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Memorial to Disabled US Military Veterans Breaks Ground in Washington

Elizabeth Lee | Washington 10 November 2010

Thursday marks the observance of Veterans Day in the United States, a day when the nation honors its military veterans. The national holiday falls on the date in 1918 considered the end of World War I. The day is known in Europe and elsewhere as Armistice or Remembrance Day. On Wednesday, in Washington, there was a ground breaking for a memorial to honor a specific sort of American military veterans, those injured and permanently disabled as a result of war.

In the shadow of the United States Capitol, construction is underway for a memorial to honor American veterans who became disabled as a result of war.

Marine Corps veteran Bobby Barrera lost his left arm and a hand, and was severely burned in the Vietnam War. "The American public cannot be allowed to simply forget disabled veterans once the wars have ended," he said.

There are numerous memorials in Washington for service men and women who fought for their country. But this is the first for the more than three million disabled veterans in the United States who are still living. Disabled Marine Johnnie Baylark came to see the ground breaking ceremony for what will soon be the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial. "To be remembered as well as all the other veterans this is something that's great," he said.

Barrera says painful psychological wounds take much longer to heal than the physical ones. "The physical part was easy. The mental part is the one that becomes more difficult and that is an ongoing process. You need to accept that life is not the same, but you need to learn that there are a lot of things you can do. Life will continue," he said. For Barrera, healing came from his spiritual faith and his family.

Organizers say they hope the memorial will also be a place of healing for disabled veterans. "We cannot give them back their real arms and legs. We cannot give them back their eyes, their ears, pieces of themselves that have been lost, the minds that have been altered, but we can give them and we must give them a respect and everlasting appreciation," said actor Gary Sinise, the spokesman for the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial.

The memorial is expected to be completed by November 11, 2012, on the annual observation of Veterans Day marking the end of World War I. "From deep within our hearts we say thank you America...." Barrera said