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SD Department of Veterans Affairs  
Secretary Zimmerman December 2017 Column

**CHRISTMAS PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE**

As the holiday season approaches, let us not forget we have thousands of U.S. service members that are still in harm's way and deployed away from friends and family.

While we often feel we have enough on our hands just taking care of ourselves; reaching out and helping someone else can really change a person's perspective. I encourage all of you to send a card, a handwritten note, or a care package to someone that is deployed. In addition, invite military families to partake in your holiday activities, and ask if you can assist them in preparing for the holidays.

Many military families find themselves having to redefine the word "family" as their loved ones are often stationed far from home. Military children cope with so much: new schools, changing neighborhoods, friends who move, and deployed parents. A holiday full of laughter, shared and newly created memories would be a precious gift.

Charles Dickens said, "I will live in the past, the present, and the future. The spirits of all three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach!"

It doesn't matter if you are reflecting on Christmas past, present, or future; the one commonality is traditions. It's the magic and the love that we'll always remember.

While I wouldn't trade Christmas at home with my family and friends, I will forever fondly recall my Christmas spent overseas. Sharing the holidays with my military family, gorging myself on food, improvised holiday decorations, and unique holiday shenanigans. You learn to make the most of deployments – you remember that you signed the contract to protect those around you and you realize very quickly that it's worth it to have to miss out on some holidays.

Spending the holidays apart is hard, but sharing traditions whenever possible can create special memories for everyone.

We wish you and your family a blessed holiday season and a new year of peace and happiness. As you and your family gather this holiday season, please keep our heroes (past, present, and future) in your hearts. God bless our veterans, their families, and our troops that are currently serving in harm's way.

Larry Zimmerman, Secretary

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