

Some of our veterans are well-known heroes who've received wide-spread acclaim. Most are not. Most are just ordinary citizens who answered the call to duty when it came. They postponed their private lives, their peaceful pursuits of farm, factory, and office. They poured all their talents and energy into becoming soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines. Often, the call to duty led them to war's hardship, danger, and death.

Let us recall what General MacArthur said about the American soldier: "His name and fame are the birthright of every American citizen. In his youth and strength, his love and loyalty, he gave all that mortality can give. He needs no eulogy from me or from any other man. He has written his own history and written it in red on his enemy's breast."

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Our war veterans often have returned home to marching bands, colorful parades, and an admiring public. That was the case after the world wars, and it was surely the case after victory in the Persian Gulf. The nation lavished heartfelt thanks upon its returning veterans, both for their victory and their sacrifice.

Unfortunately, that hasn't always been the case. For those who fought in Korea or Vietnam, there were few bands and fewer parades. On returning home, veterans often faced indifference from their countrymen. Sometimes, they faced outright hostility. But their sacrifice and their suffering were no less than the sacrifice and suffering of any other veterans who fought for their country. We owe them all our gratitude.

For no matter where or when our veterans have served, they've always served with distinction. They knew they had to fight. They knew they had to sacrifice. They knew they had to win. And they did just that, time after time, battle after battle.

They also knew the loneliness of separation from family and friends, and the fear of dying in a foreign land, alone, far from home. In serving America, they sweated, they bled, and they agonized. They crawled through mud and rain, and often ate their food from a tin can or a plastic wrapper. They forged deep friendships and felt deep pain when their friends were killed or maimed in battle.

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In honoring American veterans of World War Two, we honor all American veterans. For they were, and are, made of the same stuff; they were, and are, equally passionate in their patriotism and love of liberty.

Look around you. Who are the veterans of World War One? Who are the veterans of World War Two? Who are the veterans of Korea? Who are the veterans of Vietnam? Who are the veterans of the Persian Gulf? Perhaps you can tell the difference by the wrinkles on some faces and the smooth skin on others.

Perhaps you can tell the difference by the medals they wear. But you cannot tell the difference by their devotion to duty and their love of country. You cannot tell the difference, for there is no difference.

Look into their eyes. Whatever war they served in, you see a tear for fallen comrades, and you see hope for lasting peace. Let us look into their eyes and let us say to our veterans, we are a grateful nation -- we remember.