

Warrior Care Month: Honor Veterans every day

Maj. Gen. M. Ted Wong, For the Express-News

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Army Maj. Gen. M. Ted Wong is commander of the Southern Regional Medical Command and Brooke Army Medical Center.

It is an indescribable honor to serve one's country — to be one of the few who are qualified, chosen, tested and deemed worthy to wear the uniform. It's an honor, but it is one that comes at a price.

Scrawled on a bunker outside Khe Sahn in Vietnam are the words, "To those who have fought for it, freedom has a flavor the protected will never know." It's an anonymous quote by an anonymous soldier, but it captures the experience of those of us serving, or who have served, in uniform. Those of us who put ourselves in harm's way and fight for freedom and liberty for our nation, and, yes, sometimes for those nations who cannot defend themselves against tyranny.

During November, the Army celebrates Warrior Care Month. It's a time for us to focus on the 10,000 soldiers who are assigned to Warrior Transition Units across the United States. This month is a time when the Army makes a concerted effort to educate wounded, ill and injured soldiers and their family members about the Army's programs and initiatives to help them transition back into the force or to civilian life.

I have the extreme privilege to not only command the Army's Southern Regional Medical Command, but also to command Brooke Army Medical Center and San Antonio Military Medical Center, where an integrated team of talented soldiers and airmen works together to care for our wounded, ill and injured.

Most people only hear the heroic stories of our military when it makes the evening news or the paper. I hear those stories every day. Every single day, I am surrounded by heroes, and every day, I see the sacrifices they have made and continue to make.

The Army is the strength of the nation, and soldiers are the strength of our Army. Our soldiers are soldiers for life, and the Army is committed to lifelong success for our soldiers, veterans and their families by connecting them with opportunities for employment, education and health care after their military service. Supporting our soldiers and Army veterans requires a team approach by the Army, other government agencies and the local community.

As a nation, we celebrated Veterans Day this past weekend, but I challenge you to look to the veterans in your life every day. Shake their hands. Thank them. Thank their families, too. For although they may have left the battlefield, some still fight battles here at home. Find a way to help.

Above all, never forget those who have served. Honor the memory of those who died protecting our great nation. Support their families, for they too have paid a high price for our freedom.

John F. Kennedy said, "As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them." That is how you should continue to celebrate our veterans — today and every day.

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