

Veterans Day 2020 –Will We “Keep Faith” to Veterans?



By Rees Lloyd

“The cost of war is in two parts: The cost of the battle itself, which is immediate; and the cost of care for those sent to fight the battle. Since most of those fighting the battle are young, that cost can continue for seventy years, or even longer. But when the country needs veterans, it gets veterans; when it feels it no longer needs veterans, it forgets veterans.”

These are the poignant words of a now deceased 100% disabled combat veteran of the Vietnam War generation. The truth of his words should long survive him, and should be remembered not only on this Veterans Day 2020, but every day – *if* we Americans are to “keep faith” with all those veterans who have served and sacrificed in defense of American freedom.

Maj. Gen. Patrick H. Brady (USA, ret.), a recipient of the Medal of Honor for his heroism in the Vietnam War, has written in tribute to America’s veterans: “America, under our Constitution, has no hereditary class of ‘nobility.’ America’s nobles are her veterans.”

There are an estimated 23-million living American veterans. It has rightly been said of them, and of all Veterans who have served in defense of freedom, including those serving now: “All gave some, some gave all.”

As to giving “all,” over 1.4-million veterans have given their lives in all the wars in defense of American freedom. Many

thousands are still "Missing in Action." Many millions more have survived but suffered devastating wounds lasting their entire lives. In the modern era, many veterans are surviving wounds that would have been fatal in earlier wars due to advances in medical care. They will need continuing care for decades, long after the close of wars in which they served.

It is they who must not be forgotten when actual war recedes; it is they with whom Americans must "keep faith." Patriotic warriors for freedom were mostly the young when wounded. They will need continuing care, even when the attention of political office holders and Americans generally tends to shove them out of sight and out of mind as other problems take the center of attention.

There are over 9-million of those veterans who are receiving medical care today through the Veterans Administration hospitals and medical facilities for the wounds of war—physical, mental, and emotional. They are survivors from WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, the War Against Terror in the Middle East, including combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. They all deserve, and must receive, the medical care they were promised by the nation that they would receive for their military service.

But that will require that the Americans whose freedom was purchased by the service of veterans must "keep faith" with America's veterans.

It has generally been thought among veterans that the medical care provided by doctors and nurses of the VA is good – "if you can get it." Too often, that needed care has been delayed, and thereby denied.

For years, there have been stories of long waits to actually see a physician—waits sometimes so long that veterans have died waiting. There also have been horror stories of mistreatment of veterans by career bureaucrat administrators

at the VA, including deliberate falsification of records to hide the bureaucrats' failures. Regarding those abuses, it was until recently all but impossible to remove the VA bureaucrats responsible for the problems.

Thanks to reforms initiated and fought for by President Donald J. Trump in his first term starting in 2016, long waits have been cut down by allowing veterans "freedom to choose" to seek help from private physicians when the VA is unable to provide timely help.

The Trump reforms include the ability to terminate those VA bureaucrats and employees who fail to properly serve the veterans. Several thousand VA bureaucrats and other VA employees have reportedly been fired for abuses. The result has been that President Trump has received an approval rating among veterans being served by VA to an astonishing "91%."

Whether those successful policies will remain if there is a change in the Presidency, is unknown. It is known, that Democrats in House and Senate generally opposed the Trump reforms, including Democrats on the Veterans Affairs and other military-related committees. Therefore, veterans need the vigilance and support of Americans to ensure that the promises made to veterans for their service are fulfilled.

The late General Norman ("Stormin' Norman") Shwartzgoff, who led the victory in Desert Storm which brought down the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, famously said: "Some things are worth living for. Some things are worth dying for. One of those things is freedom."

America's veterans are those men and women who took an oath to "defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic." Every single one of them took that oath and entered military service knowing that they might be required to die, or suffer horrible wounds, in defense of freedom. Yet, they served. As noted, some 1.4-million American

veterans have died in defense of our freedom. Countless millions suffered the wounds of war, many lasting a lifetime.

There can be no doubt that we of this generation of Americans owe a great debt to America's veterans who preserved and protected our freedom by their service—including all those veterans who are serving now.

We pay our debt to those who have served, in part, by remembering, honoring, and "keeping faith" with veterans by insuring that the promises made to them are kept.

This Veterans Day 2020, although traditional parades and ceremonies have been curtailed due to the Chinese Communist Party virus pandemic, we would do well to honor veterans and reflect on just what Veterans Day means.

Veterans Day was originally "Armistice Day," honoring WWI veterans. Congress later amended it to "Veterans Day" to honor all veterans. Veterans Day observances traditionally commence at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of the year, the anniversary of the date and time of the signing of the Armistice ending combat in World War I on November 11, 1918.

WWI was a horrible war of slaughter: There were over over 10-million casualties. It began in 1914. The first of some 4-million Americans who would serve in –and win that war – began arriving in France in June, 1917, when it looked as if Germany would be victorious.

The first Americans to die were three soldiers who were killed in combat on Nov. 3, 1917. By the time the Armistice was signed a year later, on Nov. 11, 1918, some 117,000 Americans – almost 10,000 per month of combat–had given their lives in service.

The horror of WWI, presented side-by-side with the sacrifices of those Americans and allied forces who served, fought, and

died – and the need for us to “keep the faith” with those who served –is expressed most profoundly by the poem, “Flanders Fields.” It is perhaps the most moving poem ever written about war, and sacrifice, honor, and the need for those who live not to “break faith” with those who died for freedom.

“Flanders Fields” was written by then-Major John McCrae, MD, a surgeon in the Canadian Army who was born in 1872 and would die in 1918, the year that terrible war ended. Dr. McCrae wrote the poem in the devastation of the battle of Ypres in WWI, days after his best comrade had been killed. His words reach across more than a century to bring home the reality of all the wars, and the need to “keep faith” with those who served.

On this Veterans Day 2020, may God bless all the veterans who have served in defense of our freedom in all the wars. And may the country whose freedom they preserved honor them on Veterans Day and on every day. They kept the faith with us; and, as expressed in the haunting words of “Flanders Field,” we must not “break faith” with them.

IN FLANDERS FIELDS

By Lt. Col. John McCrae, Army of Canada, WWI

*In Flanders Fields the poppies blow,
Between the crosses row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

*We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders Fields.*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw*

The torch; be it yours to hold it high.

*If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders Field.*

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