

Veterans Day

Today and Every Day, A Call to Duty

By Col. Thomas L. English

Veterans deserve our respect and gratitude. Veterans from the last 12 years of conflict are unique: first, they are all volunteers; second, they answered their nation's call knowing they would go to war. Yet they volunteered, giving up their civilian constitutional protections in exchange for limited rights under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. They surrendered their privacy and the comforts of everyday living for cramped military housing—many times living in tents or worse. Each took a solemn oath to protect and defend our nation, even if it cost his or her life or physical well-being.

Going to war has never been easy. The same is true for current warriors coming home: one in five veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder; veterans now account for 20 percent of suicides in the country; and the unemployment rate among veterans is more than 14 percent. The price they pay is high, and they deserve our recognition. Thousands of patriots gave their lives and tens of thousands shed blood for our country. They do not want, nor need, a handout; they want and need a hand up. We owe them the assistance they need to rejoin the society they left to serve our interests. They need help in overcoming very real disabilities and finding meaningful employment.

Political debate swirls over Iraq and Afghanistan, but it must not taint our commitment to veterans who dedicated their lives and well-being to answer the call of their nation. Their commitment to our country lies in the fact that they have no say in decisions regarding whether the country goes to war or stays at war. We learned a valuable lesson from Vietnam veterans, who waited far too long to be recognized for their contributions to our great nation. Confusion over the political realities of war and the warriors who serve their country played a part



in causing this delay. As healthy political debate over the Vietnam War arose around our country, the warrior became confused with the war and our veterans suffered.

Let this Veterans Day serve as a call to duty for all of us to extend a hand to those who served. We owe them the help they need to regain what they surrendered in service to our country. This must be an everyday challenge, not just on Veterans Day. There are many places you can contact to help veterans and their families: Operation Home Front, Wounded Warrior Project, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, and Hire Our Heroes,

just to name a few worthy programs. If nothing else, a round of applause and a pat on the back go a long way to start healing wounds both external and internal. ■

Thomas L. English is a U.S. administrative law judge and state judge advocate for the Michigan Army National Guard. He is a former military policeman, New Mexico State Police officer, and assistant U.S. attorney (DNM). As a cabinet secretary for the New Mexico Department of Public Safety and State Police, he was the state's homeland security advisor. In 2011, he was director of legal operations for CJIAF 435 in Afghanistan.

We owe them the help they need to regain what they surrendered in service to our country. This must be an everyday challenge, not just on Veterans Day.