

A Very Special Thank You!

It's the Sunday before Memorial Day, and I'm struck by how much our society has migrated (I won't say evolved) toward Memorial Day sales, cookouts by the pool or lake, long weekend vacations, and the like. Yet, I'm also struck by how far we've migrated AWAY from the true meaning of Memorial Day, to remember those who have fought, died, or become disabled, to keep our American freedom, to protect our human rights, and to keep our country strong. And yes, our country isn't perfect, and it doesn't seem as though our elected officials can see beyond their trivial self-interests to cooperate enough to be able to move our country forward (perhaps we should clean house of all incumbents at the next election—perhaps that would get their attention).

One thing all of us, included the elected officials, should be proud of is our military, past and present, and their service to the United States. Sure, they are not perfect, they make mistakes, and our elected officials demand answers.

We all have either served, or had siblings, parents, grandparents, friends, relatives, or just acquaintances who donned the uniform, some to be deployed, some not, to serve our country in good times and in bad. Before joining us at the *Journal of Prosthodontics*, our very own Managing Editor, Alethea Gerding, attended the US Naval Academy, and served our country with dignity and honor after graduating. Her husband continues to serve in the US Navy JAG Corps. Our CE and Book Review editor, Dr. Brad Morris, serves in the Marine Reserves. My father and most of his brothers served in World War II and/or the Korean conflict. My only brother served in Vietnam (remember how poorly our Vietnam vets were treated when they returned home?). One of my best friends was killed when two US helicopters collided mid-air on a night flight in Vietnam. And yes, I still get choked up when I see his name on the Vietnam Memorial.

I'm confident that we all know someone who was either killed or disabled during his or her service to our country. There is no amount of money that our troops can be paid that adequately compensates them for continuously risking their lives to allow us to live freely in America. And perhaps one of the even greater injustices is the manner in which we treat (or don't), our veterans when they come home. I'm speaking in particular to the lack of adequate medical and dental care many of our veterans are denied once their service has concluded. I was

recently contacted by the director of a veterans home asking if our School could send some students down to his location to provide free dental care for the veterans in his home. They were afforded no dental benefits whatsoever, and this particular Home had no funding with which to provide dental care. Think of that poor, edentulous individual who served in the Korean conflict, or in Vietnam, who has no dentures and who cannot get new ones. Do you think this might be a quality of life issue? Do you believe our government has a moral obligation to help these men and women who have fought for our freedom? I explained to the director that every set of dentures we make costs our School approximately \$250.00 JUST FOR MATERIALS and lab services—this doesn't include sterilization costs, disposable supplies, faculty salaries/benefits, etc. In an environment of ever-shrinking state appropriations, where will the money come from to help these very deserving veterans?

I'm now seeking private grant dollars to help support this worthy group of individuals, since it appears they've been abandoned by our D.C. colleagues. I'm not quite sure how the Veterans Administration functions—why are some vets provided with care, and some are not? Does it depend on your rank, your number of days served, whether you were injured or not, whether you were actively deployed or not, or what? Isn't someone who served on active duty in our military, regardless of WHEN that occurred, a veteran of one of the five branches of our military? If so, shouldn't they ALL be afforded some level of care? Is there a time limitation, or financial limitation, on what is provided to our veterans? Can someone explain this to me?

At any rate, I'll be thanking every veteran I see for their service to our country on Memorial Day, and throughout the year, regardless of when it occurred. And, I'm going to find some way to help out the needy clients in the Veterans Home who desperately need dental care. Our veterans simply deserve more. I've traveled abroad enough in my academic career to know that there truly is "no place like home" here in the United States. I'm proud to be an American, and thankful for those who have kept our freedom alive. I hope you are as well.

David A. Felton, DDS, MS, FACP
Editor-in-Chief, Journal of Prosthodontics

Copyright of Journal of Prosthodontics is the property of Wiley-Blackwell and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.