

Opinion: Vet pleads for coddling to stop

□By Richard Allen Smith, Esquire

For the last 14 years, uniformed Americans have been in some of the most challenging conditions imaginable. We've parachuted into Iraq, marched wearily through the mountains of Tora Bora, and slept in s— at Musa Qala. We've toppled dictators, trained counterterrorism forces in Africa, and killed the most dangerous terrorist in the world. And then, too many of us have come home and whined about every minuscule slight, offense, or lapse in judgment perpetrated against us while indulging in some of the most decadent of accommodations.

We've got to stop.

It's not entirely the fault of 21st century veterans that we demand to have our egos coddled. The desire early on to suppress dissent for the poorly justified conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, plus a sense of collective guilt for the shameful treatment of Vietnam veterans, forced our nation to open its proverbial arms and wrap us veterans in soft, star-spangled blankets.

That is how we arrived at a place in American society where the roughest men and women our country can produce are babysat. Our supermarkets have reserved veteran parking spaces, despite handicapped spaces already existing for any veteran who actually needs accommodation. We grandstand for veteran employment programs without considering that the veteran unemployment rate is actually less than that of the general population. We rant about the broken promise of disability compensation while the Department of Veterans Affairs is awarding disability claims at the fastest rate in

history. Even with all these faux controversies, we still manage to find time for manufactured outrage about gym wear and TV ratings gambits.

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