OTHERS SAY: TOM PALAIMA
Regular contributor

For military veterans, every day Memorial Day

Memorial Day is now behind us, but not for many soldiers and veterans of our country.

My friend Charles E. Patterson is a masterful counselor. He served with Morrison Foerster law firm in Los Angeles. His outline brilliantly tells us that he served as "an officer in the United States Marine Corps at various duty stations, including the Republic of Vietnam, 1966-1969." What that matter-of-fact description and Chuck's extensive legal résumé do not reveal is the personal hell he and other veterans, carries in his heart to those who served alongside him.


Babbitt grew up in an environment of poverty and physical abuse. He was 17 when he quit school in the seventh grade. When he came back from Vietnam, he had been a poster child for post-traumatic stress, and never sought Mr. Babbitt's Vietnam medical records. The lawyer later admitted that he "failed completely in the death penalty phase" of the trial. On May 14, 1982, the jury imposed the penalty of death on Manny Babbitt.

In March 1988, Babbitt, on death row, received a Purple Heart for wounds suffered at Khe Sanh. Four fellow veterans of the siege stood by. Patterson filed the forms that made sure Babbitt received the medal he had earned in service of his country. Patterson and his firm also put in thousands of hours pro bono from 1997 to 1999; one day after his 50th birthday. He was executed by lethal injection at San Quentin State Prison.

"Manny's a Marine. He was in Khe Sanh. I know I could depend on him to do what he could to save my life. He should be able to depend on me to do the same thing. There's that obligation." He and Babbitt both had scars from exploding shrapnel.

Patterson expressed the deep injustice done to Babbit in his legal writing. He expressed the injustice done to Norman in his poetic writing.

"Marion Henry Norman Khe Sanh, 1968"...

They took your life. As if it belonged to them. If only they had told me. They needed a life.

I would have given them mine.

I wonder

What they did with your life?

Perhaps

If they don't need it now, They'd give it back. -Ca Lu, March 1968

I saw you dead. But never buried. In my heart you've lived, Laughing, smiling Hank. I would keep you there forever.

In a memorial more perfect Than hands could build.

In a memorial more perfect Than hands could build.

I would keep you there forever.

For which the consideration Should have been honor. -The World, 1983

For veterans, every day is Memorial Day.

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