Honoring Those Who Serve

At Outrigger and OHANA hotels, we have a long tradition of supporting the men and women who serve our country in the U.S. armed services – Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, and National Guard – and, as we approach Veterans Day, November 11, it is appropriate to review that history, renew our dedication, and share a few thoughts about today’s military.

In fact, our personal and corporate loyalty dates back to before the “official” birth of our company in 1947, the year the little Islander Hotel opened its doors on Seaside Avenue in Waikiki. In 1941, our founders, Roy and Estelle Kelley, were operating apartments in Waikiki and invited two of their tenants, Capt. John Schultz and his wife, Martha, to join them for breakfast on the morning of Sunday, December 7. Capt. Schultz arrived in his gleaming dress white Navy uniform and, when the bombs began to fall, he rushed to his ship in Pearl Harbor to begin World War II, as possibly the “Best Dressed” officer on duty at the moment. (That tale is humorous now, but at the time, nobody was laughing.)

We continued our support of the military through World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, and we are still doing so in many ways, as our troops are currently engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Recently, David Carey and I had an opportunity to visit military installations to get an up-close, personal, and better understanding of what our uniformed personnel are currently facing.

David visited Hurlburt Field, near the larger and better-known Pensacola Naval Air Station in the Florida panhandle. (World War II history buffs – I’m one too – may be interested to know that Hurlburt was the field where Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle trained his “Raiders” for short-runway takeoffs and landings before his carrier-launched raid on Tokyo on April 18, 1942.)

Today, Hurlburt is the home of the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC). The men and women stationed here are trained to conduct global special operations missions ranging from precision application of firepower, to infiltration, resupply, and refueling of special operations forces around the world. Similar in ability and employment to Army Special Forces and Navy Sea-Air-Land forces (SEALs), Air Force Special Tactics personnel are typically the first U.S. military forces to enter combat and often find themselves deep behind enemy lines in demanding, austere conditions, usually with little or no support.

My travels took me to Washington, D.C., where I spent the day at the Pentagon listening to high-level representatives from all branches of the service including:
- Gen. Norton Schwartz, Air Force Chief of Staff
- Gen. George Casey, Army Chief of Staff
- Vice Adm. William “Doug” Crowder, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations

Both David and I were reminded of and greatly impressed by the quality and dedication of the members of our armed services. David was struck by how capable the young men and women in our all-volunteer forces are. He found them “remarkable and inspiring.” All of them face unbelievable challenges these days, particularly those who are involved in operations in Iraq and the remote regions of Afghanistan.

The numbers of those who have been killed or have suffered traditional wounds in Iraq and Afghanistan are easily documented. However the effects of repeated deployments and of powerful roadside Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) have produced many non-traditional casualties, including:
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and similar mental conditions from the stress, strain, and shock of combat.
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) with multiple, microscopic injuries within the brain resulting from nearby explosions that may not produce lacerations or fractures.

Just this week, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DoD) hosted a first-of-its-kind national summit to address the mental health care needs of America’s military personnel, families, and veterans, harnessing the programs, resources, and expertise of both departments to deal with the aftermath of battle.

The effects of PTSD and TBI are long-term, insidious and severe. According to a report in the New York Times, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, retired Gen. Eric Shinseki, noted that more veterans have committed suicide since 2001 than have been lost to combat deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Both David and I came away from our visits with a renewed respect for the members of our armed forces. We pledge that we will continue to offer any type of support we can, following the example set by Roy and Estelle Kelley in 1941 and the years that followed.