From National Public Relations Division, The American Legion, Indianapolis 6, Ind.

Holidays
Veterans Day

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VETERANS DAY

Suggested Talk for American Legion Speakers on November 11, 1954

"There's a long, long trail a-winding" today . . . a long, long trail of pride in the glory of American veterans of all wars.

Throughout the length and breadth of our great land today, millions of loyal Americans are paying fervent tribute to those veterans who, from the snows of Valley Forge to the shattered hills and paddies of Korea have fought and bled and died to keep America American.

This date . . . November 11 . . . long celebrated as Armistice Day, now takes on a new and brighter significance. It has become this year our Nation's first Veterans Day.

It is 36 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 adopted 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 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 after the end of World War II came the conflict in Korea, in which more than 32,000 American lives were lost.

MORE

Then came another "armistice" to end another war!

Thus Armistice Day survived three wars. Today is belongs to History. The American people have resolved that armistices now must be replaced with victories. The very word "armistice" seems to have become a mockery of the lofty meaning heretofore attached to it.

In recent years the bells of Armistice Day celebrations have seemed to have a hollow ring. Because of this, The American Legion, at its national convention in Miami, Florida, in 1951, resolved that Armistice Day henceforth be observed as "Veterans Day," commemorating the valor and sacrifices of American veterans of all wars.

This action has been repeated at subsequent conventions, and on June 1 this year President Eisenhower signed into law The American Legion-sponsored bill changing annual Armistice Day on November 11 to Veterans Day.

But that is only a part of the story of this first Veterans Day. At the invitation of United States Attorney General Brownell, The American Legion from coast to coast today is cooperating with the Department of Immigration and Naturalization by assisting in the naturalization of more than 50,000 new Americans . . . men and women who until today were aliens, but who now have earned and are being accorded the privilege of citizenship.

"These ceremonies," Attorney General Brownell has told our National Commander, "will bring into citizenship persons born in all parts of the world. Among these thousands are foreign born who have served in the Armed Forces of the United States in both World War II and Korea, others who have escaped through the Iron Curtain and persons of unusual success in their chosen fields."

My friends, The American Legion is proud of this responsibility our Government has asked us to accept. We are grateful for the privilege to demonstrate that we are serving the cause of Americanism in time of peace as well as in war.

There is still another important phase of this our first Veterans Day. It marks the grand climax of "AL Weeks" . . . American Legion Weeks . . . a 23-day period that opened on October 20 and during which we have extended an invitation to other millions of eligible veterans to join the ranks of The American Legion and work with us in our service "for God and Country."

Just what is The American Legion? some may ask. It is a great fraternity of three million men and women who have seen honorable service in three wars. Its membership includes President Eisenhower, Vice President Nixon, the Chief Justice and five Associate Justices of the United States Supreme Court, four Cabinet members, 62 United States Senators, 231 Members of the House of Representatives, the Governors of 30 of our 48 States.

In our membership are doctors, lawyers, ministers, farmers, industrialists, merchants, the construction men who build our homes, the clerk at the corner grocery, the filling station attendant down the street . . . men and women of all callings, classes, colors and creeds . . . the truest cross section of American citizenship.

What many do not see . . . but which every American must unconsciously feel - is The American Legion's constant battle for Americanism, by combatting the infiltration of Communism or any other "ism" except Americanism which threatens the American way of life . . . The American Legion's fight for adequate national security . . . for betterment of our foreign relations . . . for making our communities better places in which to live.

It may not be too well known that The American Legion and its affiliated organizations . . . the American Legion Auxiliary, the Forty and Eight and the Eight and Forty . . . have expended more than 110 millions of dollars in child welfare work alone.

Through its farflung "Back to God" movement . . . encouraging regular church or synagogue attendance, daily family prayer and the religious education of our

children . . . The American Legion has helped materially in reawakening our people to a consciousness of spiritual rededication.

A primary consideration of The American Legion, naturally, is the care and protection of our disabled and needy veterans . . . their widows and orphans. The American Legion will keep the faith . . . so long as any of us shall live.

Today there are some 22 million veterans who are eligible for membership in The American Legion . . . and not one whom The American Legion has not helped in some way. It is the veterans of World War II and Korea for whom The American Legion has done the most. The G.I. Bill of Rights is exclusively the creation of The American Legion's vision, foresight, enterprise and hard work. Through this G.I. Bill, more than 3,700,000 World War II veterans have been able to buy their own homes; 8,000,000 have received a college education or specialized training, and more than 9,000,000 drew unemployment compensation during their tough job-hunting periods. The American Legion-sponsored Korean G.I.Bill has extended such constructive benefits to our newest veterans.

Those are but a few of the reasons we hope millions more of our American veterans will join forces with The American Legion "for mutual helpfulness." And we trust that before this Veterans Day comes to a close, our ranks will have been swelled to an all-time high membership in our 36-year history.

Veterans Day . . . like the Armistice Day of before . . . will ever remain a day of remembrance . . . remembrance for those who have placed their love of God and Country, their devotion to Liberty and Freedom, above even life itself. But also it should be a day of rejoicing . . . rejoicing that American manhood and American womanhood always have measured up to our responsibilities.

God grant us the courage to live as bravely as they died!

Francis Cardinal Spellman, while on Okinawa in 1945, penned an epic poem entitled "Our Sleeping Soldiers." It closed with these beautiful lines:

" . . . They in turn, to us, I feel, are speaking
With eloquence which we, the living, hear.
Theyask not to have back what they have given;
They seek not praise, nor prize,nor earth's acclaim.
They only ask that we who follow after
May profit by the anguish they have borne.
They ask for men the just peace that they fought for,
The better world that they have died to build."

We of The American Legion, who constitute the world's greatest veterans organization, are deeply concerned by the threat which the Communist ideology holds for the house our patriots "have died to build" . . . for our freedom and for the God-given rights of people everywhere. Having been among the first to recognize the menace of Communism for what it was . . . as far back as our cradle days in 1919 . . . we reaffirm now that there never can be an armistice with this Godless philosophy.

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 is that America has fought for in all its wars . . . and what we are fighting for today.

Volumes have been written on the meaning of democracy. But the American idea . . . the American way of life . . . is spelled out in these immortal words of our Declaration of Independence:

"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."

Those are the ideals we fought for . . . those are the ideals for which we shall forever fight.

As Legionnaires, we should be ever mindful of the tenets of the Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion . . . "to foster and perpetuate a one hundred percent Americanism . . . to inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation . . . to consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness."

On this, our Nation's first Veterans Day, let us pledge our allegiance anew to those principles, and in so doing keep faith with those we honor today and with their children who must defend Freedom tomorrow.

"The tumult and the shouting dies;
The captains and the kings depart;
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,
A humble and a contrite heart.
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet . . .
Lest we forget . . . lest we forget!"

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