

Memorial Day 2019 Reflections

Memorial Day, as we all know, is a day to honor those who died in service to our country. The events I attended did just that. First, I had the honor of being the keynote speaker for the Memorial Day remembrance in Barnesville, hosted by the VFW post. Included in my remarks were some of my connections with Barnesville. Until I did some research on Barnesville, I did not know that the Legion post is named after Maurice Masterson who joined the Army in June 1917, served in the artillery in Europe and was killed in action near the end of the war. My father joined the Army in December 1917, served in the artillery in Europe and was lucky to survive the war. Although unlikely, the two men could have met in France. Masterson's story has been preserved by the letters he wrote back to his family and is now in the collection at the Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County, housed in the Hjemkomst Center. Moorhead Legion Post 21 held a memorial event highlighted by the Red River Veterans Concert Band. Post 21 will be holding its 100th year celebration June 21-23.

On the national scene just prior to the Memorial Day weekend, the US Army tweeted a question for service members and Veterans "How has serving impacted you?" Thousands of people responded with stories of their service. Here are a few of those responses.

"After 15 years in I was kicked out after showing obvious signs of PTSD and depression. Now I can't function in society because of my major depressive disorder. So now what?"

The frequent references to PTSD don't come as a surprise to Marsha Four, national vice president of Vietnam Veterans of America. She said "When you're in war, that's what happens. I was a nurse. I dealt with death and dying every day. I dealt with people's fear and their rage and their loneliness."

"My cousin committed suicide while on duty at the armory after coming home from a tour abroad."

"I was assaulted by one of my superiors. When I reported him, with witnesses to corroborate my story, nothing happened to him. Nothing. A year later, he stole a laptop and was then demoted. I'm worth less than a laptop."

An Army nurse responded "I would never have been able to be in the position I'm in, knowing that this is where I could find my purpose — to be part of something bigger than I am, to know that I've contributed, that my life has been worthy."

The responses indicated three major problems of military service we see today; PTSD, suicides and sexual assault. Whenever we talk about our country going to war, we must remember to include funding to support our Veterans when they return to civilian life. Our track record on doing that is very poor.

If you have a comment on how military service impacted you, please email it to me.