

“Bei uns ist immer was los!”

VOLKSTRAUERTAG

Volkstrauertag (German: *people's mourning day*) is a public holiday in Germany on the second from last Sunday before the first day of Advent. It commemorates all those who died in armed conflicts or as the victims of violent oppression. It was first observed in its modern form in 1952.

Modern form

After the end of World War Two, *Volkstrauertag* was observed in its original form in West Germany, beginning in 1948. The first central meeting of the German War Graves Commission took place in 1950 in the Bundestag in Bonn. In 1952, in an effort to distinguish *Volkstrauertag* from *Heldengedenktag*, its date was changed to the end of the ecclesiastical year, a time traditionally devoted to thoughts of death, time and eternity. Its scope was also broadened to include those who died due to the violence of an oppressive government, not just those who died in war.

Observation

An official observation of *Volkstrauertag* takes place in the German Bundestag. The President of Germany traditionally gives a speech with the Chancellor, the cabinet and the diplomatic corps present. The national anthem and the song "Ich hatt' einen Kameraden" are then played. Most provinces also hold their own ceremonies; veterans usually organize ceremonies that include a procession from the respective Church service to a war memorial, prayer by the pastor, speeches by the mayor and the veterans' chairmen, a military guard of honor, several wreaths are laid, and "Ich hatt' einen Kameraden"; where available, also with the attendance of a Bundeswehr officer as official representative.

Because of the relation to Advent, the date is the Sunday nearest 16 November, i.e. in the period from 13 November to 19 November.

Wreath-Laying Ceremony on the German National Day of Mourning

On Germany's National Day of Mourning, November 13, 2011, the US Army hosted a wreath-laying ceremony for German and Italian soldiers who were laid to rest at Fort Meade's cemetery after the Second World War. During the ceremony, Colonel Rothstein of the US Army stressed the importance of the transatlantic friendship and his gratitude for the well-functioning international cooperation in Afghanistan as well as other places. Captain Fritz, Deputy Commander of the German Armed Forces Command USA and Canada, agreed. "Sorrow and grief know no boundaries" and the National Day of Mourning serves as a day to remember all those killed during times of war - whether they were soldiers, civilians, prisoners or members of minorities, he said.

German National Day of Mourning



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