

What Does Being a Veteran Mean

Some veterans bear visible signs of their service: a missing limb, a jagged scar, a certain look in the eye.

Others may carry the evidence inside them: a pin holding a bone together, a piece of shrapnel in the leg - or perhaps another sort of inner steel: the soul's ally forged in the refinery of adversity.

Except in parades, however, the men and women who have kept America safe wear no badge or emblem.

You can't tell a vet just by

looking.

He is the cop on the beat who spent six months in Saudi Arabia sweating two gallons a day making sure the armored personnel carriers didn't run out of fuel.

He is the barroom loudmouth, dumber than five wooden planks, whose overgrown frat-boy behavior is outweighed a hundred times in the cosmic scales by four hours of exquisite bravery near the 38th parallel.

She - or he - is the nurse

who fought against futility and went to sleep sobbing every night for two solid years in Da Nang.

He is the POW who went away one person and came back another - or didn't come back AT ALL.

He is the Quantico drill instructor who has never seen combat - but has saved countless lives by turning slouchy, no-account rednecks and gang members into Marines, and teaching them to watch each other's backs.

He is the parade - riding Legionnaire who pins on his ribbons and medals with a prosthetic hand.

He is the career quartermaster who watches the ribbons and medals pass him by.

He is the three anonymous heroes in The Tomb Of The Unknowns, whose presence at the Arlington National Cemetery must forever preserve the memory of all the anonymous heroes whose valor dies unrecognized with them on the battlefield or in the ocean's

sunless deep.

He is the old guy bagging groceries at the supermarket - palsied now and aggravatingly slow - who helped liberate a Nazi death camp and who wishes all day long that his wife were still alive to hold him when the nightmares come.

He is an ordinary and yet an extraordinary human being - a person who offered some of his life's most vital years in the service of his country, and who sacrificed his ambitions so others would not have to sacrifice theirs.

He is a soldier and a savior and a sword against the darkness, and he is nothing more than the finest, greatest testimony on behalf of the finest, greatest nation ever known.

So remember, each time

you see someone who has served our country, just lean over and say Thank You. That's all most people need, and in most cases it will mean more than any medals they could have been awarded or were awarded.

Two little words that mean a lot, "THANK YOU".

It is the soldier, not the reporter. Who has given us freedom of the press. It is the soldier, not the poet. Who has given us freedom of speech. It is the soldier, not the campus organizer, Who has given us the freedom to demonstrate. It is the soldier, Who salutes the flag, Who serves beneath the flag, and whose coffin is draped by the flag, who allows the pro- testor to burn the flag."

Espinoza Remembers Iraq



Leo Copeland Gerardo Espinoza was born in Chihuahua, Mexico. He moved with his mother

to Ruidoso, New Mexico where Gerardo went through school, graduating in 1996. He then attended the Universal Technical Institute (UTI) in Phoenix, Arizona, studying in Automobile Technology.

In 1998 he joined the United States Marine Corp. He said he had heard that the Marines were the toughest and most challenging of all the military forces out there, and he wanted to be a part of it. He was in the Marine Corp from October, 1998 to October, 2006. He was at Camp Pendleton in California for three years and then overseas for a year and then deployed in Iraq for four years. He was in Iraq when the war first began.

He did his basic training in the Marine Corp Depot out of San Diego, Calif. After Basic Training he went to Marine Combat Training, (MCT) at Camp San Onofre, in Calif. and then he was sent to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, where he completed his job specialty training in Motor Transport Operations.

He was then sent to his first duty station, in Camp Pendleton, Calif. The Third Amphibious Assault Battalion. His job was driving vehicles in support of the assault vehicles with Logistics, (delivering water, supplies and personnel).

After three years at Camp Pendleton, Espinoza re-enlisted in November of 2002. He went to Marine Wing Com Squad 38, (MWCS-38).

He spent some time over seas before the war in Iraq began. Right after 911 they were sent to Norway getting the gear ready for the war.

He said people would be surprised how much equipment and supplies the government had stashed in the mountains in

Norway. It was very cold and lots of snow in the mountains.

