

What is a Veteran?



Some Veterans bear visible signs of their service; a missing limb, a jagged scar, a certain look in the eye. Others may carry the evidence inside them; a pin holding a bone together, a piece of shrapnel in the leg - or perhaps an inner scar.

Except in parades, however, the men and women who have kept America safe wear no badges or emblem. You can't tell a Veteran just by looking. So, what is a Vet?

He is the cop on the beat who spent six months in Saudi Arabia sweating two gallons a day making sure the armored personnel carriers didn't run out of fuel.

He is the barroom loudmouth, whose overgrown frat-boy behavior is outweighed a hundred times in the cosmic scales by four hours of exquisite bravery near the 38th parallel.

She or he is the nurse who fought against futility and went to sleep sobbing every night for two solid years in Da Nang. He is the POW who went away one person and came back another - OR DIDN'T COME BACK AT ALL.

He is the Quantico drill instructor who has never seen combat - but has saved countless lives by turning slouchy, no-account rednecks and gang members into Marines and teaching them to watch each other's backs.

He is the parade - riding Legionnaire who pins on his ribbons and medals with a prosthetic hand. He is the career quartermaster who watches the ribbons and medals pass him by.

He is three anonymous heroes in The Tomb of the Unknowns, whose presence at the Arlington National Cemetery must forever preserve the memory of all the anonymous heroes whose valor died unrecognized with them on the battlefield or in the oceans deep.

He is the old guy bagging groceries at the supermarket - palsied now and aggravatingly slow - who helped liberate a Nazi death camp and who wishes all day long that his wife were still alive to hold him when the nightmares come.

He is an ordinary and yet extraordinary human being - a person who offered some of his life's most vital years in the service of his country, and who sacrificed his ambitions so others would not have to sacrifice theirs. He is a soldier and a savior and a sword against the darkness, and he is nothing more than the finest, greatest testimony on behalf of the finest, greatest nation ever known!

So remember each time you see someone who has so generously served our country, just lean over and say Thank You. That's all most people need, and in most cases it will mean more than any medals they could have been awarded. Two little words that mean a lot. Thank You.

-Father Dennis Edward Obrien USMC-

*To all Veterans past, present, and future...
Thank You, Thank You, Thank You, and God Bless You!*