**Serving Those Who Have Served**

What makes someone a hero? Should the badge of heroism only be placed upon people who achieve notoriety? Must we reserve this honor exclusively for those who accomplish gargantuan feats? Or do we have a responsibility to acknowledge all people who act selflessly and sacrificially?

On May 13, 2014, former Sgt. Kyle Jerome White was awarded the Medal of Honor by President Barack Obama at a White House ceremony. The president recounted a Nov. 9, 2007, ambush outside the Afghan village of Aranas, which claimed the lives of five Soldiers and a Marine. When White’s unit of thirteen Americans and a squad of Afghan soldiers descended into what was called “ambush alley,” suddenly, a barrage of AK-47s and rocket-propelled grenades (known as RPGs) lit up the valley with shattered shards of red-hot metal and flying chunks of bone-crushing rock. White courageously fought through a concussion and the deaths of seven military comrades on this fateful day, sacrificially sprinting through enemy fire several times to rescue wounded soldiers and administer first-aid.

During the ceremony in the East Room of the White House, President Obama fittingly paid tribute not just to White, but to each courageous soul serving in our military.

“The men and women of our armed forces have known the measure of danger that comes with military service,” he said. “But year after year, tour after tour, they have displayed a selfless willingness to incur it – by stepping forward, by volunteering, by serving and sacrificing greatly to keep us all safe.”

The Tennessee Valley Coalition for the Homeless (TVCH) echoes these very sentiments. We celebrate the heroic actions of Sgt. White and reverently remember the noble sacrifice of his seven comrades at the Battle of Aranas. *But we also recognize that every living veteran is worthy of honor*. That’s why we are passionate about serving those who have served our country.

As the backbone of our very freedom, no veteran who has protected our homes should ever be without one of their own. Yet the unfortunate reality of our time is that roughly a quarter of all homeless people in America are veterans.[[1]](#footnote-1) On any given night, an estimated 57,849 veterans are homeless[[2]](#footnote-2), and nearly 400,000 veterans experience homelessness over the course of a year.[[3]](#footnote-3) But these figures hit even closer to home than you dare to imagine: in just one day during 2013, at least 75 homeless veterans were identified within the TVCH service area.[[4]](#footnote-4)

What should we make of this tragic trend? First of all, TVCH wants our fellow citizens to know that we are seeing results. Nationally, veteran homelessness has decreased 70% since 2005[[5]](#footnote-5) and nearly 25% since 2010[[6]](#footnote-6)! Regionally, TVCH continues bridging the gap for homeless veterans in the Tennessee Valley region by serving over 100 veterans and families each year! So there is much to celebrate as we consider the positive progress made both here at home and across the country.

However, let us also consider another sobering reality: a recent spike in homelessness within our region leaves much still to be done. In spite of our passionate efforts, the literally homeless population within TVCH’s 21-county service area has nearly doubled within the last three years![[7]](#footnote-7) Our hearts break when we consider the uneasy truth that men and women who have protected our homes must live in our midst without one of their own. But don’t be fooled into thinking that these homeless veterans are failures; on the contrary, as our former Commander-in-Chief George Bush once astutely observed, “Any definition of a successful life must include serving others.” Veterans will always be heroes precisely because of their service.

Are you a veteran who is either homeless or facing homelessness? Do you belong to the family of such a veteran? Is a struggling veteran your friend or colleague? If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, the Tennessee Valley Coalition for the Homeless wants to hear from you. Call us at (888) 556-0791 to speak with an Intake Specialist who will listen and help guide you in the right direction. The TVCH considers it a high calling and privilege to work on behalf of the courageous heroes we call “veterans.”

Let us remember that those who once served now need our service unto them.

1. <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/factsheets/veterans.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.onecpd.info/resources/documents/AHAR-2013-Part1.pdf>, p. 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://thenovetleftbehind.org/stats.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <http://tvchomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/TVCEH-PIT-2013-Report-All-Counties.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <http://nchv.org/index.php/news/media/background_and_statistics/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.onecpd.info/resources/documents/AHAR-2013-Part1.pdf>, p. 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <http://tvchomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/TVCEH-PIT-2014-Report-All-Counties.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)