

One Veterans View of Veterans Day 2015

By Stephen Long, Editorial Advisory Board Member

For me, Veteran's Day is always a time of introspection. I think of the friends I've lost; the fathers and sons and brothers and uncles, and now daughters and mothers that did not come home. But I also think of those that did come home and live amongst us today. I think of the phrase, "the best days of our lives," as joined Service and Sacrifice has been called. Maybe the American Legion motto sums it up best – "All gave some, some gave all." This morning I attended a celebration that opened with the Star Spangled Banner – played in front of an enormous American Flag – truly Old Glory. Her size and majesty made me think of her sister that graces the halls of the Smithsonian – the Old Glory that gave rise to our National Anthem. My eyes are always moist when I hear and move my lips along with the words, "the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air, gave proof through the night that our Flag was still there..." For those not so familiar with the war of 1812, these rockets and bombs were explosions trying to kill the defenders of Fort McHenry in Baltimore Harbor. It is because they resolutely stood, in the hell of falling bombardments, which enabled the Flag to still defiantly stand and be seen in the dawn's early light.

As I contemplate Veterans Day, I thought it worthwhile to look up some statistics about Veterans. Florida has 1.58 million Veterans – 8% of the State's population. Brevard County has 69 thousand Veterans – 12% of the County's population. Today less than 1 percent of the US population serves in uniform on Active Duty, the National Guard or Reserve forces. In 1971, veterans made up 72 percent of members in the U.S. House and Senate. In the current 114th Congress, this number has fallen to 18%. Our current Commander in Chief, President Obama is not a veteran; nor was President Bill Clinton. Presidents George W. and H.W. Bush; Presidents Regan, Carter, Ford, Nixon, Johnson, Kennedy, Eisenhower and Truman were veterans. In Florida, veterans include Congressmen Buchanan, Desantis, Nugent, Rooney, and Senator Bill Nelson. Senator Rubio is not a veteran. Here in the Florida 8th congressional district, Congressman Bill Posey is not a veteran.

More profound than anything I could write, I highly recommend an article by D. Barno and N. Bensahel, "When the Yellow Ribbons Fade: Reconnecting Our Soldiers and Citizens," published in July 2015. I've extracted several quotes that are simultaneously illuminating and troublesome:

"...Since the all-volunteer force replaced military conscription...the number of Americans with a personal connection to the military has shrunk dramatically...today, fewer than 1 percent of Americans serve in uniform at any given time...Members of military families are far more likely to serve than the rest of the population...American democracy require(s) a military that is representative of and connected to the people of the United States...Civilians have a responsibility to understand their military and have an essential role in decisions to commit it to battle..."

For all of our Veterans, I give my deepest thanks. To my Dad - Staff Sargent Elwood Long that served during the Korean war; to my instructors and mentors that flew in Vietnam and came home unloved; to my wingmen that flew alongside me through the Cold War years; to my comrades that served in the modern hells of Afghanistan and Iraq; to my son's close friend Julian that gave his life in Afghanistan – I thank them all for their Service Greater than Self. My service was small compared to theirs. This year, on Veteran's Day, if you know a Veteran, shake her hand and thank him for his service. Remember a Veteran's widower, hug a Veteran's orphans. Remember that a very small few continue to defend and have defended all of us. Stephen Long, Major, USAFR Ret. (DC and NJ Air National Guard, USAF Reserves)