

Dayton Daily News

VOICES: Let us all pause to remember the meaning of Veterans Day



Caption

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By Kathy Platoni

We remain the forgotten.

On March 20, the twentieth anniversary of the War in Iraq came and went largely unnoticed.

Those heralded for their bravery, courage, and heroism were two *reporters* who covered the first airstrikes when Operation Iraqi Freedom was born. Never was there a mention of members of the Armed Forces who conducted these operations and who launched a 20 year war in which 3490 lives were lost in Iraq alone (and an additional 2,462 Service Members who were killed in action in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Freedom's Sentinel), let alone the sacrifices and struggles made by the more than 1.9 million troops deployed in support of OIF and OEF since the beginning of these wars in 2001.

In total, military personnel have been deployed in 3 million tours of duty lasting more than 30 days as part of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) or Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). More than 1.8 million Veterans are disabled with physical and psychological injuries sustained in time of war that will infect their bodies and souls for a lifetime.

Those of us who have deployed multiple times struggle with the aftermath of war, the toll of which multiplies each time we load our duffle bags and ruck sacks on flights into an entirely new kind of hell. And each time we come home again, we try to cement the broken pieces back together until the next deployment and for all the days to come.

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It is purely shameful that we have been reduced to numbers and nonexistence. How soon they forget. Let us all give pause to remember the true meaning of Veterans Day this year and to recognize the gifts of the freedoms and independence that we have been granted because of those so willing to take up arms for country.

We have borne witness to the horrors of war, the last agonizing breaths of the dying as they cling to their final seconds on earth, the disfiguring wounds of war that cannot be unseen, the tragic consequences of innocents lost so unnecessarily because they made the choice to raise our right hands to take the Oath of Office for a higher purpose. But there is a fundamental reason for all of this, as it is us who have been charged to carry the message that has been entrusted to us, as we carry on the mission long after war's end to pay tribute to those lost and maimed so senselessly.

We cannot allow ourselves to escape the flashbacks and intrusive memories and nightmares and struggles, as that would diminish the magnitude of the losses and erase the colossal costs of war. It is the price we have always known we would pay in survivor guilt. The onus is on us to enforce the knowledge of the longstanding costs of war and for the multitudes of those for whom the bell must toll, lest we disregard and overlook the very purpose of Veterans Day.

Most of our populace remains clueless and untouched by the plight of war. They will nurse their hangovers and go on about their lives following the holiday. We Service Members and Veterans live in a very different world, bearing scars that run deep and a hollow emptiness that can no longer be filled by a land that no longer recognizes us. We desperately search for something that delivers the same value, meaning, as that which called us to serve.

There is so much more to the story of these enormous sacrifices that will never reach the consciousness of most Americans. God bless the souls so willing to carry these burdens, for they remain the very essence of this great nation. Let them not be forgotten.

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