

Modern youth typically idolize a famous actress or music artist, but my American hero stands far above famed celebrities. He is in a third-world country, enduring the hardship of separation from his family, taking many risks to fight for our nation's freedom. My hero is the American soldier.

This man withstands more than many of us can realistically fathom. Facing a fifteen-month deployment, he leaves his family and friends behind. In his absence, he may miss the birth of a child, the death of a loved one, or important milestones in family members' lives. Thousands of miles from home, he waits an hour in the phone line just to hear his wife's voice for 5 minutes, sometimes not even getting to tell his kids how desperately he misses them.

Dwelling in a tent, he treks through the desert amid torrents of gritty wind-blown sand embedding deep into his sunburned skin. It's been fourteen months since he had a home-cooked meal and, despite the camaraderie of his fellow mates, his loneliness sometimes consumes him. Without a second thought, we enjoy frequent 20-minute hot showers while he waits a week for a hasty, cold wash-up.

This soldier lives to receive mail from home, yet he also exists in a state of constant heightened awareness. He may never return to his homeland to reunite with his beloved family, but he continues to persevere in hopes that his children and future generations can have a brighter, more peaceful future.

When the American serviceman has a rare opportunity to watch the media coverage of the war, he wishes the news would portray the good that the U.S. is accomplishing on foreign soil. He wonders why the fighting must continue, but he carries on for his country, wanting to believe his work will result in a greater good. Despite his best efforts, he knows some will never understand or support our troops, and his eyes well up with tears at the warm sentiments he receives from many American citizens.

My hero has no particular name; he is a son, brother, father, cousin, grandson, friend, someone personally connected with all of us. He ties up his boots, shoulders his body armor and weapon, and trudges into the dust of the Middle East to carry on his mission. This man witnesses the death of his comrades, and the impact on him is profound; there are few that will comprehend what he has survived while overseas. A soldier will never forget having to defend his country by taking a life, or when he sees any others from his unit fall in battle, and he struggles to live a "normal" life when he returns to American soil.

I see firsthand the epitome of my hero every day in my own father as he assists in the rehabilitation of injured soldiers at Reynolds Army Community Hospital. I admire him and our military for taking a stand, for not refusing to serve their country and fellow Americans, for fighting for my freedoms.