

LEVELED Book • U

Veterans Day



Written by Amy Weber

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A veteran talks to Brownies and Girl Scouts at a Veterans Day parade.

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A Vietnam veteran salutes the flag during a Veterans Day program.

Introduction

If you've ever made a **sacrifice** to help someone, you know it isn't easy. Yet millions of American veterans have sacrificed for the sake of their country. Veterans are people who have served in the U.S. armed forces; they may or may not have fought in wars. The U.S. armed forces include the army, navy, air force, marines, and coast guard. Today, there are about 25 million veterans in the United States. Many more millions of Americans served in wars in which the United States fought. Those who died are remembered on a national holiday called Memorial Day. Veterans Day honors the sacrifices of all veterans, living and dead.





An American flag is raised near Paris to celebrate the armistice and end of World War I on November 11, 1918.

History of Veterans Day

Veterans Day actually began as a different holiday: Armistice Day. This holiday celebrated the end of what was known as the “Great War,” a war the United States entered in 1917. It fought on the side of its **allies**, which included Great Britain, France, and Russia. In all, more than four million Americans fought. In 1918, the Great War came to an end after more than four years. **Casualties** reached more than thirty-seven million. The modern world had never experienced such wartime losses.

On November 11, 1918, both sides signed an **armistice** that ended the fighting. The armistice started on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of the year!



Why Poppies?

On Veterans Day, some veterans wear a little red poppy on their shirts. Some hand out poppies and accept donations. The donations that the U.S. Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) collect are used to help wounded or disabled veterans.

Poppies grow in a region called Flanders, which stretches across areas of France and Belgium. Many soldiers died there during World War I. A Canadian army surgeon named John McRae served in Flanders and wrote a poem called "In Flanders Fields." The poem spoke of poppies growing in an Allied graveyard "between the crosses, row on row."

Even now, the red poppy helps keep alive the memory of those fallen soldiers. It also raises funds for soldiers living today. The poppy helps the VFW live up to its motto, "to honor the dead by helping the living."





American soldiers land on the French coast on June 6, 1944.

In September 1939, war broke out in Europe again. Even more soldiers were sent to fight, and more soldiers were killed than in the Great War. People later called this war World War II and then referred to the Great War as World War I.

The sacrifices that the United States and its allies made were huge. After the war, many Americans started to call for recognition of World War II veterans. In fact, they wanted all veterans to be honored, not just those who fought in wars.



General Dwight D. Eisenhower gestures as he watches troops and tanks in Great Britain on March 13, 1944.

Like many other American presidents before and after him, Dwight D. Eisenhower was a veteran. An army general during World War II, he rose to become Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe. On June 1, 1954, President Eisenhower signed a bill that changed the name Armistice Day to Veterans Day. The bill also changed the purpose of the day to honor all veterans who had served in the U.S. armed forces. Veterans Day was to be celebrated on November 11.





Fourth graders recite facts about Veterans Day.

Honoring Veterans Today

As on many other holidays, people across the nation hold parades on Veterans Day. Government offices and buildings are closed. Some businesses and most schools around the country close as well.

Schools that stay open often conduct activities or lessons about veterans and Veterans Day. Some communities even offer service days in which students make care packages for soldiers serving abroad. They collect items like gum, candy, toothpaste, soap, razors, and other things that soldiers cannot get easily.

Some citizens deliver food to those in need. They may make sack lunches and deliver them to shelters. Others work in soup kitchens to serve free meals to poor and hungry people, sometimes including veterans.

Often on Veterans Day, the president or vice president of the United States visits Arlington National Cemetery, located near Washington, D.C. Many members of the military are buried there, along with former presidents such as John F. Kennedy.

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is also found at Arlington. In wartime, soldiers who die may not be able to be identified because of their injuries.

Sometimes there are very few remains of a soldier's body. Some soldiers' bodies are never found. After World War I, the British decided to create a tomb for an unknown soldier. The United States did the same. An American soldier killed in France during World War I could not be identified. On November 11, 1921, the soldier was buried in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery. Since then, an unidentified soldier from every war in which the United States fights has been buried there.



