

Memorial Day 2018-Some 50 Years Gone

This is not a traditional high school remembrance along the lines of, "it was wonderful, golden, carefree time never to be repeated."

May 28, 1968 Memorial Day to some Americans in our cohort is a remembrance of a terrifying, confusing period when doing the right thing was wrong, and the wrong thing right.

I was the eldest of six siblings, whose father, through no fault of his own, found himself unemployed during my junior and senior years of high school. There was no possibility of going away to college, instead I worked as a janitor at night in my senior year in high school and my early years of college.

After graduation I started college at De Anza and in short order found myself asleep in my 8:00 AM Political Science class because of my night time work schedule. I had to drop a class or two at De Anza because of my night work schedule and as a result lost my student deferment.

As I mentioned here 10 years ago, I won the draft lottery. Shortly thereafter when faced with a draft notice for immediate induction into the Army in the middle of a semester, I opted to delay my entry into the service for 45 days and chose to enter the USMC.

This was the height of the Vietnam conflict and like many of us the last thing I wanted to do was to participate in what appeared to be a pointless war filled with death nor face the disdain of many Americans at that time for being in the military. But there it was.

But today I have been thinking about the men and women I served with almost 50 years ago. I was the **only** one out of 150 men in my boot camp company who went to college at all. At least 50% of my company had not graduated from high school. About 40% of my Company were African Americans or Latinos and were there only because of lack of other opportunities or their inability to avoid the draft by various deferments. More than a few of the others had the choice of jail or the Marines.

Serving with these men made me viscerally aware of the vast differences in opportunity in our country that is solely the result of birth, race and economic happenstance and I have carried that knowledge with me the rest of my life.

This brings me finally to my point. I think that most of you during high school had a father, brother, cousin or neighbor that Vietnam put in harm's way. This made the sacrifice of Veterans real to most families.

But how many of you now know anyone currently serving our country? Not many is my guess.

Currently only four tenths of one percent of all Americans serve in the military, so in other words 99.6% of all Americans are relying on someone else to protect them and their way of life. Unfortunately, many of those numbering the 99.6% of the remaining population don't even acknowledge the debt owed to these few men and women nor are even concerned with the sacrifices made on their behalf.

Then, as now, I see very little being done by our country to even slightly balance the scales for the disproportionate contribution to our country by these few men and women.

I want to ask you today to think about the sacrifice that a few Americans are making on the behalf of the many, and instead of saying “thank for your service” actually do something meaningful for these wonderful men and women.

Please contact your representatives and demand that more be done to help our Veterans and their families. At least pressure them to do something right now about the slow and mediocre medical care offered by the VA.

By the way, saying “thank for your service“ to a Vet and doing nothing more is about as meaningful to us as saying “have a nice day” is to Forest Gump.

May 28, 2018

Princeville, HI