



OPINION

# A Tribute to the Grit of Disabled Veterans

The newest monument in Washington honors vets who were seriously injured and carried on.

By CHRIS MARVIN  
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 10 COMMENTS

It may be surprising to hear, but until this week the United States did not have a national memorial for disabled veterans. That changed on Sunday when President Obama dedicated the new American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial, a two-acre site in view of the Capitol with inspiring quotes etched in glass and granite walls, a black-granite reflecting pool and a star-shaped fountain. At the star's center is a ceremonial flame, honoring all veterans—living and dead—who suffered disabling injuries.

“America, if you want to know what real strength is, if you want to see the character of our country, a country that never quits, look at these men and women,” the president told some 3,000 attendees, many of them veterans of World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq. The memorial represents the sacrifice, loyalty and tenacity of these men and women. It's a place for veterans, family members and friends to convene to bear witness to these experiences, while also witnessing the strengths of those who have been disabled in the line of duty.

Ten years ago, I was severely wounded in Afghanistan while serving in the U.S. Army. I was trapped inside the wreckage of a Black Hawk helicopter in a hostile area near the border with Pakistan. Bones were shattered in my legs, arm and face, and I was unable to extract myself from the aircraft.

Given that the area was prone to insurgent attacks, my life



Disabled veterans attend the dedication ceremony of the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial in Washington, D.C., on Sunday. *ASSOCIATED PRESS*

depended on my fellow soldiers, who risked their lives to pull me from the wreckage.

The experience put my life on a new trajectory. The severity of my injuries and a four-year-long recovery inspired and motivated me. Surgery after surgery, I gained strength and resolve to find a

renewed sense of purpose. With the help of family and friends, I eventually earned my master's from the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School and started Got Your 6, a nonprofit dedicated to changing the conversation in America so that veterans are perceived as leaders and assets in our communities. In the military, the phrase "I've got your six," means, "I've got your back, and you've got mine." In our organization's work, the phrase represents the types of values that military veterans bring with them into our communities.

In my seven years working with veteran-focused nonprofits, I've learned that my experience is not unique. Contrary to the image many Americans have of "disability," the majority of wounded and disabled veterans are out in their communities making a difference.

Because of what we have been through, more of us are prepared to empower fellow veterans, succeed in the workforce, lead businesses and nonprofits, inspire others with stories of tragedy and triumph, and serve alongside our fellow citizens in communities throughout the country. Now, as we carry on the mission of service we began in the military, we have a memorial to call our own.

Interestingly, planning for the memorial began before 9/11 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The memorial doesn't speak of "wounded warriors"—a phrase many veterans dislike. Instead, the memorial highlights not only the sacrifices made by men and women during their time in the military, but also the service and leadership they so often provide after their injuries.

Etched in glass are quotes from some of my fellow disabled veterans. One panel reads: "For every tragic story of a life unraveled by military battle, there are a dozen tales of individuals who have managed to triumph over the harrowing experiences of war and ruin"—a quote from Jesse Brown, a U.S. Marine partially paralyzed in Vietnam who later became secretary of Veterans Affairs. Another quote from Bob Dole, the former U.S. senator who was

seriously wounded in World War II, says: “It’s faith that gives you the strength to endure—faith that won’t allow you to give up; faith that manifests itself in a ferocious determination to take the next step—the one that everyone else says is impossible.”

These words show strength and resilience, wisdom and ambition. They suggest how much America’s “disabled” vets have accomplished and can accomplish—not in spite of our injuries, but because of our experiences. The American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial, now open to the public, is a symbol of our nation’s perseverance, on and off the battlefield.

*Mr. Marvin, founder and managing director of the Got Your 6 organization, was medically retired from the U.S. Army in 2009.*



## EDITORS' PICKS

### SPEAKEASY



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### FASHION



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