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Veteran's Day Essay

The world we know today has been built on the ruins of gratuitous acts of violence, or at least that's the opinion I can generate after reading some passages out of our history textbooks. People either volunteer or are chosen to fight wars they had no part in starting, and sometimes even no real intentions of finishing. These people, otherwise generally known as veterans, are more often than not overlooked despite how much they go through in the field.

A great number of veterans return home as shells of the people they were when deployed. Psychiatrists call this post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD for short. This mental disorder is often the result of first-hand experiences with extremely disturbing situations. Popular, although that may not be the correct term to use in this context, PTSD causes are killing innocent people and watching people you know die in front of you. (It should be noted that these are not the only causes of PTSD, whether it be military-related or otherwise.) Some people, the lucky ones, learn to cope with PTSD, while others fall short of just being "okay".

A veteran I once came across while on my summer trip to California explained to me that no one he knew came back the same. "Being out there is different from what people tell you it'll be like. There's truth to the stories of the bond you form with the people, but there's way more to it than just that. The games you guys play, Call of Duty and everything, don't prepare you for what you'll see – I don't think anything will ever be enough to prepare you for being out there. The physical training you go through is one thing, but the mental training is

difficult. Homesickness plays a big part in that; you think, 'Oh, okay, I never really liked home anyway,' but no; you'll take that back. I even cried myself to sleep sometimes. Orders are orders out there; you have to follow them whether you want to or not, and that can really screw a person up."

Another explained why he fell into the mess he did. "You get there and the one major thing you and everyone else has in common is that you guys are all looking forward to the day you get to go home. The days feel like weeks, but the weeks feel like days. Time is slow, but you don't really pay much attention to it because you're so busy with everything else. All you want is to be done. Then one day something unexpected happens. I was back at camp when a buddy of mine went patrolling with some other soldiers. He was on top managing the gun(s) when they ran over a landmine. He died instantly, or at least that's what they told me. That was our last week there, you know; we were supposed to go home two days after that. We had a plan to go to Lake Tahoe, but he didn't even get to see the plane. It's just sad to remember, especially because he went patrolling in my place. I was assigned to go that day, but he switched with me because I wasn't feeling well. Every day, all I can think is that it could have and should have been me." He explained that before that all happened, he wasn't even sure sadness like that could exist. "The sadness can push you to do things," he said, "things you know you probably shouldn't do, but you do them anyway because how else are you going to get rid of the hole inside you. Mine was alcohol. I used to drink pint after pint of vodka to try and forget him offering to go for me, to try and forget his mom's face at the funeral. I stopped that, but it didn't get any easier to remember, and I don't think it ever will."

The words of these people have changed the ways I see war. No longer is war

(absolutely) necessary or anything to be celebrated, not when so many people have to suffer its backlash. The words of these people have also changed the way I see life. Sadness exists in great amounts, and often the people who are considered to be brave and nothing else are the people who need it to be most recognized. Things that seem easy by one standard won't be easy by all of them, and such extreme things take dedication and much mental preparation.