

## Thinking of Veterans

In my first operational squadron, The Royal Maces of Strike Fighter Squadron 27 stationed in Atsugi, Japan and forward deployed on the USS Kitty Hawk (CV63), I had the pleasure of having our pilot training officer always preach at us this one key phrase: "perception is reality." You may ask yourself why a Top Gun graduate would use such a phrase on impressionable young fighter pilots, as I know I did back in that Spring of 2002. The truth is, he was teaching us about more than just being a good pilot. He was teaching us that our response to the flying, our outward reaction in the debrief whether it was a good showing or a bad one, was very important to our forward progress as an officer. He was teaching us how to pay attention to details, not only in the airplane, but also beyond it, to have the right perspective and create the most favorable perception professionally.

Lessons like these have played a part in every aspect of my life and were particularly useful when I found myself in dangerous situations occurring anywhere from highly specialized training flights to actual combat missions. When you have developed a heightened sense to mission, team and then self-preservation, your priorities take a very specific order. This process of prioritizing also occurs in life outside of the military and is often clarified in times of trial. When your family experiences a personal trial your priorities swiftly shift from the routine, such as making sure you get your kid to baseball on time, to instead a regrouping effort by making sure everybody is sitting around the dinner table on a Monday night.... as a family unit. It is how you rally and get up from being knocked down. A bit cliché, perhaps, but couldn't have a more meaningful connotation. With every trial comes a choice, to either recover together, find the opportunity, and become stronger through it, or embrace defeat and accept a weaker frame of mind. In my family, I teach that the former is the only choice, the one right approach to how we respond to trial. If dealt with correctly and with a victor – and not a victim - mindset, you can become stronger, and better in most aspects of your life. You gain the right perspective, and you learn how to prioritize with expediency.

When Israel was invaded by Hamas a couple weeks ago, I had read somewhere that 350 thousand Israeli military reservists came forward to fight voluntarily. That is over 75% of their total reservists and nearly 4% of their whole

population. In comparison, that is more than 25% of the total number of US military service members in active service today. This terroristic invasion on the Jewish people by Hamas is nothing short of horrific, and an affront to all mankind. There is no other way to qualify this invasion. To say the least, this is a trial to Israel. We can only hope that a stronger Israeli people will emerge.

As I hear the mounting news stories from Israel, I'm thoroughly convinced that the Israeli response, those reservists that so quickly volunteered to serve, has much to do with the fact that all Israeli citizens over the age of 18 must serve in the military – men for 32 months, and women for 24 months. I'm not advocating this; I'm just pondering what our own perception of the military would be if this were the case in the United States. What perception would become our reality here on US soil? Would we have the same protests at the Universities nationwide that we are seeing now? I'm curious if we'd focus more on how we could survive together, how we could find common ground, perhaps balance the budget, or become fiscal stewards as a country because it's the right thing to do. Could we focus on human decency and the mission instead of the individual? Unity instead of division? Must we be subject to our own trial as a country to once again find common ground, to prioritize each other over personal gain? I sincerely hope not. Such a tribulation would come at tremendous cost.

I don't have all the answers, but I do know many of the lessons that are taught in the military have the potential to make service men and women more thoughtful, well-rounded individuals better able to prioritize. Unfortunately, what an individual Veteran experienced while serving, what they saw, and when and how they fought for this country, has a significant effect on how well they can respond to daily life outside of the military. What does it say that, since 9/11, more Veterans have passed by suicide than have died in combat? Serving is honorable, but it isn't easy.

Please spend this upcoming Veteran's Day weekend spending some time thinking of them, thanking them, and enjoying the freedom that we all have because of them. And if you are a Veteran, we at Statherós want to thank you for your service, we will forever be indebted to you.

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