



Guest Editorial: A lesson in humility

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Well the Fiscal Year 2015 president's budget is submitted, quadrennial defense review released, and congressional testimonies have begun with our senior defense leaders.

Many of the conversations will center on the role of the U.S. military, its capabilities, and its resourcing. Amid the rhetoric and impassioned calls for the "special" status of our military, I am drawn to a personal reflection.

A few summers ago, I was happy to be able to attend my older brother's wedding in Las Vegas. With over 11 years of overseas military assignments, I often missed such events.

It was his first marriage and an opportunity for a extended family gathering and vacation in a non-traditional setting. As with many officers (we are frugal by nature), I did not own a tuxedo and decided to wear my Army mess dress to the ceremony. It would be the only time my siblings would see me in that formal uniform before I retired the following summer. And I saw it as an opportunity to show the uniform of service during the global war on terror at a place so far removed from it.

The wedding was scheduled for mid-morning in the chapel of a prominent Las Vegas casino. Our family met about an hour beforehand in their finest clothing—we were a handsome bunch — but one person was missing.

In uniform, I went down to the floor of the casino to find my cousin. She was at her favorite slot machine, squeezing out 15 more minutes to get a full return on her investment.

I agreed to wait and make sure she made it to the ceremony on time. So I stood there in my military regalia—Airborne Wings and Ranger Tab next to the miniature medals on the crimson red lapel, the Order of Saint Barbara around my neck, and eagles pinned to cuffs of dark blue sleeves.

I was looking and feeling good. Very soon, a couple walked up to me and asked directions to the nearest restaurant. Then a man asked me for the nearest ATM. Another person prefaced by saying, "You don't work here, do you?"

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Other such encounters took place with our American citizens a few more times in that 15 minutes. While I was initially affronted (I did tell them it was an Army uniform), it was a humbling experience that I have often thought about.

One could say that it was an example of the disconnect between our nation and its military-evidence that its citizenry does not know us and thus, does not appreciate our military service and understand the sacrifices.

A more telling point, upon personal reflection, was my expectation to be recognized and treated as something special by our fellow citizens. This is insidious hubris. We can and should be proud of our service but should remember that it is the American citizen whom we have chosen to serve.

Given the high esteem in which our military has been held over more than a decade of war, it is understandable that service members have pride in their separate identity and role to protect the United States.

It is important, however, to remember that selfless service has two important attributes — having a clear sense of who we are and whom we serve—that lead to humility.

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