

Veterans Day

by Jim Murray

A member of VSPA who just returned from a trip to Vietnam--hope to hear more from him later.

For many people, Veterans Day is kind of a '*nothing*' day. Not quite a holiday, because so many stores will be open in anticipation of the holiday shopping season. And not quite a "fun" day, since summer is a faded memory and the chilly winds of Autumn may keep many of us homebound, with "nothing to do."

Many will just dawdle over their morning coffee and try not to think about going back to work Tuesday. But for those who would like to escape the doldrums that now seem to accompany the day intended to honor and recognize the sacrifices and contributions of American men and women who have worn our country's uniform, a few humble suggestions are offered:

We could reflect on the origins of Veterans Day, formerly known as "Armistice Day." It was on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918, when the fighting in World War I officially ended. It was called "The War to End All Wars." We could remind ourselves that we have to keep trying.

One way to remind ourselves of the need to end war, is to visit one of the Veterans Administration hospitals, and other places to offer a kind word to one or more of the in-patient veterans, some of whom might otherwise spend a lonely day, bedridden or wheelchair bound.

Some are aged World War II, or aging Korean War veterans. Others are Vietnam veterans who fought in a different kind of war where, according to 'VFW' magazine, "Amputations or crippling wounds to lower extremities were 300 percent higher than in World War II, and 70 percent higher than in Korea. Of course, visiting a VA hospital wouldn't be for everyone.

A number of ceremonies and activities are planned for Veterans Day in which the whole family can take part and enjoy. If you choose to brave the inevitable brisk November winds, you may be struck by the sight of many "new" Americans, hard-working immigrants who have come here to take jobs that nobody else seems to want, to stake their claim to the Veterans Day American dream for themselves and their children. They will be easy to spot because they will be waving their little American flags and cheering the loudest as the parade passes down the street – just as we native-born Americans used to do in years past.

Visit a homeless shelter: Come spend some time with 350 men and women veterans who live at the shelter - people who are asking only for a "hand up" and not a handout as they receive counseling, support services and job training to help themselves get back into society. On top of all that, a simple handshake could do much to help them on their way back from a hell that, thankfully, most of us will never know. A warm smile can do as much for them as a warm bed or a hot meal.

If none of these things fit into your schedule, you could simply call or call upon a veteran that you know, and say, "Thank you." You could say (like I've seen on some bumper stickers about Vietnam), "I wasn't there, but I care."

Reprinted from VSPA Guardmount - Jan 1997

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