

One of my favorite phrases, which I think sounds even more delightful in French:

« *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.* »

“The more things change, the more they stay the same.”

As we consider this evening where we were then and where we are now, I think our adage applies –

Much has changed. I remember when I came into the military 26 years ago, that we looked at the few who remained in active military service who actually had been in world conflicts as some cross between heroes and dinosaurs.

As I scan the gatherings of service members in which I find myself these days, those who have NOT deployed or worked the hospitals, command centers, crisis action planning meetings, are the rare ones.

In the last 10 years, more than 2 million servicemen and -women have served in wartime duties, with more than half of them have deployed more than once.

Consider this: the young men and women in our military who have stepped on the yellow footprints of boot camp in the last ten years, know nothing but defending a country engaged in world conflict.

We learned from the dinosaurs of the Vietnam War, that that kind of saturation can have an incredible impact on a generation – and that includes their families. The programs we put forward before were geared to the peaceful routine of a military on “stand-by”

- We maintained a whole different assortment of skill sets and family support systems which didn't have to consider the impact of Post Traumatic Stress on the individual's ability to reintegrate, and on family dynamics,
- Managed through daily routines and claimed attitudes that didn't acknowledge the abiding wounds, illnesses, and injuries sustained during service to God and country.
- The military was an institution that didn't look to the civilian community for support and stability.

All that's changed. There are working groups, and task forces, and commissions and congressional panels, immersed in studying the programs we took for granted, the challenges we never even fathomed.

There are churches and other religious organizations, community services, airlines, corporations, who are striving valiantly to contribute to and sustain the health and welfare of today's Sailor, Marine, Soldier, Airman, and Coastguardsman. (Police and Fire Department)

« *Mais plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.* »

What remains the same is both good and challenging.

I'll start with the latter:

14% of Americans indicate that they have served in the military in the past or are currently on active duty.

[27% of men 2% of adult women]

In spite of record recruiting successes and increases in military endstrength to support OIF/OEF, that 14% only indicates a rise of 1% of those who had served or were serving in the year 2000

Still, less than 1 percent of Americans volunteer to serve their country in uniform.

When it all adds up – in the last ten years the ratio of service member to civilian hasn't changed much if at all.

And because the experience of military service is so rare – it is often misunderstood. As veterans seek to reintegrate into civilian society –

- either because they have completed their term of service, retired,
- or are one of the over 46,000 who find themselves with permanent injury

Because they have had lived a life so foreign to their civilian counterparts, oftentimes these men and women find themselves on the margin of employment and educational opportunities.

Even more sobering, is that they find themselves on the margins of emotional and spiritual support as they wrestle with painful memories and life-altering experiences.

That said, what has remained the same over these last ten years, this elite group demonstrate daily what is becoming the equally rare characteristics of dedication, loyalty, sacrifice.

Just this past Friday, the Secretary of the Navy, Ray Mabus spoke of his interactions with today's Sailors/Marines and now, even 10 years later, these men and women still express their sincere commitment to give back to their country.

Now 10 years later, the men and women who wear the cloth of our nation still labor selflessly, untiringly, daily to ensure the foundations faith, freedom and justice, on which our country is built. Foundations, interestingly enough, of which General MacArthur made note of one fateful day in September over 65 years ago:

“From this solemn occasion a better world shall emerge out of the blood and carnage of the past, a world found upon faith and understanding, a world dedicated to the dignity of humanity and the fulfillment of our most cherished with for freedom, tolerance and justice.”

General MacArthur, USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay at 9:02 a.m., Sept. 2, 1945

I pray that what changes is that we will work harder to reintegrate these incredibly dedicated men and women into the fabric of our communities.

I pray that what remains the same is that we, military and civilian alike, will dedicate ourselves to preserving the ideals remain unshakable in spite of the challenges our nation has faced throughout its history.