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(South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs)

SD Department of Veterans Affairs
Secretary Zimmerman May 2018 Column

It Can Be Done

When we hear the word “operation,” we think hospital, emergency, illness, surgery, treatment, and procedure. However, with over 33 years in the military the word “operation” affords me a completely different meaning. For decades, the military has issued random code names for exercises, attack plans and other operations. Operations were used to resolve conflict, promote peace, and support civilian leaders in response to domestic crises.

In the 70’s while on Army active duty training in Europe, there was Operation Reforger, and every year while at SDNG Golden Coyote training there were many different operations based on the humanitarian mission we were carrying out. My tour in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan had numerous humanitarian operations, including Operation Qala-i-Wali Air Assault.

I have lived with operations and missions throughout most of my life. Some were assigned to me as a part of a military mission, and some I developed to enhance information exchange and to increase outreach for the Department.

During my six years leading the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, I carried that operational mindset with me. A key part of building momentum is education, raising awareness, and inspiring action. Although much of the focus of our operations was on veterans, it also afforded us the opportunity to educate the masses that may not have served.

Our Department operations included Reaching All Veterans (RAV), Ketchup, Korean, Taiwan, Saigon, Whirlwind and Calling All Returning Servicemembers (CARS). Although each was conducted with its own mission and time frame, they all afforded us the opportunity to reach out to our veterans and to thank them for their service, educate them on the benefits, services and programs available to them. They also provided us a great opportunity to educate civilians on the important role these heroes played in protecting our freedoms.

Our veterans have shouldered the burden of our defense. They display extraordinary strength and resilience in the face of adversity to protect the freedoms we, as Americans, enjoy daily. They remain disciplined, dedicated, and trained Americans with a wealth of knowledge, skills, and experience. When our men and women return home after years of war and sacrifice, we have the opportunity to show our gratitude by serving them.

I'm proud of the team that worked with us as we completed our operations. They met each mission with energy, passion and deep devotion to our veterans.

God bless our veterans, their families, and the United States of America.

Larry Zimmerman, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs