

I was a rainy day on Saturday when wreaths were placed on the graves of American veterans. Nevertheless, Phil Potts, Mike Murphy and Derek Taylor had organized this national event for Highlands, Wreaths Across America. American Legion Post 370 assembled a group of veterans, and a commemorative ceremony was held this past Saturday at the Highlands Community Building, followed by the placing of the wreaths at the cemetery.

It was a bitter sweet event, a time to think about departed loved ones who served our country. At Christmas I think of veterans and their commitment to service. I remember my first Christmas as a soldier and how I so much cherished a two week leave at Christmas. I also vividly recall the second Christmas posted in a foreign land and having to be on duty on Christmas Day. Nothing ever changes, there will be thousands of GIs on leave and on duty in distant places during the holiday season. I hope everyone will take a moment to pause and thank them for what they are doing at this moment.

Before the wreath ceremony our American Legion post had a breakfast gathering. I sat down with other veterans and talked about the old times of military service. We are old men now, but as I talked with my friends, I was struck by what they had done in service to our nation, and the fact that many of them are very fortunate to still be celebrating any Christmas at all. And what was even more amazing was that some of these old veterans were hobbling around, limping and struggling to place those wreaths on the graves of their comrades, but they made that extra effort to do so.

At that breakfast gathering of old veterans there were many stories of them doing their duty and going that extra mile for our country. There was the Legionnaire that spent six years in a North Vietnamese prison camp. He was eating his breakfast like nothing had ever happened. I sat next to a former US Air Force pilot who had survived over 100 missions over Hanoi. (I can't bring myself to call it Ho Chi Minh City.) This former pilot said during those combat days he smoked five packs of cigarettes a day and tended to shake like a leaf. After hearing accounts of what he did as a pilot, I was in awe of his courage and sacrifice. Flying that many combat missions almost assured that his final number would be up sooner than later. It is a miracle that he still celebrating Christmas.

There was another old vet that was using a hiking stick as a support as he placed wreaths on graves. He was covered in water, a condition he was very accustomed to in his military service. This man was wearing a hat with the words Seal Group 1. His hat indicated he was one of first members of the distinguished Navy Seal Teams. I suspect he, like the veteran who was a POW and the pilot, all felt fortunate to be celebrating this Christmas in 2021.

This season is a time of anticipation and hope. Anticipation and hope are the cornerstones of faith. As we face yet another possible surge in COVID and face other uncertainties, let our community, like those old veterans, have the hope and anticipation that this next year will be the best yet to come.