

Par Ridder
General Manager

Mitch Pugh
Executive Editor

Chris Jones, Editorial Page Editor

Phil Jurik, Managing Editor

DIRECTORS OF CONTENT
Amanda Kaschube, Sports and Audience
Todd Panagopoulos, Visuals

Chicago Tribune

Founded June 10, 1847

YOUR VOICE

As we honor Veterans Day, it's time to relearn servant leadership

By Jonathan P. Harmon

More than 40 years have passed since the summer day I said goodbye to my parents, boarded a bus with my fellow plebes and began cadet basic training at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Little did I know that the leadership lessons I would learn as a cadet would sustain me throughout my adult life, from my service as an Army officer to my career as a trial lawyer and my role as chair of one of the largest law firms in the world.

My experience in basic training, known as “Beast Barracks,” taught me the attributes of “followership,” an important step in developing leaders of character. As plebes, or cadets, we obeyed orders from upperclassmen and spoke only when spoken to. Our only permitted responses were “Yes, sir”; “No, sir”; and “I do not understand, sir.” As we prepared for a life of selfless service, the message was clear: No matter what you thought of yourself when you arrived for Beast Barracks, as far as the Army was concerned, you didn’t matter one iota more than the next guy, and the next guy didn’t matter an iota more than you.

What mattered was the unit and, above all, the mission.

Today, I look back at that time and see a lesson for all of us. To lead large groups in complex tasks, whether a long trial or a major crisis, one needs strength of character. And the most important character trait is humility.

This Veterans Day, I see a nation in desperate need of humble leadership that puts ego and self-interest aside and works instead for the good of the whole. That is the essence of “servant leadership,” a value ingrained in the Army’s culture long before



Jonathan Harmon is shown in 1987 at the United States Military Academy, better known as West Point. **JONATHAN HARMON**

the term was popularized in 1970.

When I graduated from West Point in 1987, I was assigned to the 1st Cavalry Division at Fort Hood (since renamed Fort Cavazos) in Texas. I got my first platoon and was well aware I would lead a group of grizzled veterans — older, more experienced and battle-tested soldiers — as well as younger enlisted soldiers whose life experiences were different from mine. I knew I had a lot to learn, and I told them that. I also told them they would be my teachers.

To be an effective leader, I would need to serve the soldiers in my platoon first. That is, I had to demonstrate respect and willingness to know them as individuals, to communicate the message I learned in

Beast Barracks — that each of them was as important as the next one — and that I might be their assigned leader, but I was also their equal, their true peer in a sense. That would include admitting when I was wrong and, if I did not know something, to admit that too.

This wasn’t just a strategy. It was my governing belief. People can tell if you care about them. Merely saying it is never enough. As Gen. Omar Bradley wrote: “Far from being a handicap to command, compassion is the measure of it. For unless one values the lives of his soldiers and is tormented by their ordeals, he is unfit to command.”

My platoon, battalion and division deployed to fight in Desert Storm — where

servant leadership was put to the test and where it was essential to rely on the people serving with you. Eventually, I was promoted to work in the Battle Operations Center to deliver regular briefings to Gen. Tommy Franks, who later led U.S. forces in Afghanistan. Franks was an emblem of the servant leadership model I learned there. He had an uncanny ability to make everybody understand their importance. I know. I was the lowest ranking officer in his orbit, yet I felt as if everything I did was crucial to the success of the mission.

The lessons I learned as a West Point cadet and Army officer served me well after I left the military, earned a law degree, joined McGuireWoods and became the firm’s chair. I believe those same lessons can help us overcome the divisions and rancor that paralyze our government, erode faith in our institutions and fracture our society. Servant leaders can show us the way.

Servant leaders value the strengths, ideas and perspectives of everyone on their team — regardless of rank or world-view — not merely the loudest voices in the room. They have humility to listen and the strength of character to act in the common good.

This Veterans Day, we honor the courageous people in our armed forces who show us the meaning of servant leadership in defending our freedom at home and abroad. Let’s hope our civilian leaders take a page from our military leaders’ book and follow their example.

Jonathan P. Harmon, West Point Class of 1987, is a nationally known trial lawyer and chair of the international law firm McGuireWoods. He served in Operation Desert Storm as an Army officer.

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Honor veterans’ sacrifices

On Nov. 11, 1918, an armistice was signed, ending World War I. That war was to be “the war to end all wars.”

However, it was not long until that dream became a nightmare with the advent of World War II, followed by the Korean War, the Vietnam War, 9/11, and the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

Veterans decided to live a life of sacrifice and service for the benefit of America. On Veterans Day and every day, we not only honor their service, but we also remember their great sacrifices.

