

Woodrow Wilson High School

What Veterans Mean to America and Its Citizens

Nicholas Grant Joynes

National Veteran Business Development Council

Student Essay

April 10, 2020

What Veterans Mean to America and Its Citizens

The legal definition of a Veteran given by the Veterans Affairs administration is “a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable” (Va.org). Veterans have given at least a portion of their lives toward the service of their country and fellow man. They have done this with the knowledge that this service could come at a significant cost. Throughout this essay some of the sacrifices Americans acknowledge that our veterans may have made or may have to make will be discussed as well as why they may still choose this path for themselves and what this means to American citizens.

When we hear the term veteran, we often think of combat veterans; someone who has been deployed into a combat or war zone, someone who has feared for his/her own safety and the safety of their military brothers/sisters, someone who may have experienced such physical or mental trauma that they may never be the same, or someone who has made the ultimate sacrifice and has lost their lives. We watch films which demonstrate what the horrors of war may be like and we humbly experience deep gratitude for the individuals willing to subject themselves to this, however the combat experience is not the only distress that veterans may endure.

It would be hard for a lay person to speculate about a service persons sacrifices, but there appear to be many. Their lives are significantly changed after enlistment into the armed forces. They must leave their family and all that they know to be propelled into intense physical and mental training. This training, although rigorous and challenging, is necessary to ensure that they will have what it takes to stand strong for their country. The education and skills they acquire are critical as they must perform with exactness as part of a well-oiled machine. A machine that could compromise the security our nation if any one of the parts malfunction. They commit

themselves for the length of their service to whatever assignments or task they are given. To some extent they lose their free will and their ability to self-indulge. They follow orders or commands and they do so without question.

We have to wonder why a person would voluntarily make these sacrifices. Why are around 1.3 million men and women choosing to devote themselves in active military service in the United States (governing.com, 2017)? They may choose service because of a great love for their country; in order to give back something to the country which has afforded us so many rights and freedoms which previous veterans have helped to secure. They may choose service because previous generations of their family have served, and it is part of their family values. They may choose service to acquire respect for them selves and respect from the community which comes along with selfless military involvement. They may long for the brotherhood which happens when you work alongside other men/women in such an important way. Whatever the reason, every American benefits from a Veteran's decision to serve.

When we look at America in comparison to other countries, our rights and privileges are innumerable. The liberties and freedoms that we take for granted everyday were likely obtained through the blood, sweat, and tears of our veterans and our current military service personnel continue the struggle to maintain these rights/liberties. They have sworn to protect our country from enemies, both foreign and domestic. Examples of foreign conflicts have been the wars/conflicts that our service men have taken part in such World War 2, Vietnam, the Korean War, and the Gulf Wars. We also help to provide military aid, funding, and supplies to ally countries during non-war times. On our soil, the military may get involved in cases of terrorist attack, foreign incursion, policing in volatile areas, rescue operations, or in peace keeping efforts (Military.com). Some examples of homeland incidences that our armed services became

involved with were: the September 11th terrorist attacks in 2001, the “Unite the Right” rallies and protests in Charlottesville, VA in 2017 (Virginia National Guard, 2017), and the Boston Marathon Bombing (US Department of Defense, 2013).

Our veterans do not only assist our country and others by their defense efforts or participation in conflicts/wars, but they have also done this through what is referred to as Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW). These operations can include providing humanitarian aid, disaster relief efforts, medical assistance in impoverished areas, etc. (Military.com) A recent examples of such action is the movement of the USS Mercy to the California coast and the USS Comfort to the New York/New Jersey coast to assist with the Coronavirus/Covid-19 Pandemic. These ships have been moved off of each coast to provide overflow patient space for the hospitals which were becoming overwhelmed with the massive influx of often critically ill patients. Other examples of these types of operations include providing humanitarian aid of food and supplies in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria, in Japan and Indonesia after tsunamis, in Haiti after earthquakes, food and medical relief to South Sudan, etc. (Vehicles for Veterans, 2017).

In conclusion, Americans know that there is no possible way to repay our veterans the huge debt of gratitude we owe to them for ensuring our rights, freedoms, and safety. The definition of a veteran was discussed in the beginning of this essay however what the term means to most Americans is simply “hero”. Hero is defined as “a person who is admired or idealized for courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities” (Lexico.com). Civilian Americans will likely never truly understand the sacrifices that veterans have made, or the full weight of their experiences; however most have unwavering positive regard for them. We recognize the courage that one must possess to give up the life they have previously known and dedicate themselves

wholly to service of their country. They do this knowing their own health, wellbeing, and relationships may be jeopardized. There is no more noble achievement than that of service. Our veterans truly are America's greatest heroes.

References

Editor, VA.org. "What Is a Veteran? The Legal Definition." *VA.org*, 27 Mar. 2020, va.org/what-is-a-veteran-the-legal-definition/.

Foundation, Car Donation. "The U.S. Military's Role in Disaster Relief." *Vehicles for Veterans*,

www.vehiclesforveterans.org/blog/the-us-militarys-role-in-disaster-relief/.

"General Milley: After 9/11, 'America's Army National Guard Was Everywhere.'" *National Guard*, 22 Sept. 2015, www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article-View/Article/618137/general-milley-after-911-americas-army-national-guard-was-everywhere/.

"Hero: Definition of Hero by Lexico." *Lexico Dictionaries | English*, Lexico Dictionaries, www.lexico.com/en/definition/hero.

"Military Active-Duty Personnel, Civilians by State." *Military Active-Duty Personnel, Civilians*

by State, www.governing.com/gov-data/public-workforce-salaries/military-civilian-active-duty-employee-workforce-numbers-by-state.html.

Military.com. "What Does the Military Do?" *Military.com*,

www.military.com/join-armed-forces/military-missions-overview.html.

United States Department of Defense, 17 Apr. 2013,

archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=119790.

Va. Guard Soldiers Support Security Operations in Charlottesville,

vanguard.dodlive.mil/2017/08/14/10189/.

