

My Vision for America

My family lost its patriarch this year, my great-grandfather Leonard. He was 96 years old and was a veteran of World War II in Europe. My family was proud of his service, and the often told family story was about his landing on the beach at Normandy. The story goes that there was a tank that was stuck in the beach sand when Grandpa's infantry unit arrived. They were trying to determine how to get the tank free from the sand. Grandpa told the sergeant that he could get the tank free, as he had worked at the ALCO factory here at home building those very tanks. He was successful in getting the tank free, and when he started to return to his unit he was battlefield transferred to driving that Sherman tank. He fought in the Battle of the Bulge and saw General Patton on a bridge. Grandpa finished his service and returned home and everyone lived happily ever after.

But it was a family myth

The truth of his service was much less romantic and his return home was much more difficult. This is much like the myths that are perpetrated many of our returning veterans of today.

Many of our veterans returning home from service today want nothing more than that, to come home to their families, have a nice home and dependable job. That is what our veterans deserve, a chance to live the American Dream.

Unfortunately, many of our veterans find returning to civilian life hard. They have difficulty finding jobs or places to live, or have trouble readjusting to regular life. This experience was much like my Grandpa Leonard's who worked at ALCO building tanks for much of the war. After the war when he returned he was met with a furlough as the factory converted from war to peace. Grandpa and his older brother set out on a difficult cross country trip to find steady work. Their trip took them as far as California where they stayed for two years seeking work before he packed up the family and tumbled back to ALCO where finally they were making locomotives for the world.

Part of my Vision for America is "teamwork". We need to change our priorities to help find employment for 100 % of our veterans who are seeking employment, We must work as a team with public and private employers, from local to state government and from the small business to the monster corporations. Once we educate employers about the skill set many veterans have and how they can accommodate any special needs they may have, jobs can be found or created for those willing to work. We must build on this willingness and bring good paying manufacturing jobs back to our shores. It

is time to put the greatest economy ever back on the right track and hiring veterans who bring their unique skills and leadership from the battlefield into the boardrooms, classrooms and shop floors.

Grandpa Len was fortunate that once he returned from California and went back to work at ALCO he was able to save up and buy some land on which to build his own home. Many of our vets returning home today cannot afford homes of their own. My vision would be that low interest loans be offered to all veterans and reduced rates on homes that need to be restored. This would benefit everyone as veterans would have homes to call their own and raise their families and homes that would otherwise become an eyesore would be improved.

The final part of my vision for America is very personal. The services offered to our veterans can be lacking at times, especially in mental health. I would like to make a difference in that area. My goal is to study psychology in college and become a clinical psychologist. I would like to work with our returning soldiers on making the transition back to life at home easier. To help them deal with post-traumatic stress disorders and health care needs. Helping veterans find resources to get jobs and housing. Making them feel that their country is proud of them for their service and thank them for protecting our freedoms and way of life.

So what about the family myth?

Grandpa Leonard rarely spoke about the war and when he was laid to rest at Saratoga National my father had researched his real service record with the 8th Armored Division, 80th Tank Battalion-The Thundering Herd. My Great Grandfather had always been a tank driver from training camp to the shores of France late in 1944. While he missed the famous Battle of the Bulge and never saw General Patton, his company D would liberate many towns and cities and a sub camp of the Buchenwald concentration camp. Grandpa Len would be awarded the Bronze Star.

I will miss Grandpa and always be proud of him and his service to our county And that's the truth.