Veterans chose to endure long separations from their families, freezing in subzero temperatures, sweating in the deserts of the world, sacrificing their health and far too often losing their lives so that we can be safe. Our veterans have helped make our nation the greatest force for peace on the face of the earth. America’s veterans and those serving today have stood in the way of our enemies. Their strength has been a signal to other nations that we stand ready to defend our freedom.

As a nation and as individuals, we must honor the men and women of the military, present and past, who have made our world better. There’s no one more deserving of our gratitude and respect than those who have served in the military.

We must never forget the service of our veterans, and, as a nation, we must learn to keep our promises made to them and their families who have sacrificed so much so that we can live in the land of the free and the home of the brave.

God bless America, our veterans and all of you.

— Mike Formento, commander, American Legion Post 3, Glen Ellyn

Few are willing to serve

More than 75% of young Americans are physically, mentally, morally or intellectually unfit for military service. Few of the eligible choose to serve.

The country has changed dramatically since the end of World War II. Presidents Harry Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush served in some capacity in the armed forces. Some were wartime heroes.

Today, this is no longer the case. In fact, a recent resident of the Oval Office reportedly termed service members “losers.” Millions of his supporters and detractors will display their flags, wear flag pins, sing patriotic songs, decorate using red, white and blue, and proudly shout, “Thank you for your service” this Veterans Day.

Other Americans will demonstrate on campuses and in the public square, demanding that our government and our military “do something” to protect our borders, support both sides in ceaseless conflicts in the Middle East, stop the Russians, support Ukraine, etc. They will



X @Ramireztoons

michaelpramirez.com

MICHAEL RAMIREZ

march, shout and make demands. They will not, however, volunteer to serve.

I applaud and appreciate our elected officials who have served and/or truly support our service members. They are few in number. We watch as their colleagues hurt and hinder our armed forces and service members. Those who do so are interviewed by TV and radio personalities who also never served. We then listen to entertainment personalities who also never served. Astoundingly, many of us will allow them to mold our thoughts.

Those who are on active duty, drill with their reserve units or are veterans should stand tall. They sacrifice or have sacrificed to serve. We notice. This old dog face salutes you.

To those who smile at veterans and say, “Thank you for your service,” be prepared to answer a simple question: “What unit were you in?”

— Sam Garloff, Chicago

Support veterans with ALS

For many people, baseball is the first thing that comes to mind when they think of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, thanks to New York Yankees player Lou Gehrig and his famous speech. However, Veterans Day is a reminder that members of our armed forces are among those most affected by this terrible disease — and it demands our urgent attention.

U.S. military veterans are twice as likely to develop ALS compared to nonveterans. It’s not yet clear what about military service might trigger the development of ALS. What is clear is that the disease robs these brave men and women of their ability to move, eat, speak and breathe, and it claims their lives between two and five years after a diagnosis, on average.

Our veterans make incredible sacrifices to serve their country. We need to recognize that not all of those sacrifices remain behind on the battlefield. To honor their service, we must do more to understand the link between military service and ALS. We have to be there to support veterans and their families as the disease progresses, and we must offer hope that, one day, there will be a cure for ALS.

This Veterans Day, as we salute the men and women of our armed forces, let’s not overlook the hidden costs of military service — and let’s turn the tide against this threat to the peace and well-being they deserve.

— Laura Freveletti, CEO, Les Turner ALS Foundation, Skokie

Fight for freedom unending

On the morning of Dec. 7, 1941, a surprise attack by 350 Japanese aircraft devastated the United States naval base at Pearl Harbor near Honolulu, Hawaii, kill-

ing 2,400 U.S. personnel.

There have been many obstacles and challenges to America’s freedom since the founding of the country in 1776. Freedom was not given to us without hard work, suffering and the will of our people to protect and fight for the ideas of freedom and liberty. From the Revolutionary War through World Wars I and II, we always prevailed. We are still a free country to this day, and some of our past enemies like the Axis powers of Germany, Italy and Japan are now free democracies. The threat to freedom always exists for free countries as history tends to repeat itself.

Freedom is not given to us without sacrifice. The brave soldiers who gave their lives for our freedom at Pearl Harbor will never be forgotten. This day in infamy is a reminder that we must always be prepared for attacks on our democracy and principles of liberty.

Pearl Harbor sparked America’s defense of free nations in World War II and prevented dictatorships and totalitarianism in the world. We need to be thankful and to remember our heroes at Pearl Harbor. They will always be a reminder that freedom is not a birthright. We need to fight for its continued existence and our individual freedoms, which are central to the American way of life.

The fight for freedom and democracy never ends.

— Charles P. Dalton, eighth grade student, Lake Forest