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## **WHAT IS A VETERAN?**

*(Attributed to a Marine Corps chaplain, Father Dennis Edward O'Brian)*

**Some veterans bear visible signs of their service: a missing limb, a jagged scar, a certain look in the eye. Others may carry the evidence inside them, a pin holding a bone together, a piece of shrapnel in the leg - or perhaps another sort of inner steel: the soul's alloy forged in the refinery of adversity.**

**Except in parades, however, the men and women who have kept America safe wear no badge or emblem. You can't tell a vet just by looking. What is a vet?**

**A vet is the cop on the beat who spent six months in Saudi Arabia sweating two gallons a day making sure the armored personnel carriers didn't run out of fuel.**

**A vet is the barroom loudmouth, dumber than five wooden planks, whose overgrown frat-boy behavior is outweighed a hundred times in the cosmic scales by four hours of exquisite bravery near the 38th Parallel.**

**A vet is the nurse who fought against futility and went to sleep sobbing every night for two solid years in Da Nang.**

**A vet is the POW who went away one person and came back another - or didn't come back at all.**

**A vet is the drill instructor who has never seen combat - but has saved countless lives by turning slouchy, no-account punks and gang members into Marines, Airmen, Sailors, Soldiers and Coast Guardsmen, and teaching them to watch each other's backs.**

**A vet is the parade-riding Legionnaire who pins on his ribbons and medals with a prosthetic hand.**

**A vet is the career quartermaster who watches the ribbons and medals pass him by.**

**A vet is the three anonymous heroes in The Tomb of the Unknowns, whose presence at the Arlington National Cemetery must forever preserve the memory of all the anonymous heroes whose valor dies unrecognized with them on the battlefield or in the ocean's sunless deep.**

**A vet is the old guy bagging groceries at the supermarket - palsied now and aggravatingly slow - who helped liberate a Nazi death camp and who wishes all day long that his wife were still alive to hold him when the nightmares come.**

**A vet is an ordinary and yet extraordinary human being, a person who offered some of his life's most vital years in the service of his country, and who sacrificed his ambitions so others would not have to sacrifice theirs.**

**A vet is a soldier and a savior and a sword against the darkness, and he is nothing more than the finest, greatest testimony on behalf of the finest, greatest nation ever known.**

**So remember, each time you see someone who has served our country, just lean over and say, "Thank You." That's all most people need, and in most cases it will mean more than any medals they could have been awarded or were awarded.**

**NOTE:**

**What we call Veteran's Day is the anniversary of the signing of the Armistice in the Forest of Compiègne by the Allies and the Germans in 1918 (the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month). This signified the end of World War I and was originally known as Armistice Day. President Woodrow Wilson signed the Congressional Resolution on November 11, 1919, the first Armistice Day. However, after World War II, the day began to lose meaning and since there were many other veterans to consider, the decision was made to change November 11th to honor all those who fought in American wars. The United States Congress passed an act to change the name to Veteran's Day and in 1954 President Dwight Eisenhower signed the act.**

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