

How Did We Become a Nation?

By Bob Barrett

July 4 marks the day when we celebrate the birth of the United States. Stop for a moment and think about how that happened. How did we become a nation?

The people felt oppressed and had only one choice. They had to organize a fighting force and go to war with England. At the end, we won our independence.

So, who were those people who went to war and risked their lives to be free?

The answer is: They are the same people who have served in the military from that time to now. They are people who are believers. They believe that there's the country of the United States, which you have to defend, but there's also the *idea* of the United States. The United States is more than just a country; it's an idea. They are the people who would agree with Carl Sandburg, who said:

I see America, not in the setting sun of a black night of despair ahead of us, I see America in the crimson light of a rising sun fresh from the burning, creative hand of God. I see great days ahead, great days possible to men and women of will and vision.

And who are the men and women of will and vision? They are the people who are willing to risk it all to make the dream come true. They are people who serve or have served in the military.

Our veterans come from all walks of life, from the rich to the poor, from the pampered to the destitute, from the highly educated to those who can barely read or write. They are tall and short, fat and thin, black and white, male and female.

Some are old; some are young. Some served in war; some did not. Some were on the front line; some were in the rear. Some were physically wounded; some were psychologically wounded. Some gave up their marriages; some ended engagements; and some never got to propose because things changed at home during their absence.

Some suffered immediate problems readjusting to civilian life. Some suffered delayed stress later, leading to major problems. Some, sadly, never readjust, sinking to society's lowest point and living on the street, surviving on handouts. Some take their training and experiences and move forward to become wealthy or become leaders in our society.

Despite all the differences, they have one major thing in common: Each of them issued the United States a blank check that was payable upon demand for everything, including their lives.

In each and every case, these people stepped forward and made a simple statement: They vowed to keep their country safe. And that country is not just a place, a home, a state. It's also an idea, a promise and a shining beacon to the rest of the world of what could, and should, be.

When I think of veterans, and those who have served in combat, I always think of a saying by John Stuart Mill:

War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things. ... The person who has nothing for which he is willing to fight, nothing which is more important than his own personal safety, is a miserable creature and has no chance of being free unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself.

So in July, as we celebrate the birth of our county, take a moment and think of those who have made it all possible.

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