



Resident Perspective

On a Pale Horse – Veterans, Values, and Viruses

by Tej Ishaan Mehta MD – MCW Department of Medicine Resident

One-hundred years ago, in cities and towns across this great nation, people gathered to honor the veterans of the greatest conflict witnessed to date, World War I, the so-called “Great War.” On Armistice Day 1920, Americans from sea to shining sea gave thanks and recognition to veterans of The Great War. Named for the eleventh-hour armistice signed between World War I allies and Germany, Armistice Day marked the end of World War I hostilities. In time, Armistice Day would become Veterans Day, a day to observe the deeds of veterans from all wars, living and dead. In celebrating Veterans Day, we celebrate the best of American values; we celebrate perseverance against impossible odds, love of country and a willingness to sacrifice for others, always in the pursuit of truth and the triumph of good over evil.

However, one hundred years ago, in cities and towns across this great nation, a sinister presence, a pale horse, rode from sea to shining sea. The Spanish Influenza Pandemic brought death to countless across the globe. Countless veterans returned to America from the Western Front, only to lose their lives on the home front. At the time, viral spread was less well understood than today. As people gathered, the virus spread, and events like Armistice Day celebrations quickly turned into funerals.

In 2020, in cities and towns across this great nation, people prepare for Veterans Day and remember the sacrifices of those who fought for their freedom. People remember the deeds of loved ones, living and dead, and the fight for freedom. However, in 2020, another pale horse rides from sea to shining sea, and we are at war on the homefront. The COVID-19 pandemic affects us all and forces us to change how we celebrate this Veterans Day, but it

does not change *what* we celebrate. This Veterans Day, we may not celebrate in person, but we celebrate in our hearts and in our minds. This Veterans Day let us use the example of our veterans and the best of American values to persevere against impossible odds. We battle an invisible, ever present enemy, but we will prevail. Let us show our love of country by heeding the word of our public health officials who are our *de facto* generals leading against this pandemic. Let us show our willingness to sacrifice for others by stoically doing our part to battle COVID-19.

One-hundred years ago, on the first Armistice Day, President Woodrow Wilson commemorated the day stating, “*With splendid forgetfulness of mere personal concerns, we remodeled our industries, concentrated our resources... and assembled a great army, so that at last our power was a decisive factor in victory.*” For centuries, veterans have sacrificed to make the United States a global superpower. That status is now be threatened by COVID-19.

As in any conflict, we must present a united front. In battling the virus, we must not to fall prey to the socioeconomic, social, and political mores that seek to divide us. In 2020, let us remodel our industries, concentrate our resources, and assemble our great army to fight the invisible invader on our shores. This Veterans Day, commemorate the sacrifices of our veterans by demonstrating your commitment to American values. Persevere against impossible odds, love your country and sacrifice for others.

Tej Ishaan Mehta, MD, is Preliminary Resident at MCW and a Captain in the United States Air Force Medical Corps. He will pursue training in Radiology at Johns Hopkins Medicine next year. Editor: Kathlyn Fletcher, MD, MA

The views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the US Air Force, Department of Defense or the US Government.