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Lee Woodruff 3:10 p.m. EDT July 6, 2014

Our disabled veterans helped protect our freedom.



(Photo: Justin Sullivan, Getty Images)

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To most Americans, Independence Day was a time to kick back with friends and relax, bask in the summer sun and marvel at the fireworks displays that lit up the night throughout the country. It was a day that reminded us to take pride in knowing we are free. But we often forget that the freedom we enjoy has come at a great price ... for the small

percentage who serve or have served with loyalty and bravery for this amazing country.

Six weeks into [Bobby Barrera's](#) tour of duty in Vietnam, a 500-pound bomb detonated underneath his amphibious vehicle, [costing](#) Barrera his right hand and left arm. In an instant, like legions of service members before him and those who would serve in future wars and conflicts, his life changed forever. For Bobby, Independence Day holds great personal meaning — he has lived with the heavy toll of helping secure our independence for more than half a century.

Barrera is not alone. Take severely injured retired Army Captain [Pat Horan](#), who knows all too well what true grit, sacrifice and hope look like. After a gunshot wound to the head while on a night mission in Baghdad in 2007, he has undergone numerous brain surgeries and endless rehabilitation. His recovery from traumatic brain injury included having to learn to walk and talk again with part of his brain removed. Though Pat is still in therapy today, he and his wife Patty are committed to helping other returning veterans and their families.

Horan and Barrera's stories live on and reminds us to remember the 4 million veterans living with life-changing and often debilitating injuries. Their stories implore us to honor them and their families who live with the harsh realities of war. They serve as a reminder — and not always a comfortable one — of the high cost of human conflict. They have shown us that freedom comes with an expensive price tag, and we must never forget them nor surrender to indifference.

Warfighters from our most recent conflicts have spent more than a decade in battle. [One in every 50](#) has sustained a physical injury; [one in five](#) suffers from PTSD, traumatic brain injury or depression. For many, it's going to take a lifetime of assistance and support to fully thrive. That's where we as a nation must step in. Just as our service members cannot leave their brothers and sisters behind on the battlefield, we must vow to never leave these injured service members behind. It's high time we stand up for the living

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Publicly honoring the service and sacrifice of our nation's veterans living with disabilities is also long overdue. There are many important memorials in our nation's capital that honor America's dedicated service members, but none solely honors veterans who live or have lived with the physical and hidden wounds of war. However, this was the last Independence Day that visitors to Washington, D.C., lack a place to gather and honor America's veterans with disabilities like Barerra and Horan. On October 5, 2014, the [American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial](#) will open on the National Mall.

Throughout Barerra's work with fellow veterans he said "I have a purpose in life, and that's to help other military families through some of what I had to go through. If what I went through will help other military families, then I'm okay with that."

So, next Independence Day, we will be grateful for those like Barerra and Horan that have not only sacrificed so much for our nation's freedom but found the strength to inspire others. It's up to the rest of us to remember and pay tribute to these brave warriors — not just on July 4, Memorial Day or Veterans Day, but every day.

Lee Woodruff is co-founder of the Bob Woodruff Foundation that has been committed to helping heroes on the homefront since 2007. For more information about the Bob Woodruff Foundation, please visit: <http://bobwoodrufffoundation.org>. For more information about the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial, please visit: <http://www.avdlm.org/>.

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