President Barack Obama lays a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.



A member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars waves flags during an annual Veterans Day parade.

On Veterans Day, the president or vice president lays a wreath on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Laying a wreath or flowers on a tomb or headstone at a cemetery is one way to honor people who have died.

Some veterans march in parades on Veterans Day. Cities all over the nation honor veterans of all wars by waving flags during those parades. Veterans who march in the Parade of Flags often wear the colors of the branch of the military in which they served. In fact, a “Parade of Flags” also takes place next to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier on Veterans Day. In Mobile Bay, Alabama, fourth-grade students march in the parade along with veterans.

Life as a Vet

From 1940 to 1973, the United States used a military **draft** to bring men into the military. During that time, many young men had to serve, usually from one to two years. But the draft grew unpopular when men were made to fight in an increasingly unpopular war: the war in Vietnam. In 1973, the draft ended, and the U.S. force became an all-volunteer force.

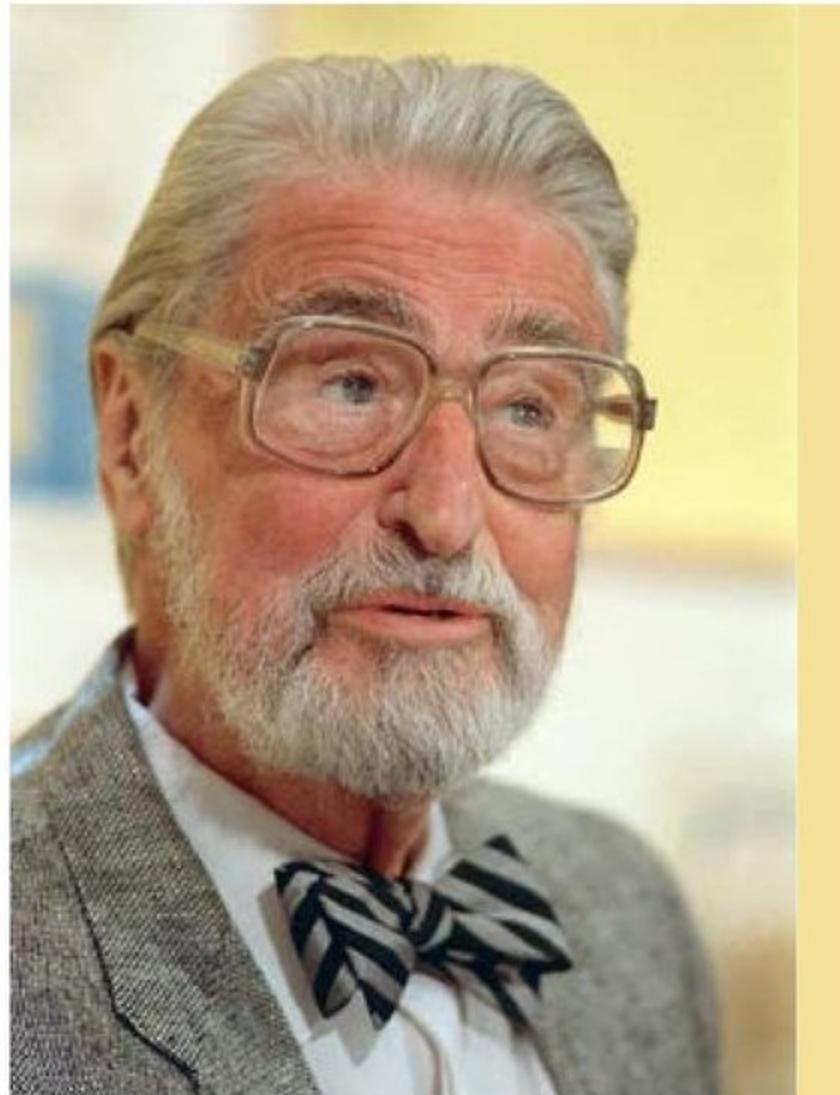
Even when vets choose to serve, their life isn't often easy. Whether or not they face combat, they are often **stationed** overseas. While this can be an adventure, it also means they must leave behind family and friends for months, even years. They miss birthdays and graduations. Sometimes babies are born while families are apart.



