To Our Freedom Fighters: A Tribute to Veterans

Don P. Diffine Ph.D.

Harding University, ddiffine@harding.edu

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by
D.P. Diffine, Ph.D., Director
Balden Center for
Private Enterprise Education
HARDING UNIVERSITY
Searcy, Arkansas
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A Tribute to Veterans

Some 25 years ago, I told our college sophomore son, “America is a privileged nation.” He countered, “I disagree.” And I rejoined, “Son, that’s the privilege!” Since then, and in our own lifetime, our country has seen some dark days and yet some very bright hours. We’ve learned a lot about ourselves. It turns out that we don’t just live in America, but rather that America also lives in us: “…crown thy good with brotherhood…”

And yet, Christians are strangers and sojourners on this earth. Aren’t we but passing through? Not one of us is staying. We look to the city whose builder is God. Our citizenship is in Heaven. We also have earthly responsibilities—duties to each other, to Caesar, as well as to God.

Governments were ordained by God. Religion provides moral values that can make a country great. Government can provide the climate and protections that make greatness possible and sustainable. The Scriptures (e.g., Romans 13) certainly hint that, in clashes between good and evil on this earth, duly constituted governments are the vehicle through which to right the wrong done to the innocent public.

And so it was, for example, on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918, an Armistice, or temporary cessation of hostilities, was declared between the Allied nations and Germany in the First World War, then known as “The Great War” (for people couldn’t imagine a worse war). On each November
11th, regardless of what day of the week on which it falls, an official wreath laying ceremony is held at the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington National Cemetery, VA, while other celebrations are held in the states.

Although Thanksgiving is a day when we pause to give thanks for the things we have, Veterans Day is a day when we pause to give thanks for the people who fought for the things we have. So, let’s forget no the real reasons for America’s Veterans Day. Former President Ronald Reagan’s presentation at a Veterans Day ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery on November 11, 1985, says it all:

*It is, in a way, an odd thing to honor those who died in defense of our country in wars far away. The imagination plays a trick. We see these soldiers in our mind as old and wise. We see them as something like the Founding Fathers, grave and gray-haired. But most of them were boys when they died. They gave up tow lives: the one they were living and the one they would have lived. When they died, they gave up their chance to be husbands and fathers and grand-fathers. They gave up their chance to be revered old men. They gave up everything for their country, for us. All we can do is remember.*

Our Veterans Day helps us focus attention on the important purpose: A celebration to honor America’s veterans for their patriotism; love of country; and willingness to serve and sacrifice for the common good and mutual goodwill and understanding between nations. And just who are the brave men and women who serve and protect America? Some volunteered; others were drafted. They all learned how to go, and to fight, and to win.
Presently, there are 23 million living military veterans in the U.S. Our nation’s service men and women come from all walks of life. They are parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters, spouses, nephews, nieces, children, and grandchildren. They are friends, neighbors and coworkers, and an extraordinary part of their communities. Twenty percent of our Harding University College of Business Administration faculty, for example, are veterans. They have ordinary names like Bob, Mark, Don, George, Norm, and Steve.

Are American citizens becoming timid and apologetic about the “Stars and Stripes?” Hear the words of Mr. Alan Grant, former President of the American Farm Bureau Federation, and guest speaker at Harding University’s American Studies Institute some years back:

When I was a little boy, very small, my father and I were watching a parade. My father was an immigrant to this country, and there was some marching and flags going by and I looked over at my dad and I said, “Daddy, why are you crying?” And he said to me, “You’re too young to fully understand.” But he also said, “Remember that you asked the question, and think about it in later years when you’re older and can think about it—remember that when you are asked the question, ‘Daddy, why are you crying?’—your flag was going by.”

Although we Americans often have our differences (especially during election seasons), we still join together in times of crises. Judge Felix Frankfurter provided the clarity we need: “Democracy is always a beckoning goal not a safe harbor. For freedom is an un-
remitting endeavor, never a final achievement. That is why no office is the land is more important than that of being a citizen.”

For all who served, or who now serve, we can’t thank you enough. And veterans, whenever your candle flickers a little (and you long for more R&R in this life), dig down in that file of military service papers, past the DD 214 Discharge Orders (past the faded photos of a slimmer, more fit you), and you will surely find this:

Certificate of Appreciation for Service in the Armed Forces of the United States

I extend to you my personal thanks and the sincere appreciation of a grateful nation for your contribution of honorable service to our country. You have helped maintain the security of the nature during a critical time in its history with a devotion to duty and a spirit of sacrifice in keeping with the proud tradition of the military service. I trust that in the coming years you will maintain an active interest in the Armed Forces and the purpose for which you served. My best wishes to you for happiness and success in the future.

- Signed Commander in Chief

Is this a great country or what! Would you remember to take time out of your busy day to thank a Veteran? If so, then "Three Cheers for You…and the Red, White, and Blue!"

Diffine is a former United States Air Force Captain and Squadron Commander, serving his country during the Vietnam era.