



The Christian may be happy to know that he is not an orphan of the world, but a Child of the Father in Heaven. Having been born anew under the privileges of mercy and grace, the Christian has enlisted in an Army whose Captain is Christ. The battle is relentless, and the soldier in that Army may expect suffering and deprivation; yet, he (or she) perseveres ever onward and upward to that high calling in Christ. But, today, I wish to acknowledge another kind of soldier whose patriotism and sacrifice reflects the highest ideals of our Founding Father's – those soldiers of our American military who have given their lives, or even offered them, that we might be free.

It may be profitable for the soldier to remember these immortal words:

My Native Land

*Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own, my native land!
Whose heart hath ne'er within him burn'd,
As home his footsteps he hath turn'd
From wandering on a foreign strand!
If such there breathe, go, mark him well;
For him no Minstrel raptures swell;
High though his titles, proud his name,
Boundless his wealth as wish can claim;
Despite those titles, power, and pelf,
The wretch, concentred all in self,
Living, shall forfeit fair renown,
And, doubly dying, shall go down
To the vile dust, from whence he sprung,
Unwept, unhonour'd, and unsung.*

Sir Walter Scott, Lay of the Last Minstrel, Canto VI

There are many veteran soldiers who are blessed to return home to their families and continue to enjoy the benefits and comforts of their home in the sun. But to many

others whose blood has nourished the free soil of America, HOME was merely a dream that kept them focused on the cause of their patriotic endeavor. In wooded slopes of Yorktown, the sunken roads of St. Petersburg, the muddy and stinking trenches of the Meuse-Argonne, the foxholes of the Ardennes, the snowy and barren mountains of Korea, the swamps and paddies of Vietnam, and the deserts sands of Fallujah, the American soldier, in moments of brief reflection, would focus on a sweet and loving face far away in some corner of his native America. It may have been a loving mother, a sacrificing wife or husband, or a precious child who may barely remember his face from his long departing.

A little more than 150 years ago, two armies were drawn up in battle array – the Confederates before Marye’s Heights facing the Union forces occupying Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania. This was in the early spring of 1863. One evening, between the merciless carnage of each day’s battle, the bands of the two armies began to play, in turns, the sweet music of their homelands. The Union band would play *Hail Columbia*, or *Ashogan*, *Goodbye*; while the Confederates would respond with the *Bonnie Blue Flag*, or *Lorena*. Quite a large crowd had gathered about the bands on both sides, and a hearty rah-rah would go up after each piece was played. Finally, the Union band struck up the notes of an old, familiar song that moved the hearts of both sides – *Home, Sweet Home* by Howard Payne. There was a hush in both camps. After the first stanza, the Confederate bands picked up the tune and the surrounding hills resounded in the most heart-touching and glorious notes of home. At the conclusion, the voices of both sides (all Americans) joined together for the first time in many months to applaud the single tribute of home.

Unfortunately, many of those men of valor lived to see the consummation of the concluding verses from Ecclesiastes:

5 Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: 6 Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. 7 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. (Eccl 12:5-7)

Let us never forget all such men who gave their life’s blood that we might live free, but also those who offered their blood on the altar of freedom but was not required – our Veterans of all wars.