

The Meaning of Veteran's Day

In every year there are 365 days. Of those days, two are set aside to particularly remember those who have served their country and its citizens: Memorial Day and Veteran's Day. The Declaration of Independence says: "*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*" Every day, men and women of the armed forces of the United States agree to surrender these rights so that the rest of us may be guaranteed them. It is for these fellow citizens, who sacrifice so much to serve us, that we celebrate Veteran's Day.

Service is a word that has many meanings in America today, but its classic meaning, and the meaning that we hold to on this day, is that we serve when we give up our own self-interest to serve the interests of others. The members of our military serve in such a way. Wherever there is trouble, or injustice, or a threat to the peace and safety of us and our neighbors these people stride confidently and purposefully into the gap. They stand as guarantors of our freedom, our rights, and our happiness.

Perhaps this story says it best. It is taken from remarks made by Rep. Ander Crenshaw to the U.S. Congress in 2001:

Sgt. Fred Stockham was an orphan. He had no family and he never married. A friend was notified of his death. His body was placed in an unmarked grave that was lost for 60 years. Only the men of his company knew of his heroism until 21 years later because his Medal of Honor citation was lost in the chaos following the war. . .

. . . On June 13, 1918, the Germans savagely bombarded Belleau Wood with deadly mustard gas and high explosives for six long hours. Sgt. Stockham courageously led the evacuation of wounded and gassed marines. When he saw a young 17-year old private cut down by shrapnel and his gas mask torn away, Sgt. Stockham without hesitation pulled off his own mask and put it on the young private and carried him to safety. He returned again and again to carry the wounded out. He finally collapsed from the effects of the deadly gas. He suffered an agonizing death a week later. He was 37.

Sgt. Stockham's heroism seems to me to be of a higher order. When he took off his mask, he was not just putting himself in harm's way or even risking death, he was knowingly condemning himself to a horrible death to save the life of his friend.

This is the meaning of Veteran's Day. That our neighbors, our parents, our sons and daughters, our brothers and sisters; all are willing to lay down their lives to save ours.

Citation:

Cong. Rec. Statement of Rep. Ander Crenshaw. 17 July 2001: E1343-E1344. Print.

Mr. Robert Lindeman, November 2014