A soldier holds his daughter after his return from Iraq.



Upon their return to **civilian** life, many vets attend college. They receive **tuition** from the federal government through a program called the GI Bill, first signed into law by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1944. Since then, millions of vets have gone to college thanks to GI Bill funding. After they graduate, many vets get good jobs and go on to succeed in civilian life.



Author and artist Theodor Seuss Geisel (Dr. Seuss) served in the U.S. Army. Based in Hollywood, he created films and illustrations for the military and public.



Drew Carey, host of *The Price Is Right*, is a former U.S. marine.



Vernice Armour was the country's first African American female combat pilot.



A Vietnam War veteran and former U.S. marine asks for help in New York City.

In recent years, however, some vets have had trouble finding jobs. Many veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have left the military only to find that their skills are not valued by civilian employers. These vets face a high rate of unemployment.

For some, unemployment can lead to homelessness. Some vets come home wounded. Some have **combat** memories that are hard to live with. They return to a life with people who haven't experienced what they have and can't understand their sacrifices.



Honoring the Brave

The Medal of Honor is the nation's highest military honor. It is awarded by the president of the United States to members of the armed forces who go "above and beyond the call of duty" during combat. In doing so, they risk—and often sacrifice—their lives. Sometimes recognition can be a long time coming. Often it comes after the hero has died.



Few medals have been awarded for conflicts since the Vietnam War, but the awards do continue. Some who have received the medal are buried in Arlington National Cemetery, one of the largest and probably the most famous U.S. military cemetery. Others may lie in a small country graveyard, a stone's throw from a busy highway where drivers race by, never realizing a hero is buried nearby.

Soldiers who have seen combat are sometimes diagnosed with **post-traumatic stress disorder**. It can come in the form of depression, anger, grief, fear, or guilt. The victims may suffer many different symptoms. Because of their experiences with gunfire and explosions, some veterans may be bothered by loud noises.



Two Pearl Harbor survivors greet each other.

Because vets sometimes have to rely on each other during combat in order to survive, most vets feel a special loyalty to one another. Sometimes that loyalty lasts far beyond their years of service. Veterans groups try to offer veterans help and support. Two such groups are the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and the American Legion.





The tornado that tore through Joplin in 2011 was the deadliest in U.S. history.

The American Legion in Action

The American Legion is the nation's largest veterans' service organization.

Across the nation, American Legion members pledge to help one another in times of need. In May of 2011, the town of Joplin, Missouri, was devastated by a tornado. From 1,300 miles away, American Legion members in New York State took note.

They gathered enough supplies to fill a 24-foot truck. Four members drove it west. The truck was filled with things Joplin needed: clothing for men, women, and children, blankets, sheets, toiletries, and cash. In Joplin, Legion members spent the next week getting the supplies to those in need.

Asked why they drove more than 1,000 miles to help, one Legion member said, "It's who we are. It's what we do. A Legionnaire is a Legionnaire.... It's that simple."

Eagle Scouts Honor Veterans

We don't always know what sacrifices veterans have made for us, but some people go out of their way to educate us, remind us, and show their appreciation on Veterans Day . . . or any day.

