

A Small Favor



By Thomas L. Cuni

There has been a long national debate about the wisdom of this nation's involvement in, and its prosecution of, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. What does not have to be debated is the fact that a debt is owed to the young men and women who have served in those conflicts. The United States of America has, over its history, had many occasions to deal with the needs of its war veterans.

A critical test of the new nation which emerged from the Revolutionary War involved the debt due to the officers of the Continental Army. The Congress had no money with which to pay those officers and no practical way to raise the funds. But for the loyalty and devotion of the officers to their commander, General George Washington, the history of our nation might have followed a different path. Following the Civil War, the country began to institutionalize veterans' affairs. After the First World War the post-Civil War framework for dealing with the returning veterans was expanded.

The veterans of the Second World War came home to one of the most extraordinary social and economic experiments in history. The investment made in the education of an entire generation of those men and women produced a remarkable period of sustained growth and prosperity for the nation.

In the aftermath of the Vietnam War there was a national discussion concerning the physical and the emotional toll which war imposes on those who serve. In prior conflicts "shell shock" and "battle fatigue" were recognized but not

systematically addressed. After the experience of Vietnam, helping veterans deal with the emotional, as well as the physical, damage of war became an accepted part of the obligation of the nation to its veterans.

Because of the length of the current wars, the armed forces have required multiple tours of duties from their personnel. For those serving, the experience of war will have been difficult, frightening, and life changing. Every soldier fights a different war and the experiences for some will be emotionally overwhelming. The resulting difficulties for some of our veterans do not indicate that they have a weakness in character or that they lacked courage. *The New England Journal of Medicine* recently published a study which found that 15 to 17 percent of veterans who served in Iraq meet "the screening criteria for major depression, generalized anxiety, or PTSD." It is my hope that we, both individually and as a nation, will try to provide those in need with appropriate help.

The current economic circumstances in this country and the world have shifted the focus of most of us away from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and the needs of the men and women who have served, and who continue to serve, in those wars. It was gratifying that Congress recently restored the educational benefits for veterans to a practical level.

The Senior Lawyers Committee of the CBA has recently undertaken a project to support the Sixth Annual USO Riverfest Gala. This annual event has generated more than \$2 million to support programs for recuperating veterans

and their families. When you are asked this summer to support the Committee's work, I hope that you will do so. The Chair of the Committee, William E. Santen, will be announcing the Committee's plans in future issues of the CBA Report.

Another local foundation, Thank America First, is sponsoring its Third Annual Tribute to the Veterans in November. For more information on that event, you may call Elizabeth Ogle at (513) 679-4400, ext. 242.

If you are an employer you can benefit from hiring veterans. The military has always imposed immense responsibilities and challenging duties upon those who serve in both combat and non-combat roles. Employees who have gained maturity and experience in the military can only benefit an employer. I urge consideration of military service as a significant positive factor when evaluating new hires.

There are many agencies and organizations which support veterans. The Veterans Administration sponsors programs aimed at assisting our returning veterans. A brief search of the internet, starting with www.va.gov will provide many more alternatives for those who are inclined to help.

A less tangible, but still important task, is to simply thank in an appropriate manner those who have served. It costs little to say to a veteran that his or her service to the nation is appreciated. A brief acknowledgement is probably the most appropriate one. ■

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