

Lawyers Deserve a National Holiday



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Last month I had to rush back to Texas for a family emergency. Due to the short notice, rather than flying my usual JetBlue, I flew Continental. It had been a few years since I flew anything but JetBlue or Southwest, so I wasn't used to the pre-board call for first class. While I contemplated the lack of efficiency in such a boarding scheme, I was even more struck as the announcer continued in the same breath: "pre-boarding for members

of the armed forces."

Our country's fetishization of the military has gone too far. To be blunt, the constant jingoistic rhetoric about how members of the military are defending freedom is simply wrong. Every day, U.S. citizens have their rights and freedoms violated. But it is not the military who defends them. It is lawyers. When you're looking for the troops on the front lines of defending freedom, don't look to Army, Marines, Navy, or Air Force. Look to an attorney.

If the police wrongly arrest someone, what recourse is there? Well, the Army can't bust in to the police department and perform a raid and extraction like perfect clockwork. It comes down to a defense attorney to get innocent citizens off the hook. After all, the 82nd Airborne Division can't exactly paradrop into Texas to get innocent people off of death row. Rather, the attorneys at the Innocence Project are the ones defending American life and liberty.

If a city tries to stop a group from protesting simply because of the content of their speech, does the 101st Airborne Division deploy men in camouflage armed with M-16s form a protective barrier to ensure that the right to free speech is not infringed? Alas, no. They are probably too busy clearing roadside bombs in Afghanistan. While that might be a noble and dangerous job, it doesn't exactly preserve the rights and liberties of the American people on a daily basis. If you want someone who does that, try calling your local branch of the American Civil Liberties Union or public defender.

Even when it comes to protecting the average U.S. populace, it isn't the First Marine Expeditionary Force locking away criminals, but local District Attorneys. These lawyers don't just ensure that criminals are punished, but do so in a manner conducive with the very ideals of liberty and rule of justice for which our country is supposed to stand. The military cannot deliver these ideals.

Furthermore, harm to the populace doesn't just come from cliché criminals played by extras in Law and Order, but from companies that skimp on safety procedures, white collar crooks, or unscrupulous slumlords. And it is lawyers, not the military, who protect the people from these ubiquitous threats.

Lawyers protect not just the people, but the military as well. Notice how law schools are not exactly wanting for military protection. However, on the other hand, the military seems to constantly need help from lawyers to fill its JAG corps. An average law firm can operate without a V-22 Osprey, but the Navy could barely operate without legal guidance from its own attorneys. After all, we live in a world of laws, not one of war. The advent of nuclear weapons and relegation of conventional warfare to the periphery leaves the American homeland generally protected from most blunt or obvious threats. Legal scholars act as a shield against the more subtle knife.

In the end, the time has come to recognize those who actually protect and uphold the Constitution. We already have two national holidays — Memorial Day and Veterans Day — for the military. We even have a national holiday for the labor movement. It is time for a national holiday for lawyers. Constitution Day already recognizes the adoption of the Constitution every September 17th. The legal community should lobby to expand this day beyond a commemoration of the mere document and to celebrate those who fight under its banner for the causes of law and liberty, lauding the good work that lawyers do defending the rights and freedoms of all citizens without having to shed a single drop of blood.

Yes, the military does an acceptable job maintaining world stability and hegemonic protection of U.S. interests and global trade. But national interests and stability are not the same as freedom and liberty. It is time to recognize the lawyers who truly protect our nation. After all, our nation was founded by lawyers, it will be saved by lawyers.