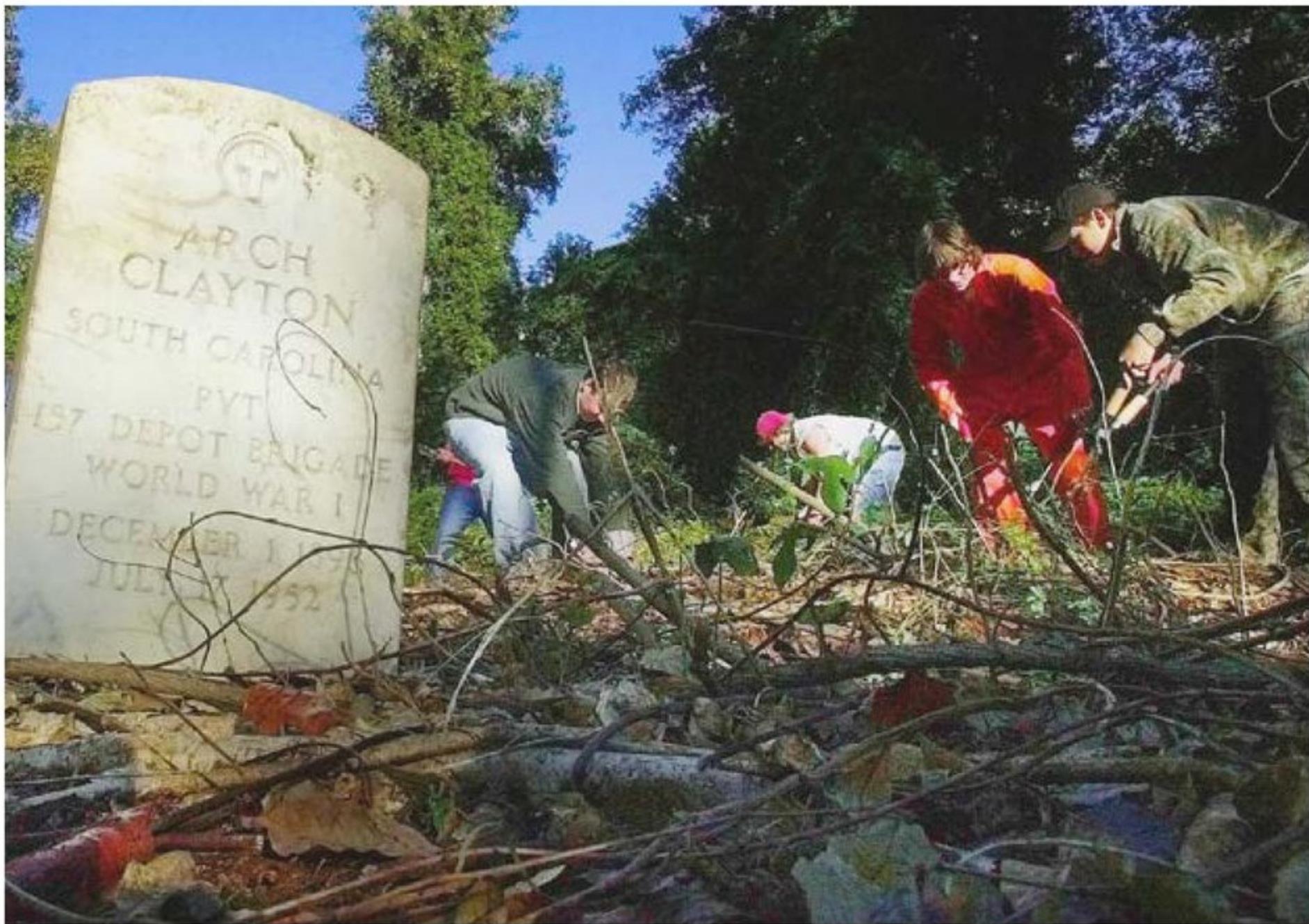


Anthony Thomas became the nation's two millionth Eagle Scout in 2009.

In order to become an Eagle Scout—the highest award given to a Boy Scout before his eighteenth birthday—a Scout has to complete a service project that benefits the community. Eagle Scouts often choose a project that honors veterans.

Some Eagle Scouts take part in the Veterans History Project. As part of the project, they interview American veterans. The stories they collect end up at the Library of Congress, preserved for scholars, researchers, and future generations.





