

Excerpts from “The Washington Times” article about Remember My Service

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By COL Terry Fobbs

...“I wanted a living history that memorialized the mobilization experiences of my soldiers and their families that went beyond a mere yearbook,” Gen. Cooke said. “I envisioned a tool that would bring a therapeutic closure to the wartime experiences of my soldiers and a legacy for them and their survivors,” he said. “This program will keep the story and experiences alive of the sacrifices our soldiers have made. We have to tell our story because no one else will.”

...Mrs. Hawkes strongly agrees with Gen. Cooke's assessment regarding the therapeutic value of Remember My Service. The increasing numbers of suicides, divorces and cases of post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan indicate that many of America's returning veterans and their families are in the midst of a crisis.

“Previous generations didn't talk much about their war experiences,” Mrs. Hawkes said. “An increasing number of mental health professionals have indicated that it is essential for our stressed service members to process their experiences by recording their history. This is something that is way beyond a ‘nice to have;’ it is ‘a must-have.’”

In the past, many veterans internalized their war experiences, specifically in regard to traumatic events that occurred on the battlefield. Sharing painful memories can provide an emotional release that may mitigate some of the harmful effects of post-traumatic stress disorder.

“I was blown away at how much it [the Remember My Service program] helped us process our experiences overseas. At the time I was grief-stricken over losing two of our comrades to suicide. I felt that if when we returned they could have undergone this experience that I literally stumbled upon, that perhaps they would not have been lost,” said Army 2nd Lt. Liana Mayo, an Iraq war veteran, in a letter to Mrs. Hawkes. “I fully believe in the potential of this project ... as being so critical in the healing process that it can save lives.”

...“As a television producer and reporter, I know almost better than anyone how critical it is to provide information that will keep viewers engaged and present it in a format that makes them care about what you're telling them,” Mrs. Hawkes said.

...The Utah, North Carolina and Ohio National Guard are using the Remember My Service program, as are several other major military organizations and corporate sponsors.

Mrs. Hawkes said that U.S. service members deserve more than memories of their sacrifices. And for those who do not return, their families deserve more than a flag and medal to remember a fallen loved one.

“When we present them with their historical record, we give them a meaningful gift of recognition that reminds them for the rest of their lives why they served, who they served with and what sacrifices were made. This is more than a history. This is their legacy,” said Mrs. Hawkes.

• Col. Terry Fobbs is a writer from Mason, Mich. He is a retired Army Reserve officer and decorated combat veteran.

