The National Holiday which is known today as Veterans Day was called Armistice Day before 1954. The change in the name came about due to Raymond Weeks from Birmingham, Alabama. Originally, Armistice Day was commemorated every year on 11 November to mark the armistice signed between the Allies of World War I and Germany at Compiègne, France, for the cessation of hostilities on the Western Front of World War I, which took effect at eleven o’clock in the morning—the “eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918.”

On the northwest corner of Linn Park in downtown Birmingham, Alabama stands a memorial to Raymond Weeks, the World War II veteran and Birmingham native who, in 1945, had the idea to expand Armistice Day to celebrate all veterans, not just those who died in World War I. Weeks led a delegation to Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, who supported the idea of National Veterans Day. "Raymond Weeks was not the only person in America who had this idea," says Dr. David Dyson, author of Patriotism in Action. "In 1945, there were many people who believed Armistice Day needed to be expanded and that we should have a national celebration to commemorate veterans of all wars." Action, he points out, is the difference between saying and doing.

Weeks led the first national celebration in 1947 in Alabama and annually until his death in 1985. President Reagan honored Weeks at the White House with the Presidential Citizenship Medal in 1982 as the driving force for the national holiday. Elizabeth Dole, who prepared the briefing for President Reagan, determined Weeks as the "Father of Veterans Day.”

The memorial in Linn Park was dedicated on Nov. 11, 2007 to commemorate Weeks’ achievement. The Dyson Institute's "Patriotism in Action" committee joined with the Blue Star Salute Foundation and Birmingham's National Veterans Day Committee to create the memorial.

Armed Services Holidays

Many of our allies also wanted to celebrate their veterans on November 11. However, the name of the day and the types of commemorations differ.

Canada and Australia both call November 11th “Remembrance Day.” Canada’s observance is pretty similar to the United States, except many of its citizens wear red poppy flowers to honor their war dead. In Australia, the day is more akin to our Memorial Day.

Great Britain calls it “Remembrance Day,” too, but observes it on the Sunday closest to November 11th with parades, services and two minutes of silence in London to honor those who lost their lives in war.

There are many other times during the year that American citizens reflect on the honor and service of our service men and women - past and present. The Armed Forces and the National Guard Bureau are honored on the following days:

- 29 March Vietnam Veterans Day
- Last Mon. of May Memorial Day
- 14 June Flag Day and Army Day (United States Army)
- 4 August Coast Guard Day (United States Coast Guard)
- 18 September Air Force Day (United States Air Force)
- 13 October US Navy Birthday (United States Navy)
- 27 October Navy Day (United States Navy)
- 10 November Marine Corps Birthday (United States Marine Corps)
- 11 November Veterans Day
- 13 December National Guard Day
Raymond Weeks is credited with leading the effort to expand the observance of Armistice Day to honor veterans of all wars, formally recognized as a National Veterans Day holiday by President Dwight Eisenhower on June 1, 1954. Weeks envisioned Veterans Day as more than a remembrance of war. He wanted the day to be a celebration of peace. Each year, The World Peace Luncheon is held in Birmingham before the Veterans Day Parade.

Weeks was born in Georgia, but his family moved to Phenix City, and later Birmingham. He attended Bush Elementary School and graduated from Ensley High School and Birmingham-Southern College.

Weeks served in the U.S. Navy during World War II. He was granted his discharge on November 9, 1945.

Weeks was the founder and chairman of the National Veterans Day Volunteer Organization in Birmingham from 1947 until his death.

Weeks also served three terms in the Alabama State House of Representatives. He was active in many civic and veterans groups including the March of Dimes, the Junior Chamber of Commerce, and the American Legion. He was honored with a National Community Service Award, the Veterans of Foreign Wars Award, a Distinguished Service Medal from the Governor of Alabama, and a Presidential Citizenship Medal given to him by President Ronald Reagan in 1982.

A granite Raymond Weeks Memorial was dedicated on the northwest corner of Linn Park on November 11, 2007. Scholarships in his name have been established at Birmingham-Southern, Samford University, and the University of Alabama.
It is critical that we pass along to our thousands of new officers the accumulated wisdom and decades of experience that have made CIA the world’s premier intelligence service.

-Gen Michael Hayden
December 2006

The mission of the CIA Museum is to capture, document, preserve, and exhibit tangible elements of the Agency’s history that “inform, educate, and inspire” the CIA’s workforce of which 52% entered service since September 11, 2001. It’s critical they understand where the CIA has come from as an agency and the drama of an event can often be conveyed in a painting more effectively than in a written volume. In addition, art brings to life history that could be unknown to newer employees or that has been lost in time among veterans.

A number of declassified CIA missions are recreated as original paintings in an artwork collection, initially funded by private citizens and corporations and are permanently displayed at the CIA Headquarters in McLean, VA. Each historical depiction was exhaustively researched and recreated by world class artists such as Dru Blair, James Dietz, Jeff Bass, Keith Woodcock, Stuart Brown, Gareth Hector and others.

The SMF’s Shadow Gallery serves as a tribute to the CIA and its creation was done with major attention to the symbolic nature of the original artwork contained in the CIA Museum. The Shadow Gallery was dedicated in 2013.

Given the unique nature of the SMF exhibit, a “make-over” of the exhibit area was recently undertaken while the museum was “off limits” to visitors. Our patrons and visitors will experience a fresh new exhibit area when the Shadow Gallery is once again proudly open to visitors.

As a 2013 article in the Daily Mail (England) stated: “There are only two places to see a gallery of artwork depicting key events in the history of U.S. intelligence services: the headquarters of the Central Intelligence Agency and an out-of-the way museum in Alabama.”


The CIA’s artwork has been done by commissioned artists, save two pieces that were created by a CIA employee.

Deborah Dismuke is recently retired and is the only CIA employee, the first woman and the only African-American with paintings in the agency’s vaunted Intelligence Art Collection.

Aside from her Cold War painting, “Message From Moscow”, Dismuke also claims a second one honoring the agency officers from the “Argo: Rescue of the Canadian Six” operation, including legendary disguise artist Tony Mendez, who rescued six U.S. diplomats from Iran in 1980.

Although publicly available versions of her paintings in calendars or catalogues feature her autograph partially or fully redacted, the originals at Langley feature her full signature.

Dismuke may not be done making CIA paintings. Her dream, she said, is to be selected to paint a portrait of one of the CIA directors. And the director she would like to do is Gina Haspel. “She’s the first female director. And I’m the first female artist and the first staff officer with a painting on the wall. It would be awesome.”