

Duty, Honor, Country

What is an American Veteran?

Someone before me has answered this already with the simple statement; “A veteran – whether active duty, retired, national guard, or reserve – is someone who, at one point in his or her life, wrote a blank check made payable to The ‘United States of America’, for an amount of ‘up to and including my life.’”

America has been a beacon to the rest of the world since our countries inception. She has been a source of refuge for people fleeing the tyranny of evil throughout the world. The poor, downtrodden and oppressed have flocked to America’s shores searching for a better place to live and a place to raise their families in peace, and when people and countries throughout the world were in distress America has answered their pleas for help by sending its military to fight for them.

America stands guard for the world at a price, and that price is the blood of our sons and daughters, our Veterans. Americas Veterans are men and women who stepped forward because something in them compels them to stand up and fight for their fellow man, men and women to whom “Duty, Honor, Country” are not just words but a way of life.

General Douglas MacArthur, far more eloquent than I am, once said:

“Duty, Honor, Country: Those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, what you will be. They are your rallying points: to build courage when courage seems to fail; to regain faith when there seems to be little cause for faith; to create hope when hope becomes forlorn.”

McArthur goes on to talk about the American Veteran:

*“I do not know the dignity of their birth, but I do know the glory of their death. They died unquestioning, uncomplaining, with faith in their hearts, and on their lips the hope that we would go on to victory. Always, for them: *Duty, Honor, Country*; always their blood and sweat and tears, as we sought the way and the light and the truth.”*

Sometimes when I see the courage and selflessness of our young men and women who willingly go to war in Afghanistan or Iraq to fight against terrorism my eyes tear up in sadness, not only at the bravery and sacrifice of these incredible people who stand guard for us but also because they are doing it instead of me. I am not alone. Most American Veterans feel this way but it is not something that can be easily expressed and we remain silent.

Our duty as Veterans does not end with the termination of our enlistment. Duty compels us to not only give our support to the active duty men and women who stand guard for us today but to honor the remembrance of those who have fallen before us. It is our duty to remember the sacrifices of the American Veterans who have fought and died in countless battles in foreign lands throughout the world so that we, their mothers, fathers, sons and daughters could be safe.

The American Veterans do not ask for much in repayment, just to honor their memory and sacrifice. One way we do this is with memorials and parks such as this place, Veterans Memorial Park. This park was constructed to honor our heroes of past conflicts and our duty is to stand guard to protect and cherish their memory and sacrifice against others who would cause them dishonor.

For over 10 years and against strong opposition from veteran's groups, certain members of the City Council and employees of the Park Board have vigorously promoted the construction of a "memorial" to South Vietnamese Soldiers in this park, Veterans Memorial Park which has been, since its inception, reserved for only those who have served in the United States Armed Forces. The personal agendas of these employees can only be guessed at. However, in their unrelenting efforts, these City employees (at the expense of the taxpayers) have not only insulted Veterans and caused us great anguish but they have continued to pressure the Vietnamese Community into direct conflict with the Veterans Community. The employees of the City of Wichita have breached their duty of service and their obligations to all the citizens of Wichita, including Veterans who are comprised of people of all races, religions and national origins, as well as to one specific ethnic group.

The right to be memorialized in the Veterans Memorial Park is *earned* by honorable service in the United States Military, and by nothing else. The diminishment of the respect and honor shown for the service of our American soldiers and sailors is not a bone to throw to diversity and so called political correctness, and this ground sacred to a people's defending warriors is an inappropriate place to promote the personal vision of a misguided and misinformed minority. If someone doesn't understand why we feel as we do that is all right: they are entitled to their own opinion - just leave us alone and don't dishonor us.

I ask you to stand with us on this matter when that vote comes before the City Council again on July 14th 2009. Call, fax and email the Mayor and the City Council to tell them to keep this park unique to memorials for Veterans of the United States Armed Forces.

John Wilson