

# Learn about military this month

RACHEL BELL, FOR THE EXPRESS-NEWS : MAY 1, 2015 : Updated: May 1, 2015 10:20am

Military Appreciation Month honors current and former members of the U.S. armed forces. For those of us who are attached to the military, we

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Civilians need to learn more about the military to properly support our troops.

world in a seriously hostile place. We were getting household affairs in order, and I was mapping out ways to stay busy and distracted and supportive and strong. My friend meant well but had no idea about any of that.

On the one hand, people revere the military. Pew research shows 78 percent of adults believe members of the military contribute a lot to society's well-being. That's more than any other profession. So, of course, everybody wants to "support the troops," but most people can't, really, because they can't relate without a frame of reference.

That disconnect, between those who serve and those who don't, is more pronounced than ever. Since 1973, for nearly two generations, our armed forces have been volunteers, and few choose to sign up. It's no surprise that a small fraction of the population bears the cost of war, but you appreciate that more when you see the numbers.

Less than half of 1 percent of the United States population serves in the armed forces today, compared with more than 12 percent during World War II. That's 24 times more people. It means pretty much everybody knew somebody who faced deployments and sacrifices, and all that comes with it. Probably nobody would have asked if a spouse was going along to the battlefields of Europe. It must have been way easier to appreciate the armed forces when people could more personally identify with and understand just what they were appreciating.

According to Pew, 84 percent of post-9/11 veterans say the public doesn't understand problems that the military or their families face, and I agree. The Army has sent the lion's share of U.S. troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, with more than 1.5 million troop-years between September 2001 and December 2011. That's more than the other services combined. There's a lot to appreciate about our Army.

This Military Appreciation Month, I'd feel most appreciated if more people understood the challenges our military community faces. Get some perspective. Have some conversations. Ask some questions. Then find out how to show that appreciation in a meaningful way. [ArmyMWR.com](http://ArmyMWR.com) is a great place to start.

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already appreciate plenty of what the armed forces do.

However, there's a pretty big disconnect between military life and what civilians understand about it. That makes it hard for most to appreciate.

For example, when my husband got ready to deploy to Iraq, I caught up with a friend who asked if I'd be going, too. It's deployment. It means he goes to a combat zone and, no, of course, I wouldn't get to tag along. It means I'd be on my own for most of a year while my husband would be on the other side of the