2,500 Memorial Days and counting

I am fortunate to know a modern Pericles. His name is Lt. Col. Ted Westhusing. A 1983 graduate of West Point (USMA), Ted has served in a number of airborne outfits, as a rifle platoon leader, scout platoon leader, company commander, regimental executive officer, and most recently, G3, 82d Airborne Division. He took intensive classical Greek from me five hours a day, five days a week last summer. So I know firsthand about his dedication, integrity and seriousness of purpose. He is now at Emory University preparing to write a dissertation on cooperative and competitive military virtues within the U.S. armed services and how authentic leaders of character can best harmonize those sets of virtues. He plans to go to the War College for a year, and then to West Point as a professor in philosophy within the English Department.

But as Ted himself says, Memorial Day is not about him. It's about the 3,000-plus paratroopers from the 82d who are ready to deploy to Afghanistan. These paratroopers volunteered three times — once to join the Army, once to go to airborne school and once more to join the elite, the 82d — to risk their lives for us.


It's about their predecessors, who jumped into Normandy, Salerno and Sicily, who broke down Hitler's indelible Atlantic Wall, who fought and won at The Bulge.

It's about soldiers and Marines who fought and won at Chipyong-ni, Chosin, Inchon, and those soldiers who were immortalized at Ia Drang.

It's about paratroopers who jumped into Grenada and Panama and won.

It's about the men and women who fought and died in Desert Storm.

It's about Special Forces Lt. Col. KT, who was inserted into Northern Iraq to prevent thousands of Kurds from starving and freezing to death.

It's about SM, the senior Delta Force operative on the ground at Mogadishu Oct. 13, 1993, trying to kill or capture a warlord bent on starving thousands of Muslim Somalis.

It's about Col. S, who led his battalion as the first unit into Bosnia to prevent Muslims from being slaughtered by Serbs and Croats.

It's about Lt. Cols. JA and ME, who led the first battalions from the 82d Airborne into Kosovo to protect Muslim Kosoyars from being slaughtered.

It's about the thousands of soldiers who have rotated through the Sinai for six months away from loved ones and civilian comforts to bring peace to that troubled land of Islam.

It's about the thousands more who spend a year away from home staring down the 600,000 North Korean troopers facing them across the demilitarized zone.

All these soldiers are never paid enough, do not have the housing they deserve, nor the benefits their arduous missions demand. But Ted assures me that as long as they know America cares, they will fight anywhere, anytime, for their and our families, and win. And from my own knowledge of western warfare, I believe him.

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