

Armistice Day

There are a great many aging Americans who still think of Armistice Day as the end of the big war. Since then we have been in a bigger one, and with weapons that made World War I almost primitive in its killing simplicity, and still another engagement in Korea, that actually had about half as many casualties as World War I, yet didn't rate the dignity of the title, "war." But the first Armistice Day sticks in many minds because it signalled the end of the first real foreign war in which this country had been engaged for more than a century.

We entered this war unprepared physically and emotionally as well. All recent wars, such as the engagement with Spain, the pursuit of Villa, were romantic and not very bloodthirsty. But from the day the first American soldier died from a bomb in September, 1917, the American people knew the pervasive blight of savage, killing war. Before it was over more than 53,000 Americans had died in battle. Sadly enough even more died from diseases and non-battle causes for a total of 63,114. The total casualties were 320,518, but the mental and physical effects of this first World War are still visible.

Our casualties were, of course, much fewer than France, Russia, and the British Commonwealth on the Allied side, or Germany and Austria among the Central Powers. In all 8.5 million men were killed or died, 21.2 million were wounded and 7.25 million were taken prisoner or were missing. One can only grieve fruitlessly at the folly of the human race, for plunging after having made this sacrifice "to make the world safe for democracy" into still another, greater, slaughter within a single generation.

Those who still grieve for their lost sons in World War I are getting older now and the memory of that war, like those before it, grows dimmer with the years. But let it be remembered that there were heroes and men of great stature in that conflict. The greatest tribute we pay their memory is to work relentlessly for permanent peace with honor.