

## VETERANS

On my resume, I indicate that between June 1, 1954 and February 29, 1956, I was in the US Army. Therefore, I am a veteran. A veteran is a veteran? Not at all. There has to be some way to immediately make a clear distinction between a combat veteran and a non-combat veteran. I propose that instead of the single word veteran on forms that ask for such information, there should be three categories: combat-veteran (CV), non-combat-veteran (NCV) and non-veteran (NV).

I remember a cartoon from World War II. It showed a movie theatre with the sign "Men in Uniform Admitted Free," and a sanitation worker walking in. He certainly was a man in uniform. As far as I am concerned, there is as much difference between a service man and a street cleaner as between a combat veteran and a non-combat veteran. But to many people, a veteran is a veteran. True, it is for the most part, the luck of the draw if you are drafted when our country is in combat, and if you are sent into combat.

I can not imagine anything worse than being in combat, except being wounded in combat, or being a prisoner of war. You come out of it (if you come out of it) with trauma, and/or mental and physical damage that stay with you throughout your life. I had a friend who fought in the Pacific during WWII and who refused to talk about it. Another friend who fought in Europe, took his duffel filled with all his belongings and threw it overboard on the boat coming home. He wanted to forget everything he could about the experience.

I have no right to have the same designation "veteran" as they. I do not want anyone to look at me and think I risked my life for my country. I could have enlisted in December 1944 when I turned 17. Of course I wouldn't. My mother would have prohibited it. I had to finish high school. When I graduated from high school, I could have gone into the "service" as my friends Phil and Mel did. The war was still on in the Pacific. I chose to go to college. In fact, I bragged about how I stayed out of the Army until 1954. I avoided combat both during those last months of fighting in the Pacific, and during the "Korean conflict."

I ended up eligible for benefits, not having suffered any of the pain. I lost a cousin in World War II, just weeks before the war ended. He was designated a casualty, an American service man killed, along with four hundred thousand others.

My friend Sol enlisted in the Army in 1946 to get the benefits offered to veterans. It was a gamble. War could have broken out again, but it was unlikely. He used the GI Bill to pay for law school, he was a proud member of the 52-20 club, receiving \$20 a week for 52 weeks as an unemployed veteran, and getting health care at VA hospitals. The price: a year in peacetime Korea.

For most of us, it was "the breaks of the game." If I and my friends, were born a few years earlier, we would have been drafted, and most likely, would have seen combat. Again, the chances for combat were not as great for us, as for a lot of other guys. We

were educated; many draftees were not. There was a greater likelihood that we would get non-combat assignments. The poorer, less educated, became cannon fodder.

We “served our country.” When there was a draft, we had little choice. The army had two designations: RA, standing for Regular Army (volunteers who apparently were planning to make the Army a career), and US, which were the draftees. We now have a volunteer army made up mostly of poor and minority recruits who have been promised all kinds of goodies, and who end up in places like Iraq and Afghanistan. All of them, when they leave the service, will be designated “veterans.” They will have more than their share of trauma and mental and physical damage.

Do you want to serve our country? Work for an end to war.

My New Year’s wish: Peace, no more killing, no more casualties, and no more combat veterans.

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