

Regardless of their duty: why all people enlisted in the military are heroes

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Regardless of their duty, all people who enlist in the military are heroes because there is a possibility they could die; their service is a form of heroism, no matter what. According to the Oxford dictionary, a hero is a person who is admired for their courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities (“hero, n1”). For many people, doctors, lawyers, firefighters, cops, etc. are heroes, but one group we all agree on as being heroes are people in the military. When you hear about people in the military, you hear stories of people dying, losing limbs, or coming back with mental health issues (the most common one being PTSD). Knowing all of the different obstacles they have to go through, no one really challenges if they are a hero or not. In *White Teeth*, Archie and Samad were a part of the army, but due to their disabilities they were on the bridge-laying regiment. Samad and Archie played poker with the Russians in which they won jeeps, guns, medals, etc. but traded that in for Dr. Perret. When Archie ask Samad why they needed Dr. Perret he said, “Because, from my point of view, the very problem is that we need blood on our hands, you see? As an atonement” (pg. 118, Smith); meaning, for him to feel like a real war hero, he felt he needed to kill someone. This is a common representation of what someone in the military does. Therefore, this is one definition of what a hero is.

While killing is seen as an act of heroism in the military, another type of heroism is the act of serving your country. Enlisting is an act of heroism. Enlisting takes bravery and courage because you know that there is a possibility of you dying, losing limbs, and probably some sort of trauma when you come out. Society assumes that people join the military because they want to serve the country, but for many people this is not the case. This does

not make these soldiers any less heroic because they still are putting their life on line. According the PEW Research Center, “ 42% percent of women and 25% of men in the military joined because jobs in the regular economy were hard to find” (pg. 10, Patten & Parker). Other reasons for people enlisting in the military are curiosity, to travel, to pay for their education, and for some women, to prove themselves and show that their gender has nothing to do with their ability to handle the same tasks as men. Before 1973, people were drafted, in which case if your name was pulled you had to go unless you had a disability that would keep you from going. So, although the underlying purpose of the military is to serve our country, that is hardly ever the initial reason for people joining the military. So, do they deserve to be called heroes when they did not join the military to protect this country? This can be argued on both sides which leads back to the previous argument that everyone’s definition of a hero is different.

Samad, along with a lot of others see a military hero as someone who has killed someone for the greater good of our country, but not everyone who serves sees combat. It is during times of great international conflict, like during the Vietnam War or WWII, that there was a high need for people to go to combat. Other than circumstances like these, most soldiers do not see combat. There are many jobs that are available in the military that are present in the civilian world too, such as nurses, doctors, mechanics, IT specialists, etc. Every one of these jobs is important for everything to function properly. The nurses and doctors take care of the wounded; the mechanics helps fix the vehicles for the troops to use when needed, and the

IT people look into how other military groups operate (such as what their vehicles and people look like, any weapons they might have, different angles they can attack from, etc.). Although you can go into the military for any of these positions, you are trained for combat and at any moment can be sent to an area of combat. Regardless of their duty, all people who enlist in the military are heroes because there is a possibility they could die; their service is a form of heroism, no matter what.