

Subject: Memorial Day and Our Veterans
May 23, 2023

I had a crazy, distant uncle who got drunk with a friend one afternoon shortly after December 7, 1941, and they walked into a recruiting office and told the soldiers on duty that they wanted to be paratroopers. The recruiters made sure their wishes were fulfilled without delay.

My uncle went on to fight at the Battle of the Bulge with the 101st Airborne, where he was shot below the knee. He was taken back behind the lines, where someone cut off with a bayonet knife his mostly severed leg. Although my uncle went on to build a successful business as a civilian, he never fully recovered from that trauma. But, that amputated leg continued to give him health problems for the rest of his short life.

After the war, he had multiple surgeries on his wounded leg; the resulting amputations resulted in stump well above his knee, on which they outfitted an artificial leg. It was a daily ordeal for him to walk on that artificial leg. He never complained and would always joke that he left his leg back in Europe. My uncle, like other veterans, struggled with substance abuse after the war. The long and short of it is that this tough paratrooper died in the early 1970s as a young man. His disability took its toll year after year, both mentally and physically, well beyond the end of the war.

He is just one example of what happens to many veterans, even to this day. After the guns of war go silent, we remember the battlefields on days like Memorial Day. But the nation is still losing many GIs to those past battles, as our veterans continue to struggle with their physical and mental war injuries. They suffer now, along with their families.

So, on this Memorial Day, I hope we will all remember the fallen and those veterans who continue to fight the internal battle from the trauma of war. America loses over 20 veterans to suicide every day. These men and women are today's casualties of war.

And on this somber day, Americans should remember the Gold Star families of the fallen and lost. Parents, spouses, and children carry a tremendous and continuous burden of loss and despair. They too, have given to and served our nation in the most profound way.

There are many ways we, as a country and as individuals, can support these families and veterans. There are opportunities for giving to the Disabled Veteran Association and the Wounded Warrior Foundation, to name only a few organizations.

Here in Macon County, there is a new and innovative program for Gold Star families and veterans. It is called the Special Liberty Project. This program is located on a mountain farm where special programs are available for families and veterans to meet, connect and experience the restorative, healing powers of being in nature. It provides support for all family survivors impacted by our nation's conflicts. They provide programs throughout the year for Gold Star spouses and children, as well as for veterans who desperately need care and support. So often, survivors and veterans fall through the cracks of official government programs. The Special Liberty Project is an innovative program dedicated to serving the forgotten who simply need acknowledgment, support and affirmation.

For more information visit their website at [Special Liberty Project](#). They are dedicated to creating a supportive community for our country's Gold Star Families. In this period of turmoil and division, making gifts on Memorial Day to support these fellow citizens is something we all can do.