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The Perennial Purple Heart

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The Perennial Purple Heart

Abstract

Let's talk about Veterans' sacrifices. I must admit that I didn't know much myself about veterans until one of my siblings entered the Navy. I'm very proud of his service, sacrifice, and dedication to protecting the United States. It's probably not a common thought to all of us, but I think often of what it is like to be away during wartime serving our country. Military folks sacrifice a ton – whether it be lower pay, moving around a lot, being away from family for a long time, going into risky military operations, etc. These men and women sacrifice comparatively comfortable American livelihoods to go into situations where they know they may very well die serving our country. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, veterans, military, navy, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs, sexual harassment, homelessness, VA scandal, politization, Veteran's Day

Disciplines

Civic and Community Engagement | Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence | Politics and Social Change | Psychiatric and Mental Health

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at [surgegettysburg.wordpress.com](#) Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

THE PERENNIAL PURPLE HEART

November 11, 2015



Let's talk about Veterans' sacrifices. I must admit that I didn't know much myself about veterans until one of my siblings entered the Navy. I'm very proud of his service, sacrifice, and dedication to protecting the United States. It's probably not a common thought to all of us, but I think often of what it is like to be away during wartime serving our country. Military folks sacrifice a ton – whether it be lower pay, moving around a lot, being away from family for a long time, going into risky military operations, etc. These men and women sacrifice comparatively comfortable American livelihoods to go into situations where they know they may very well die serving our country.

This town, Gettysburg, has a strong association with war. We all know about it, because it is observed in our College's history and we all went through 8th grade history class. As it is, nearly every time I step off campus I see something downtown relating to the sacrifices made during the Battle of Gettysburg. Our very own Pennsylvania Hall served as a field hospital during those hot July days in 1863;

the paths that we walk each day were once trodden by soldiers.

Their sacrifices are all around us. Yet when they return, many vets go unthanked, unseen, unappreciated, and homeless. Their well-being is ignored once they've gotten off the battlefield.

While abroad, many folks in the service see things and experience situations that cause them to develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). When they're serving, soldiers are in a state of constant tension. At any moment, without warning, a bomb could appear and all could descend into chaos. Soldiers are

faced with death and destruction every day. Often, these memories can come home with them and they can [still feel like they are in a warzone](#).

It's habit for veterans to scan their surroundings for bombs and potential threats; when they come home, this doesn't change. Their wartime habits become daily habits. PTSD is more common than you might think. According to the [U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs](#), it is estimated that between 11% and 20% of Iraq and Afghanistan vets have PTSD in a given year. PTSD also shows up in Gulf War and Vietnam vets.

Not only do soldiers deal with trauma in the field, but they also face trauma from within as sexual assault and harassment are prevalent in the military. Trauma and neglect has often been the experience of those [sexually assaulted while serving](#). Of those veterans who receive care from the Department of Veterans' Affairs, it is estimated that 23% of women were sexually assaulted during their service. Men are victims as well; in fact, more than 50% of veterans who were sexually assaulted are men, due to the fact that historically more men than women have served in the military. The percentages are much higher when you look at soldiers who have been affected by sexual harassment.

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, [veterans are more likely than civilians to experience homelessness](#). No person should go off to serve this country and come back to have nowhere to live, and no job to hold. The skills that my brother is learning in the military are valuable and useful to the economy. It's just that many veterans don't get the adequate care that they need to succeed because issues like PTSD and sexual assault in the military are not given enough attention. While the rate of homelessness among veterans has decreased over the past few years, especially in [cities like New Orleans](#), there's still a long way to go in ensuring that veterans come home from war supplied with the resources they need to transition back into civilian life.

There has not, however, been progress on the well documented [VA scandal](#) from last year. That is when many of us first learned that veterans are dying before they can get the treatment they need at Veterans Affairs hospitals simply because the wait times are so long. And you know what? It's been a year, but [nothing has improved at VA hospitals](#).

Republicans and Democrats have been fighting over who to blame for the scandal. This is what upsets me. Instead of admitting their mistakes and failures to serve our vets, politicians take the opportunity to blame someone else. [Hillary Clinton points fingers](#) at Republicans while [Donald Trump uses veterans' issues to fuel his popularity](#). Trump feeds off of frustration at bureaucracy's failures and makes outlandish promises he won't be able to keep.

I've had enough of the politicization of veterans' issues. Veterans are left homeless, unhealed, and forgotten. Vets have worked hard, and don't deserve to be used as a political pawn when they have suffered and sacrificed so much.

This Veterans' Day, take the time to thank any veteran you know, whether he or she be a grandparent, parent, cousin, friend, or sibling.

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This post is written anonymously not out of shame, but to protect my identity. To contact me, email surgegettysburg@gmail.com.