



From the Desk of Pastor Meyer

Thoughts on Veteran's Day

In a few weeks, the United States will mark November 11 as the solemn, somber remembrance of Veteran's Day. *"On the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, we shall remember,"* someone intoned at the first Armistice Day in 1919. It was the day marking the end of World War One, the "war to end all wars."

That "someone" lied.

Not intentionally, of course. Following the horror and bloodshed that was executed - I use that word deliberately - at Flanders, the Somme, and other places long-faded from our memory, they were spoken with romantic, noble, and good intention. Alas, mankind's heart is inclined to evil, and with the fuel of nationalistic pride coupled with the world's arrogance to think that Germany would take the brutal social and economic punishment and limitations placed upon it while being thrust to the side of the roaring global stage like a kindergartener who got caught eating paste in art class, peace lasted two short decades. A short man with a bad haircut, an awful moustache, and a sick, twisted moral ethic would soon throw the world, kicking, screaming, or denying, into yet another bloody world war.

In the years since, at least in the United States, Armistice Day became Veterans Day. Were Memorial Day honors and remembers those who died, paying the ultimate price for the country and fellow citizens, Veterans Day remembers and honors those who served and are still living.

It's been my privilege to have met Veterans from all branches of the Service. When a retired Army Major named Howard showed us some of the memorabilia he brought back from Vietnam, I foolishly and naively asked, "Did you...*you know...*?" He understood, looked me in the eye and flatly said, "I don't know." I've learned my idle and foolish and naive curiosity does not earn the right to enter that sacred space where time and memory clash. Major Howard - if you (somehow) read this, I sincerely apologize.

I met a man, Melvin, who was on the *USS Arizona* on December 7, 1941. I assure you, that date was still living in infamy in his heart and mind when I met him 47 years later. I have a cousin who was part of (what used to be) a highly secretive unit of the United States Navy which shares the same name as a semi-aquatic animal. He must have taken creative writing in school, because his LinkedIn account has some very interesting ways to describe what he did in the Navy. I have two other cousins who are mechanics in the Air Force. One uncle was a door gunner in a Huey in Vietnam. Two other uncles were over there on the ground and as soon as they got home, they tried to bury their experiences with their uniforms in Grandma's basement closet. My father-in-law is a veteran of Vietnam, also - a USAF cartographer, who got to look at pictures and make maps of Vietnam and other "interesting places." My high school band teacher was drafted for Vietnam, but when he confessed to knowing how to type, he wound up stateside teaching typing for clerks heading overseas. I remember that he kept his dog tags on his school keyring. I met a Korean War veteran at Wal-Mart, wearing a cap announcing that he was at the Chosin Reservoir in 1950 with the 1st Marine Division. I asked if he had thawed out yet; he said "maybe next summer." The best man at my wedding later served in and retired from the Navy last year.

When I was in Crosby, I buried a platoon's worth of WWII and Korean War veterans, members of the congregation and members of the greatest generation. Godfrey fought up Italy with the 10th Mountain Division in WWII. He gave me the wooden crucifix in my office. Victor, a Korean War veteran, was the company cook. He made so much oatmeal that, until the day he died, he couldn't even look at an oatmeal cookie without groaning. Ed served on McArthur's staff in Japan after VJ-Day. Mildred was in the US Army nursing corps in World War II. There was Roy and Ralph and Ed, and most unique of all, Gero, who was at the Battle of the Bulge --- on the German side, having been conscripted at the age of 11. What a story he had to tell!

You can read in this *Messenger* the names of the men and women of Zion who have served. If I tried to name you all, I would surely miss one, so let me simply say, collectively, you did what you needed to do – *thank you* - and came home safely - *thank God*.

Rightly, attention is given to these veterans, but a word needs to be said of the veterans of a different kind, those who “served” in the home while loved ones were away. These men and women, the heroes of the home, deserve an honor as well. While their serviceman or servicewoman is away, they take care of house and children, work and school, going about their lives knowing the possibility that their loved one might never come home. When they get home, it's not always as easy as picking up where they left off. Thankfully, we know more about PTSD than ever before, but that doesn't change the mental combat that still takes place behind closed doors in homes across the country. The battle that you once read about that took place in 2021, or 1991, or 1951, still rages on in some people's minds. Service personnel receive a Purple Heart if they are wounded. To those husbands and wives, parents and children who care for their wounded warrior, the nation owes you the highest of all honors. We should call this the Broken Heart medal. May I suggest that if November 11 is set aside to honor veterans, we set aside November 12 to remember and honor those who stand alongside those who have served. Truly, they deserve their own honor. God bless you for your faithfulness to your love done, fighting in a battle that may not end this side of heaven.

This year, Veterans Day means a little more to my wife and me. I went to the Field of Honor the other evening and just stood in silence, seeing the flags and who they represent –the nation, yes; but especially the people who have served and who continue to serve. It's a humbling thing to know our child, our son, has surrendered himself to the United States Government. (Yes – I know, he's not a “veteran.”) We still see him as our kid, a boy – albeit a big boy. The Navy sees him, not as my son but as an instrument of war whose job serves a greater good. I know we're not alone as parents. Some of you have sons and sons-in-law who serve or who have served. You pass your yellow ribbons and blue flag banners and think of your loved one who is over there. *Send the word that the Yanks are coming.*

To each and every Veteran who might read this, please know you have my deepest respect and appreciation for what you did. Whether you carried sacks of potatoes or a 9.5 pound M1 rifle; whether you served under the sea or never left our own shores; whether you were in the court of the queen of battle or in an office pool; whether you proudly wear a Veteran baseball cap or quietly treasure the DD-214 that is in your safe deposit box, I don't care. You did what was asked of you. Best of all, you came home. As one who hasn't served and who can't serve, I won't pretend to know your story. Besides, I learned my lesson a long time ago from Major Howard: I'm not asking for anything and I don't want a war story.

Dear Veteran, those who serve, and the families who wait in prayer: I simply want to say “thanks.”


Pastor Meyer