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VOICES: Trying to come home in the dawn of every new year



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By Kathy Platoni

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It's not working, try as we may. This elusive goal of coming all the way home has no map, no pathway. We limp through this solitary journey on deserted and directionless roadways. If you haven't walked in our boots, you simply cannot walk beside us. Less than 1 percent of the populace has served in uniform — 99 percent don't get us.

I retired last year after 40 years of military service. I would deploy again in a New York millisecond. Four deployments somehow doesn't seem like enough — some have deployed more than a dozen times. Once a soldier, always a soldier.

As a survivor of the Fort Hood Massacre of 2009, where 13 soldiers were assassinated in cold blood, with 33 more wounded, it became clear that my sacred mission was to save as many wounded souls as crossed my path, including the first responder community. I didn't walk out of there alive to do anything less.

Psychological battles are not left behind on the battlefield. Research suggests that 11 to 20 percent of returning Veterans struggle with PTSD, significantly higher than the 6 percent of the general population who carry the same diagnosis. The [2021 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Report](#) estimated that 17 Veterans take their lives every single day. Additional research has also revealed that PTSD rates vary among wars: [23 percent of those who served in Iraq or Afghanistan](#), [12 percent from the Gulf War/Desert Storm](#), and [15 percent among Vietnam Veterans](#); but the devastating toll cannot be explained by numbers alone.

We lived and breathed war multiple times. Carnage and human suffering, living in refuse and filth and muck and eating very much the same, desperate to live long enough to finish our deployments and make it home to our families. And we would too easily give up home to do it all over again.

Our fallen comrades-in-arms are left behind in our hearts and souls and guts as the unfinished business of the battlefield. And every new year is overrun with a fresh shipment of grief and anguish. This is made so much worse the further and faster they fade from memory.

Many of us suffer alone, but it doesn't have to be that way. For those who wish to help, consider donating your time and presence to the Veteran community. There are 121 Veteran and military organizations right here in the Dayton area, among them:

- American Legion
- Veterans of Foreign Wars
- Vietnam Veterans of America
- AMVETS
- Veteran 2 Veteran
- Disabled American Veterans
- Sophie's Companions for Veterans Foundation
- Patriots United for Suicide Help
- Patriot Guard
- Dayton VA Medical Center

If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, please call or text **988** or chat 988lifeline.org. Crisis Text Line is a free, confidential service available 24/7 via text on mobile devices. One can text the keyword “**4hope**” to **741 741** to be connected to a trained crisis counselor anywhere in Ohio. For the Veterans Crisis Line, **dial 988, followed by the #1, or text 838255**.

And so in the dawn of this new year, there are chapters to be written and tales to be told that keep alive the sacred oath and valiance of military service. God bless America, its service members, its Veterans, and those who have never turned their backs on us. May the new year restore hope in all things right and good embodied by each of them.

Dr. Platoni is a practicing clinical psychologist in Centerville, Ohio and a combat Veteran with 40 years of military service.