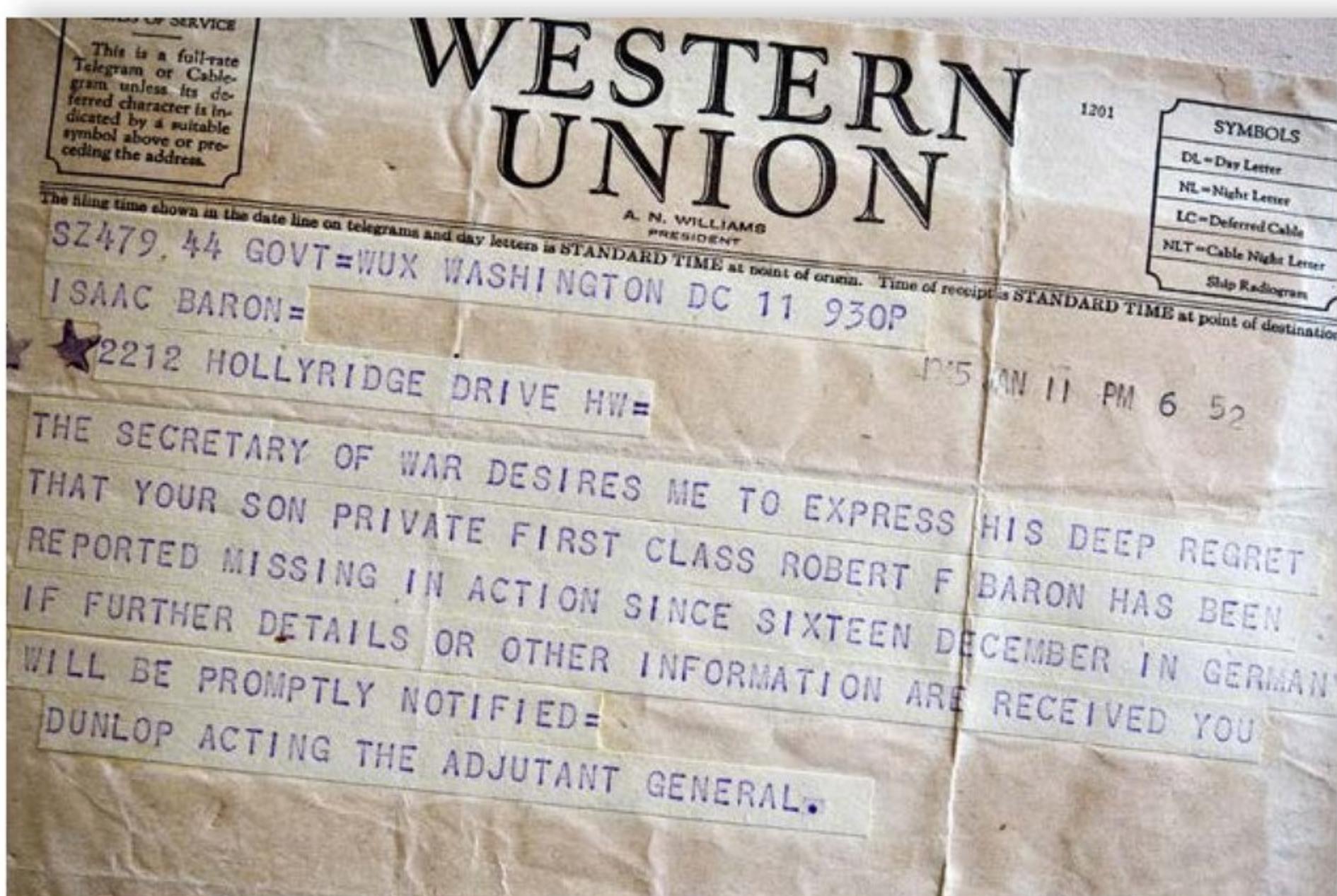
In 2003, members of an Eagle Scout troop exposed the headstone of Arch Clayton, a World War I veteran buried in 1952. As many as one thousand veterans were thought to be buried at the abandoned South Carolina cemetery.

