

Five Reason that GWOT Veterans should join The American Legion

- 1) Needed camaraderie; even though they don't know it yet. Gulf War and GWOT veterans (eligibility 8/2/1990 to present) form the group who has seen the longest period of sustained war in our nation's history (28-years of continuous eligibility for TAL). Because there has not been a gap in eligibility (or warfare, for that matter), many Gulf/GWOT vets do not consider VSO's to be exclusive and welcoming to them. The conflicts have not ended, and there is a constant flow returning wartime veterans. I don't think they realize just how small and special they are (with just under ½ of a percent, .47%, of U.S. citizens serving in the military). When the dust settles and the smoke clears, they will begin to identify themselves as "different and out-of-place," and they will need to socialize with their own kind or risk mental isolation from a 99.52% culture who does not understand them.
- 2) Social Isolation. With 28-years of continuous conflict, modern Americans are growing numb to overseas warfare because it has been a norm for them since they were young. Today's young voting demographic likely has no memory of 9/11, and the Gulf War might as well be 100-years ago. This means that today's youth identifies wartime service as a normal by-product of military service, thus legislative initiatives that benefit veterans financially will meet greater resistance. The military retirement plan has already been affected, and there is much attention on increasing the rates of Tricare for retirees and families. The bottom line is that there has never been a more important time for veteran advocacy, especially in a culture leaning toward a more socialist government model.
- 3) Preservation of Americanism. Patriotism has always rested on the shoulders of living history, and that living history has been passed from veteran-to-veteran since before 1776. Proud cultures reflect upon history and try to advance the social, economic, and political ideals in honor of those who fought on behalf of those ideals. While America has learned a hard lesson about the outward hostility toward our brothers and sisters returning from Vietnam, there is an even more concerted effort to re-write true history and apply modern cultural "isms" to the founding documents of the nation today. Rather than building upon history to advance our civilization for the better, the new cultural norm is to remove history that does not fit with today's accepted norms. The one culture that has held steady the ideals of Americanism is the veteran culture, and we must engage each other socially to understand our history and advance our future. More importantly, we remember (during social engagement) why it is critical to stand in defense of our Nation, our Flag, and the history that has taught us so much.
- 4) Old problems; new generation of warfighters. While noteworthy accomplishments like the G.I. Bill, Department of Veterans Affairs, and Tomb of the Unknown are staples of TAL, there are thousands more smaller victories on behalf of veterans of every war since WWI. Still, today's generation of warfighter has unique challenges never-before-faced by preceding generations. Even though the survival rate in combat today is significantly higher during the GWOT than ever before (due to improvements in PPE, medical treatment, and technology), that has resulted in an extraordinary increase in "survivors" with disabling conditions (particularly amputees). The influx of PTSD, physical disabilities, etc. are a product of survival under conditions to which veterans of other wars may have perished. This means there will always be advocacy for a reduction in disability benefits, retirement benefits, and [even] basic pay increases. We must

have strong advocacy to PRESERVE those benefits, even as the bean-counters profess that it is unsustainable for the U.S. budget. While likely true, we must remember that [eventually] these wars will end, and the veteran population receiving benefits will be a minority in society in need of strong advocacy.

- 5) Take up the mantle; fill the seats. We GWOT vets may feel alone in the world, but so did our Vietnam vets (the largest TAL demographic today). When they returned, it was not uncommon for WWII and Korean War veterans to thumb their noses at Vietnam vets. After all, society didn't recognize it as a "just" or "real" war. When the Vietnam vets were finally accepted into warm embrace of their predecessors, they formed the strongest cadre of veteran advocates ever seen...a benefit that the GWOT vets have enjoyed. Still, as the WWII veterans, Korean War veterans, and some Vietnam veterans pass to Post Eternal, their seat remains vacant. The importance of preserving The American Legion at the national/legislative level are obvious; but empty seats at the Post symbolizes that the next generation of warfighter will come home without strong advocacy from us (their predecessors), and that next generation may come home to a hostile population reminiscent of 1969-1975 America. We have an obligation to fill those seats!