

YOU SERVED!

General Petraeus About Our Military Today

Thanks to my fellow veterans: I remember the day I found out I got into West Point. My mom actually showed up in the hallway of my high school and waited for me to get out of class. She was bawling her eyes out and apologizing that she had opened up my admission letter. She wasn't crying because it had been her dream for me to go there. She was crying because she knew how hard I'd worked to get in, how much I wanted to attend, and how much I wanted to be an infantry officer. I was going to get that opportunity. That same day two of my teachers took me aside and essentially told me the following: "David, you're a smart guy. You don't have to join the military. You should go to college, instead." I could easily write a theme defending West Point and the military as I did that day, explaining that USMA is an elite institution, that it is actually statistically much harder to enlist in the military than it is to get admitted to college, that serving the nation is a challenge that all able-bodied men should at least consider for a host of reasons, but I won't. What I will say is that when a 16-year-old kid is being told that attending West Point is going to be bad for his future, then there is a dangerous disconnect in America, and entirely too many Americans have no idea what kind of burdens our military is bearing.

In World War II, 11.2% of the nation served in four (4) years. During the Vietnam era, 4.3% served in twelve (12) years. Since 2001, only 0.45% of our population have served in the Global War on Terror. These are unbelievable statistics. Over time, fewer and fewer people have shouldered more and more of the burden, and it is only getting worse. Our troops were sent to war in Iraq by a Congress consisting of 10% veterans with only one person having a child in the military. Taxes did not increase to pay for the war. War bonds were not sold. Gas was not regulated. In fact, the average citizen was asked to sacrifice nothing, and has sacrificed nothing, unless they have chosen to out of the goodness of their hearts. The only people who have sacrificed are the veterans and their families. The volunteers. The people who swore an oath to defend this nation. You stand there, deployment after deployment and fight on. You've lost relationships, spent years of your lives in extreme conditions, years apart from kids you'll never get back, and beaten your body in a way that even professional athletes don't understand. Then you come home to a nation that doesn't understand. They don't understand suffering. They don't understand sacrifice. They don't understand why we fight for them.

They don't understand that bad people exist. They look at you like you're a machine - like something is wrong with you. You are the misguided one -- not them. When you get out, you sit in the college classrooms with political science teachers that discount your opinions on Iraq and Afghanistan because YOU WERE THERE and can't understand the macro issues they gathered from books, because of your bias. You watch TV shows where every vet has PTSD and the violent strain at that. Your congress is debating your benefits, your retirement, and your pay, while they ask you to do more. But the amazing thing about you is that you all know this. You know your country will never pay back what you've given up.

You know that the populace at large will never truly understand and appreciate what you have done for them. Hell, you know that in some circles, you will be thought as less than normal for having worn the uniform. But you do it anyway. You do what the greatest men and women of this country have done since 1775. YOU SERVED. Just that decision alone makes you part of an elite group. "Never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few." --Winston Churchill Thank you to the 11.2% and 4.3% who have served and thanks to the 0.45% who continue to serve our Nation.

General David Petraeus, West Point Class 1974

Submitted by CAPT Chuck via David Sokol