Other Eagle Scouts repair and restore veteran memorials and cemeteries. They raise sunken vet grave markers, build paths for vets in wheelchairs, and sometimes create new memorials. They gain **recognition** for vets who may have died in action, which can be a great comfort to the loved ones those vets left behind.

Sometimes recognition can be a long time coming. Children may walk down a city street every day on their way to school, never knowing that the street is named for a soldier who died at war.

Mahoney Avenue in Stoughton, Massachusetts, was one such street. Years ago, it was named for Sergeant Daniel Henry Mahoney Jr., a World War II veteran born in Stoughton in 1920.

According to the *Stoughton Journal*, Mahoney was drafted into the U.S. Army Air Force in November 1942. He promised to marry Dorothy Sweet, then went off to Europe, where he died at the age of 23. A bomb from another Allied plane was mistakenly dropped onto Mahoney's plane and destroyed it over Yugoslavia. Sweet's last few letters came back to her, returned with a message—"Missing in Action"—written in red.



Sometimes soldiers termed "Missing in Action" are later found. This Western Union telegram from 1945 was sent to Robert Baron's family shortly after he became a prisoner of war. Baron survived, however, and returned to the United States after World War II.



Mahoney was declared dead a year later. His body was found on the side of a mountain in 1949, returned home, and buried in Stoughton. Sweet never married.

Sixty-six years after his plane went down, Mahoney's story came to light again through the work of eighteen-year-old Daniel Noyes. For his Eagle Scout project, Noyes decided to build 70 garden boxes for veteran memorial markers. He spent more than 250 hours building and placing the garden boxes throughout Stoughton with the help of his troop.

For years, Sweet had kept a memorial at the street sign for Mahoney Avenue, but in her eighties was no longer able to continue. Instead, she made a donation to the project, asking that a garden box be built at Mahoney Avenue. Noyes and his father found the street but discovered there was no **dedication** sign, only a small American flag.

Thanks in large part to Noyes' project, Daniel Henry Mahoney Jr. now has an official memorial on the street sign that bears his name, a white Killed in Action marker with green writing. That recognition felt right to Noyes, to Sweet, and to Mahoney's family.



A Brownie places U.S. flags at veterans' graves in a Los Angeles cemetery.

Conclusion

Now that you've learned about Veterans Day, consider how you might honor veterans. There are many different ways:

- Visit a veteran at a Veterans Administration Hospital or community center.
- Find out if there is a cemetery or memorial for veterans in your area. Maybe you can help maintain it or help place flags or wreaths on military graves.
- Send a care package to a soldier serving abroad.
- Write a thank-you note to a veteran, thanking him or her for serving our country.



The next time November 11 rolls around, think about the veterans who help defend you and your country every day. Give thanks for their service and sacrifice.



Students from the Texas School for the Deaf salute while watching a Veterans Day parade.

Glossary

allies (n.)	people or groups that join with others for a common cause (p. 5)
armistice (n.)	a wartime truce (p. 5)
casualties (n.)	people wounded, injured, killed, or missing during a war, accident, or disaster (p. 5)
civilian (n.)	a person who is not a member of the military or police (p. 13)
combat (n.)	fighting between military forces (p. 14)
dedication (n.)	words that express in whose honor something has been created (p. 21)
draft (n.)	a system that requires people to join the military (p. 12)
post-traumatic stress disorder (n.)	a mental condition that can follow a very disturbing experience, such as battle (p. 15)
recognition (n.)	thanks and honor given to someone for service or an achievement (p. 19)
sacrifice (n.)	an action or object unselfishly given to help other people or a cause (p. 4)
stationed (v.)	assigned to a place (p. 12)
tuition (n.)	the fee charged for instruction at a school (p. 13)



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Front cover: Salvatore Giunta placed himself in the line of fire in Afghanistan to save two army comrades. In 2010, he received the Medal of Honor (see page 15). He is the first living Medal of Honor recipient from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Back cover: A fifth grader calls out to veterans passing by during an annual Veterans Day parade in Kentucky.

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