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How 9/11 Changed America's View of Vietnam Vets



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EMBLEMATIC SERVICE: Veterans often make their tour of duty visible to the world.

BROOKLYN — Steve Placanica and his fellow Vietnam War veterans had been home for decades. Yet until the calamity of Sept. 11, 2001, it seemed few Americans expressed any gratitude for their service.

“No one cared about veterans,” said Placanica, who served as a buck sergeant in the Army. “When those two buildings fell, that’s when everything changed.”

He was among more than two dozen veterans who gathered at the Roman Catholic Church of St. Patrick in Bay Ridge ahead of Veterans Day, where they shared brunch and a camaraderie born out of years of neglect.

Steve Miller, a retired electrician from Coney Island, said he always proudly wore Army T-shirts to work. It wasn’t until after the 2001 attacks that people began voicing their appreciation. The US war in Afghanistan, launched to combat the terror unleashed by Osama bin Laden from Al Qaeda’s base there, has overtaken the Vietnam War as [America’s longest conflict](#).

“It’s funny,” he said. “Everyone’s coming up and thanking me for my service, but where were they in 1968?”

For decades, many veterans of the divisive war say, they only had their families and each other to turn to for support and survival.

The Department of Veterans Affairs “never told some of these guys they could get benefits,” Placanica said. “I was on vacation in Mexico and ran into a Marine veteran suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and told him about filing for the VA. And I realized, here we were in a foreign country and he’s finding out from another veteran that he could be compensated.”

The Veterans Appreciation Brunch was organized by the Brooklyn Young Republicans. Beyond offering veterans a meal, events like these spotlight the relationships veterans have long cultivated among themselves.

“As I was serving the food, I was looking around and seeing everyone talking,” said Joel Acevedo, president of the organization. “They don’t talk like they’ve just met. It’s like they’re distant cousins catching up after having not seen each other in a while.”

“They’re all still involved with each other as veterans and as brothers,” Andrew Windsor, the organization’s vice president added. “That camaraderie doesn’t just go away.”

For years, Windsor’s father was in charge of organizing the annual brunch along with the district’s community board. Eventually, someone else took over the event and it was discontinued after their departure. This October, Windsor started working to bring it back in order to honor his late grandfather, who served in Korea, and other veterans.

Windsor brought the idea to Acevedo, who is in the Army reserve, and got the event going via the Young Republicans. The event, which remains non-partisan, aims to bring the community together.

“You don’t have to support the war,” Windsor said. “But you have to support the warriors.”