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Freedom Isn't Free

I am ashamed. I recognize that freedom isn't free, but I take freedom for granted. I am blessed with the freedom of religion, speech, press and assembly, but do I fully appreciate these freedoms that citizens in other countries cannot even imagine? I must remember the veterans who have paved the way for freedom in the past and continue to pave the way for us today.

Take Second Lieutenant Melissa Stockwell, for example. In March of 2004, she was deployed into Baghdad as a member of the Army's 1st Cavalry Division. Only a month into her service, a roadside bomb exploded, hitting her Humvee and seriously injuring Stockwell. She had her left leg amputated above the knee. At the time of the blast, she was 23—an age many would consider the prime of their lives. Her sacrifice to her country resulted in her being permanently disabled. This example is one of over 30,000 Americans wounded and 4,000 killed in the recent Iraq war, and serves as a reminder of the cold truth: Americans have sacrificed and still sacrifice themselves for our freedom.

Even after the blast, her fighting spirit strove onward during countless hours of rehabilitation, where she spent an entire year at Walter Reed Army Medical Center recovering. Against all odds, she tirelessly succeeds. She participated in the Beijing Paralympics as a swimmer, swimming the 100 fly, 100 free, and the 400 free. Additionally, she was awarded the 2010, 2011, and 2012 Female Paratriathlete of the year. Her accomplishments display the American spirit of perseverance even in the face of great trials.

Perhaps now, when I reflect upon Lieutenant Stockwell's sacrifices and accomplishments, I am inspired and better appreciate veterans' continued sacrifices for my freedom.

As best said by Thomas Campbell, "The patriot's blood is the seed of Freedom's free."