1951

From National Public Relations Division, The American Legion, Indianapolis, Ind.

American Holidays
Armistice Day

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Suggested 1951 Armistice Day
Address for American Legion Speakers

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MY FELLOW AMERICANS:

Through the year there are a number of occasions which all of us celebrate . . . . some with gayety, others with prayer and thanksgiving . . . but there is no one day of the year which has been more sacred to American veterans and their families . . . nor observed with deeper reverence by The American Legion . . . than Armistice Day.

It is 33 years since our first Armistice Day . . . that joyous day in 1918 which marked the end of the war we had hoped was to end all wars.

Armistice Day itself . . . as perhaps few realize . . . was the creation of The American Legion. At its second national convention in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1920, The American Legion resolved that November 11 be made a national holiday to be known as Armistice Day, to commemorate "the termination of that power which exemplified autocracy." Similar resolutions were passed at succeeding national conventions until Armistice Day was proclaimed a national holiday by the Congress in 1938.

But the Armistice of 1918 did not result in the millenium of which we had dreamed. The March of Time has distilled from the term Armistice the essence of Victory.

There followed a second World War, even more costly in lives and national substance than the first. And five years later came the present conflict in Korea, in which already more American lives have been lost than in the first year of World War II.

And, ironically, as we gather here today our delegates are meeting 8,000 miles away with a new enemy, seeking to arrange another armistice to end another war!

Armistice Day may now belong to History. The very word "armistice" seems to have become a hollow mockery of the lofty meaning heretofore attached to it. Armistices must now be replaced with clean cut Victories. This day, therefore, takes on a new significance. It is fitting that The American Legion, at its recent 33rd national convention in Miami, Florida, resolved that Armistice Day henceforth be observed as "Veterans Day," commemorating the valor and sacrifice of American veterans of all wars.

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The American Legion will endeavor to translate this convention mandate into the law of the land so that on each November 11th, for as long as the Stars and Stripes shall fly overhead, the nation may honor all the brave men who have fought and fallen in the never-ending fight for freedom.

At the recent national convention, National Commander Donald R. Wilson paused to salute those who lie, living and dead, in the cold hills of Korea. He said:

"So long as The American Legion can speak and act, you will be remembered, you will be supported, you will be fought for."

We of The American Legion who constitute the world's largest veterans' organization are deeply concerned by the threat which Communism holds for our own freedom and for the God-given rights of men everywhere. Having been among the first to recognize the menace of Communism for what it was . . . as far back as 1919 . . . we re-affirm now that there never can be an armistice with this godless ideology. .

The American Legion, in convention assembled, has demanded the defense of Formosa. We will fight with all our vigor any move which would grant American recognition to the Chinese Communists or which would admit them to the councils of the United Nations for any purpose whatsoever. We shall stand guard that there be no compromise with Communism --- either in Korea or in any dealing with the Kremlin or its enslaved satellites. And The American Legion pledges its full resources to track down those so-called Americans . . . whether they be Communists or their dupes . . . who would surrender the Freedom which the victories of the past 33 years, in Europe and the Pacific, have won for our children.

We, as Americans must hold fast to our ideals.....We must hold them high for all men, at home and abroad, to see. Let all that can see and all that can hear know once and for all what it was that America fought for in World War I, what we fought for in World War II and what we are fighting for today. Volumes have been written on the meaning of democracy. But we need only turn to the Declaration of Independence and dwell for a moment on those eternal truths upon which our nation was founded and which have contributed to its greatness.

When Thomas Jefferson composed these memorable words, he wrote not only for the colonists, but for all men of all time who strive for Freedom. His words serve as a formidable warning not only to George III, but also to Hitler and Stalin:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights governments are instituted among men deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

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Those are the ideals we fought for; these are the ideals we fight for today.

The three million men and women of The American Legion, who have defended these ideals in war and in peace, invite Americans everywhere to join with us in a renewed aggressive Americanism. During November, The American Legion throughout the land is sponsoring the observance of "Americanism Appreciation Month." These four weeks of November have been set aside to dramatize our heritage of Freedom in religion, education, economics and government.

It has been said that the fight with Communism is really a war for the minds of men. It is ultimately a war of ideas. The American idea....the American way of life....is spelled out in the Declaration of Independence. Our adversary's blueprint for society is stated clearly in the manifesto of Karl Marx and forecast in the ruthless deeds of Communists everywhere.

So it is not merely a figure of speech when I say we must hold high our ideals for all men everywhere to see. We as individuals and as a nation must let no one mistake our idealism for weakness. Rather indeed they are our sinew and our strength. We must work together, pull together, fight together and pray together for Freedom.....Justice.....Democracy. We must rededicate our lives to service "For God and country."

We pledge our allegiance to those principles and in so doing keep faith with those we honor today and with their children who must defend Freedom tomorrow.

"Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet . . .

Lest we forget . . . Lest we forget!"

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10-25-51