

ANOTHER POV

Their Due

"I am an American soldier I serve in the forces that guard my country and my way of life. I am prepared to give my life in its defense." That is the First General Order for all soldiers in the United States Army. I memorized that in 1973, and I remember it as well today as I did the day I learned it—and I believe it today as well.

While I served until 1992, it was always clear to me as a soldier what my duty was, and I suspect it is the same for those serving today. As a soldier, it was not my choice where I served or what I had to do. As a young officer, I commanded many soldiers and, as it is with the army, lost a few brave souls. I can also remember many a night being afraid, whether on the deck of a small watercraft pitching in rough seas, repelling from a sheer cliff, hovering helicopter, or sitting in a hole in the ground with another soldier watching in the darkness for some unforeseen foe. It was all very traumatic, to say the least.

War is an awful thing for anyone who serves. So many brilliant minds have had equally brilliant thoughts about its futility, yet few seem to heed, and it still goes on. America was born of the Revolutionary War. We have continued in war with our Civil War, the two World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam. In all those wars, the American people were intensely involved. In the Revolution, the war was on our doorstep, and the 'civilians' were literally in the war. That also was true in the Civil War. During the World Wars our civilians lived the war every day. Serving in war-time jobs, conducting war-bond drives, scrap drives of all sorts, struggling with a short supply of just about everything, and the daily news of the loss of loved ones, friends, and neighbors in battle. During Vietnam, our streets filled with demonstrators to end the war; if you did not see it yourself in the streets, then the images filled the TV screens every night.

This war, or whatever it is, has not reached out to the general American public as those wars before reached us. There are no scrap drives—I guess America is still the land of plenty. There are no war bond campaigns—the government just gets loans from China. And no mothers are marching in the streets to end a draft to keep their sons home from war. I believe if there were a draft, and the unwilling were compelled to fight in this war, the streets would have been filled with people protesting this war, and it would be over by now.

One thing is the same today as in all wars: the rivers of tears shed by the families of those soldiers who are not coming home. In all wars, we have lost members of the military in battle, but this is the first time we have asked our military to endure returning to the war zone three and now four times. Can you imagine standing at a checkpoint every day and wondering if the next car is the one that is going to blow up and kill or maim you? I can't imagine the mental stress they are undergoing every day. If they survive it physically and mentally, it still takes its toll. The suicide rate among our soldiers is at record highs, and one out of every eight of our soldiers suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Is it real? Think of the worst event of your life and how it affected you the next day and the day after. Try to imagine living with that event reoccurring every day for a year, then, just when you thought it was over you had to go

back to wherever that was and face it again. Now, maybe we can understand what these soldiers go through in their three and four tours of duty.

As for the end of this 'War,' more and more Americans are becoming frustrated, concerned, and just plain outraged with the cost of the war, and more and more are saying, 'Enough is enough.' I fear, however, that we have not seen the final cost of this war, nor in dollars and not in human cost. I fear the impact the billions in loans made to foreign governments will have on our economy, but more so, I worry about how our soldiers will survive post-Iraq. If you remember post-Vietnam, you will remember the answer was not well.

The Senate has passed a bill by a vote of 75-22 for a new GI benefit plan. We now await the House vote, and the President said he will Veto the bill. One opponent of the bill said, "It (the Bill) is too generous and will encourage soldiers to leave the service too soon." Too generous? I cannot imagine how we can be too generous to those who served so well.

This country has a debt to pay. Next week, I will express Another POV.

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