

An Ungrateful Nation

by Frederick Wickert

It has been the history of this nation from the beginning, to forget the troops, or even worse than forget, to despise them and abuse them. They are never paid enough. They are frequently given a job to do without adequate supplies or equipment to do it with. Yet, they have always got the job done admirably.

In the Revolutionary war, the Continental Congress promised the troops a portion of land after the war. The land was not forthcoming, and in many cases the land some of them owned before the war was confiscated because they were unable to pay the unreasonable taxes levied.

When I entered the military service during the Korean War, we were promised that if we stayed in the service for twenty years, our dependents and ourselves would be given free medical and dental care for life. It never happened.

We have heard and read much in the media about the lack of proper medical care for our troops returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, and about a scandal concerning conditions in Walter Reid Army hospital and problems with the Veterans Administration. A large percentage of homeless people in this country are veterans who need help, but the Veterans Administration is either incapable due to lack of funding, or unwilling to help them. Many have mental problems the VA is not equipped to handle.

Whenever the budget gets tight, the retired military are the first that administrations of both parties have begun their cuts with. COLA increases have been withheld from military retirees for example, while at the same time they were given to civilian retirees.

There are many more examples, but to little space to list them. Troops returning from World War II had the entire nation behind them and were greeted warmly when they returned. The entire population knew some degree of suffering during that war and the people of the nation supported the war and supported the troops.

The Korean War was not as popular and the welcome of the returning troops was not so warm. The Vietnam War was unpopular to the Hippie Culture and troops returning from that were treated with disdain and even spat upon. The Korean and Vietnam wars were my era. I remembered the welcome the World War II vets received from my childhood and was dismayed at the difference. I now believe the difference in attitudes was a direct result of the fact that life went on at home as usual during the wars since World War II. The sacrifices and the participation of the nation as a whole have not been there since World War II. I believe things were different because of that lack of sacrifice and participation.

Recently I have wondered if perhaps due to the length of the current wars, even though there is little sacrifice or participation by the nation as a whole, that some of the disdain for the troops is beginning to turn around.

The following appeared in The Washington Post, December 17, 2007, page 21:

A Civilian Partner for Our Troops
Why the U.S. needs a reconstruction reserve.

Richard G. Lugar and Condoleeza Rice

A Republican Senator and the Secretary of State write that the proposed Civilian Reserve Corps, a volunteer cadre of civilian experts who can work with the military to perform urgent jobs of Post-conflict stabilization and re-construction, is essential for national security, and the Senate should authorize its creation.

Arizona Daily Star, December 17, 2007

Politicians are Scrooges in the way they Treat Troops

Joseph L. Galloway

There are some new statistics that give us reason to be ashamed for the way that our country has treated those in the military who have sacrificed for us. Those statistics damn the politicians who start every speech by thanking the troops and veterans and blessing them. They indict our national leaders who turn up at military bases and the annual conventions of veteran's organizations and use troops and veterans as a backdrop for their photo-ops. Neglecting veterans and the widows and orphans that result from our wars is as American as apple pie. It's nothing new. But in the past we always waited until after the war's end to forget those who fought the war.

Boston Globe, December 18, 2007

Peter S. Canellos

National Perspective

Appreciation for Troops Emanates from Trail

From Congress to the White House to Town Meetings across the campaign trail, candidates and their supporters have been extolling the excellence of the military while perpetuating a sense of denial about the Army's recruitment and training flaws. There are many ways to support the troops, and knowing their sacrifices is only a start.

Beginning to see articles like these in media traditionally hostile to the troops and the military makes me wonder if there is any hope things will begin to change. If I see a great deal more of the same, I might be persuaded to have hope for change. At the same time history has taught me not to be taken in because it usually is not going to happen.

Some good examples are: The Air Force is flying fifty and sixty year old aircraft. It takes many years in this day and age to develop new and better aircraft. B-52 bombers and KC-135 refueling tankers have been around since the Korean War and we are still using them. Congress just don't want to spend any money for new replacement aircraft, while at the same time, Russia and China are both developing and building new and more modern aircraft. The bone yard has many of these planes that are no longer safe to fly because of metal fatigue and corrosion cracks. The entire F-15 fleet is currently grounded because they are finding too many cracks in them. They are not safe to fly.

The Navy is in dire need of some new ships. They have to cut back on initial orders for ships because Congress doesn't want to spend the money for them. At the same time, Congress has no difficulty at all in finding money for all sorts of new social programs to benefit the illegal aliens and thousands of earmarks they put in to the defense budget, while having nothing at all to do with defense. Buying such things as a Hippy Museum in New York is far more important to them than buying a new and safe refueling tanker for example, or a C-130 new enough it isn't in danger of having the wings fall off. The Army and Marines too are flying Korean War and Vietnam War vintage helicopters that are worn out and falling apart.

A new weapon has been developed that is non lethal. The Army wants it badly for use in Iraq. It heats the skin of the enemy so badly they cannot stand it and they retreat or disperse. It does not kill. Congress is denying the use of this weapon that could save thousands of lives for reasons of political correctness. Somebody might think we are mean if we use something like that.

There may be some progress as time goes by, but history has taught me to be skeptical. Unless and until we are attacked in large scale on our home ground, I don't believe much will change. The politicians are much

too comfortable with business as usual and we the populaces are much too complacent and apathetic to bring about much change for the better.