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What Veterans Mean To America and Its Citizens

General George S. Patton once said “All of the real heroes are not storybook combat fighters either. Every single man in this Army play a vital role. Don’t ever let up. Don’t ever think that your job is unimportant. Every man has a job to do and he must do it. Every man is a vital link in the greatest chain.” Something to pick from this quote is that through uncertainty, through doubt and despair, the soldier under camouflage with the willingness to sacrifice their life must embed that their ultimate sacrifice is crucial to the contribution of our freedom. To the yearly celebration of our red, white, and blue to the parades honoring our Veterans for the freedom we have today, we truly cannot thank them for their service and sacrifices enough.

Our Veterans are the key and backbone of our united country today. If it weren’t for their many selfless acts of services, there would be no “land of opportunity” as we know it now. Many Veterans came from unique backgrounds, each having their own reasons as to why they chose to fight for their country’s life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. In my family, our veteran is my grandfather An, who served in the Army Airborne for the Southern Republic of Vietnam. As a young man who had just finished studying medicine abroad, my grandfather saw and had many encounters with people in war torn countries who were living in poverty, including his country

Vietnam. One encounter he vividly remembered was a dying mother still trying to breastfeed her child as she took her last breaths. From those many encounters he realized how privileged he was, coming from a very wealthy family which prompted his desire to help better the future of Vietnam; there, the people view you and treat you differently depending on your family's wealth. As the eldest and honorable heir of his family, he decided to disregard all his fortune to join the Army, and from that point on his parents never spoke to him again. My grandfather always told me that it was probably the best decision he ever made seeing how everything turned out to be, despite losing his parents' trust and respect.

Immediately after The Fall of Saigon also known as The Liberation of Saigon on April 30, 1975 my grandfather became a prisoner of war. The Fall of Saigon holds a different meaning to many people, from marking the end to the Vietnam War to the reunification of Vietnam under Communist Rule. It was definitely a devastating day for my family as my grandfather recalled; he was the main source of income for his family and because of this, it was a rough time for them as making income in Vietnam was already hard itself. With a big family of nine children, my grandmother was able to work and save up enough money to visit my grandfather in prison just once. As the spouse of a former soldier who served on the Southern Republic side, my grandmother faced numerous death threats and constantly moved cities to cities to ensure her family's safety. My grandfather told me how poorly him and his inmates were treated from going days without food or water, to being spat on, and the constant torture. Having studied medicine, my grandfather was actually able to help tend to his fellow inmate's wounds and injuries with the limited supplies they had, sustained from the constant torture they endured. After an attempt to escape, my grandfather and his fellow inmates were then tied to a tree, blindfolded, and then

whipped. In the beginning of his imprisonment, my grandfather and his inmates were always mischievous and tried to escape every chance they could; it all stopped once they learned that if they worked hard and behaved, they would one day be free. Another event that he deliberately recalled was how often he had to steal salt to lick because of how hungry he was; despite the amount of times he was dehumanized and faced with harsh realities, my grandfather's motivation was his family and he worked as hard as he could during the hard times in hopes of a better life for them. Those events were few in many hardships that he faced in his time there.

After six years of imprisonment, my grandfather was able to work hard and earn the trust of higher officials there and was later set free. My grandfather then started looking for his family who later turned out to move eight hours from where he was imprisoned, because of the constant death threats. After reuniting with his family, my grandfather was not allowed to refer to himself as the father of his children out of fear that he would be imprisoned again. By then, my mother was eight years old and thought he was an uncle visiting for a while. She told me many stories of the hardships they went through during the post-war to provide for their big family. In between 1989-1993, my family was offered an opportunity called the Humanitarian Operation Program, known to many as "HO" which granted families of former U.S. employees, family reunification, and former education camp detainees to immigrate to the United States. From that point on my family immigrated to the U.S. in different groups and years to start a better life for themselves.

Fast forward to today, my grandfather still expresses how grateful he is to have served his country for over fifteen years to his fullest potential; to risking his life for a greater good through service and support of the U.S. mission, my grandfather is an example of what selfless sacrifices will grant you. So what do Veterans mean to America and its citizens? A Veteran is someone

who has sacrificed, endured pain and hunger, went through despair yet still provided aid and hope to their citizens, who fought with the purpose of bettering their country. Though many were able to come back to their families, we also acknowledge those who have fallen or have now faced homelessness. As many of them are still trying to fit back into society who now live with disabilities from injuries sustained during their time of service, to even suffering from PTSD, depression, and anxiety it is the least we could do to honor them through gratitude and support. If it weren't for the service of our Veterans we would not have the protected rights and freedom we have today; through it all, it is more than reasonable to honor our Veterans out of appreciation and respect for their time served.

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