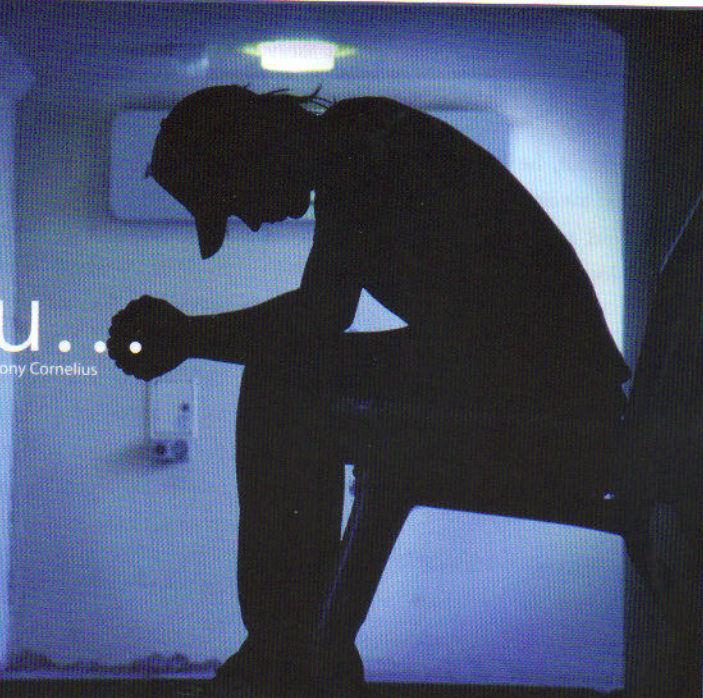


Ask Not What Your Country Can Do For You.

By Wade Anthony Cornelius

United States citizens are naturally patriotic. When we hear the news of national catastrophes and the sacrifice of soldiers serving their country in distant lands, it encourages our inward American spirit. We feel compelled to personally contribute.



Very often, however, such ideas are dismissed. How could any of us possibly help our countrymen when we have professional duties and family obligations? The answer can be found in the State Guard.

The State Guard provides a unique opportunity for patriotic citizens to serve both state and nation in a military capacity without ever leaving their local area.¹ The possibility to move beyond political conversations and become actively involved in serving our country is just how celebrity Clark Howard became interested in becoming a Guardsman. Many may know Clark Howard as a consumer expert from his radio program or the, "Clark Howard Show" on the HLN cable channel. He advises viewers about saving more and

spending less. Few are aware that Clark came from a patriotic family with very strong military background.

After 9/11, it was impossible for Clark to continue his normal show format. For 4½ months he discussed current affairs with his callers. After a time, Clark made efforts to return to the theme of the show, but listeners continued to visit the subject of the terrorist attacks and its profound nationwide impact. On one particular day, as he was having his morning bagel, a stranger approached him and remarked rather sarcastically, "You know that's really inspiring stuff you're talking about on the air."

"Thank you," replied Clark rather reluctantly.

"So you're saying," continued the stranger, "we all need to sacrifice, we all need to stand up and do for our country what we can. Well...what are you doing?"

"What do you mean exactly?" asked Howard.

"I mean, what are you actually doing, for our country?" persisted the stranger.

Howard thought about the question for a moment and replied in all honesty,

"When you put it like that, I guess I'm not doing anything."

As it turned out the stranger was a retired Marine, serving in the Georgia State Guard. He softened his tone and handed Clark a brochure inviting him to learn more about how the Guard contributes. Clark accepted the invitation and visited a state armory where Guardsman received training. While there, he observed everyday people doing what they could in their own lives to help their country. He found it was truly an opportunity to become a citizen-soldier and to personally contribute while maintaining his career and duties as a father. This past November marked his 9th year of service as a Guardsman.


Although Clark had no prior military experience, his civilian skills were taken into account during his enlistment evaluation. This allowed for an assigned service position that was both beneficial for the State Guard and comfortable for him in public relations. Additionally, standard trainings afforded Clark an opportunity to learn valuable skills, such as search and rescue procedures, administering first aid and medical evacuation care. Thus, when the catastrophe of Hurricane Katrina hit, Clark Howard, was called upon to serve in a way he never dreamed of-bringing back



to Georgia planeloads of injured, wounded and ill people from the ruins of devastated New Orleans.

Clark's experiences, however, do not represent the full extent of State Guard services. Chaplains are another supportive entity of the State Guard. A chaplain is a minister for the military personnel. In addition to marriage unions and church services, a chaplain acts as an advisor to commanding officers of their respective units and provides direction as needed in spiritual and moral matters. In many ways, chaplains function as cheerleaders doing what they can to keep morale up. This is known as edification. It is an area of critical need as soldier suicides and depression continue to rise.

When a soldier is called for operational duty, chaplains do all they can to prepare the individual and their family for the deployment and are on hand to welcome and support soldiers returning to civilian life and duty. There is no better opportunity for any person desiring to hone their skills than to serve state and country. Once a month State Guard personnel receive specialized training that prepares them for assisted service in medical support, radio communications, public affairs, transportation, chaplain services, honor guard duties for military funerals and general support for the National Guard.

The skills learned within the State Guard and the people one meets can lead to career opportunities one may never have considered. Many serving State Guardsmen have found new leases on their careers through service. Benefits aside, let us recall the words John Kennedy issued nearly fifty years ago to every American, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." Every State Guard soldier can stand proudly and say with a good deal of pride, "I have accepted that calling." 

1 State Guard soldiers serve in their respective states and do not face possible deployment. However, forces from one state may work in other states if activated to do so. Catastrophes such as Katrina are one example of when this would occur. During activations (usually within-state) State Guard personnel are paid by the state.

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