Espinoza was then deployed in Iraq from Jan. 2003 until March 2005. The war started in March of 2003 with Operation Iraq Freedom (OIF). His unit first encountered attack in the northern part of Kuwait before reaching Iraq. They were hit with the kind of projectile that could deliver nuclear biological chemical warheads (NBC). They learned to work with gas-masks in place.

As they invaded Iraq, they encountered heavy fire from the enemy. Espinoza said you could hear bullets flying past all night and then when morning came you would see many of the Iraqis bodies and disabled military vehicles strewn about.

After this, Espinoza's unit broke from invasion to set up forward operation bases, (FOB). They set up communications for any aerial or land units involved in the battle.

Their job was to support the FOB in other places in Iraq. They traveled in the convoys you hear about. His unit

went to different places to set up FOB. His job was to bring supplies to the different units that were dispersed to different places. As such they often fell under fire from the Iraqis trying to keep them from their destination. They put special armor on their vehicles and had 240 caliber machine gun at the front and rear of the convoy.

His unit was never hit with IED, (improvised explosive devices), but were near some who were. Espinoza vividly remembered seeing a fellow Marine who was wounded, being carried to a Medi-Vac on life support and as he passed he could see the wounds in his chest.

He also remembered the sound of ammunition going past him as they passed through different towns. The little towns had only a few two storied buildings, and these were often used by snipers. Thanks to the heavy armor, these snipers were not very effective. "We would return fire with the machine guns and if we fired where we should have, we would see the enemy falling

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or Sunday. However, like all other federal holidays, when it falls on a non-workday -- Saturday or Sunday -- the federal government employees take the day off on Monday (if the holiday falls on Sunday) or Friday (if the holiday falls on Saturday).

Federal government holiday observance (for federal employees, including military) is established by federal law. 5 U.S.C. 6103 establishes the following public holidays for Federal employees: New Year's Day, Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., Washington's Birthday (President's Day), Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Columbus Day, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day.

This federal law does not apply to state and local governments. They are free to determine local government closings (including school closings) locally. As such, there is no legal requirement that schools close on Veterans Day, and many do not. However, most schools hold Veterans Day activities on Veterans Day and throughout the week of

the holiday to honor American veterans.

Veterans Day Around the World

Many other countries honor their veterans on November 11th of each year. However, the name of the holiday and the types of ceremonies differ from the Veterans Day activities in the United States.

Canada, Australia, and Great Britain refer to their holidays as "Remembrance Day." Canada and Australia observe the day on November 11, and Great Britain conducts their ceremonies on the Sunday nearest to November 11th.

In Canada, the observance of "Remembrance Day" is actually quite similar to the United States, in that the day is set aside to honor all of Canada's veterans, both living and dead. One notable difference is that many Canadians wear a red poppy flower on November 11 to honor their war dead, while the "red poppy" tradition is observed in the United States on Memorial Day.

In Australia, "Remembrance

Day" is very much like America's Memorial Day, in that its considered a day to honor Australian veterans who died in war.

In Great Britain, the day is commemorated by church services and parades of ex-service members in Whitehall, a wide ceremonial avenue leading from London's Parliament Square to Trafalgar Square. Wreaths of poppies are left at the Cenotaph, a war memorial in Whitehall, which was built after the First World War. At the Cenotaph and elsewhere in the country, a two-minute silence is observed at 11 a.m., to honor those who lost their lives in wars.

Have You Hugged Your Veteran Today?

One of the most personal and meaningful Veterans Day activities for people is to send notes or cards to hospitalized veterans or those living in veterans homes. Or, better yet, visit a veteran in a local veterans hospital or veterans home. The best way to have a "happy Veterans Day" is to do something special to make a veteran happy.

Salute All Veterans and remember that Freedom Is Not Free!

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THANK YOU

Here's to the many veterans both past and present who have helped to make America great.

Without your courage, freedom would only be a dream. Without your sacrifice, democracy would only be a concept. But your spirit and dedication has made us an enlightened nation plus helped to set a good example for every future generation.

We appreciate your important contributions and are here to serve you in any way we can.



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