

Hollow Words

By Pete Clark

An in thing to do today is to promote military service by thanking a veteran for his or her service. It has been seventy-four years since multitudes of GI's began returning home after having lived through the inhuman ravages of total war. These men and women have been called the Greatest Generation and they are, by any measure. The next wave of combat veterans began returning home in July, 1953 at the end of the Korean Police Action. The Korean War had been a very difficult experience for the men and women of the U.S. Military. Those who survived the war came home and were forgotten.

Then came Vietnam with its poison punji sticks and small children carrying live grenades. American troops had to conduct missions in a country where the rural population supported the communist insurgency because of the corruption in Saigon. As a friend told me, "You mostly couldn't recognize the enemy until he tried to kill you." With the first antiwar protests in 1965, North Vietnamese Party First Secretary, Le Duan, knew the war was won. All he had to do was sacrifice his people until the American public grew weary of the cost of the war, both financially and in human terms. The North Vietnamese had no worry of a free press broadcasting the gruesome and negative details of the fighting. American veterans came home from Vietnam to be called baby killers and be spit on by the guardians of truth, justice and self-righteous indignation.

In July, 1973 after the last American combat units had been pulled out of Viet Nam, the Draft was eliminated and an all-volunteer military was created. This force has worked well, except that National Guard troops have had to supplement regular military forces during the Iraq War and in the continuing fight in Afghanistan. As an incentive to enlist, National Guard members are now given the veteran's benefits that were once reserved for regular military personnel. I think the worst attribute of the all-volunteer military is that it is composed of a minute percentage of the American population. For the rest of the people, Afghanistan and other military imbroglios are at the fringe of their lives as they or their children will not be forced to fight. My granddaughter, a member of the Wyoming National Guard, is in Afghanistan. She could have stayed home as she was non-deployable, but she chose to go with her Blackhawk Medevac Crew.

To say Thank you for your service is to parrot propaganda. The statement is also a poor substitute for the care of veterans, male and female who have come home from combat, damaged either mentally, physically or both. It has been my experience that the VA provides good health services as timely as possible. The department is underfunded and understaffed. Congress needs to appropriate sufficient funds for VA, so those dedicated people can do their jobs to ease the suffering of those who have sacrificed so much for their country. That move would actually help maintain America's greatness.