

The evolution of these broad commitments began when America was an infant nation. The Commander of the Continental Army, General George Washington, led the way when on June 8, 1783, in a letter to the Governors of all the States, he said in part:

"It [benefits] was a part of their hire. . . it was the price of their blood and of your Independency, it is therefore more than a common debt, it is a debt of honour . . ."

These concepts were strengthened when Abraham Lincoln in his Second Inaugural Address, called upon the nation -

". . . to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan. . ."

Recently President Johnson placed strong emphasis upon the precedents established by Washington and Lincoln in a message to the Chairman of the U.S. Veterans Advisory Commission, when he said:

"Our government and our people have no greater obligation than to assure that those who have served their country and the cause of freedom will never be forgotten or neglected."

And in his message of January 30, 1968, President Johnson reiterated these commitments in the following words:

"America holds some of its greatest honors for the men who have stood in its defense, and kept alive its freedoms.

"It shows its gratitude not only in memorials which grace city parks and courthouse squares across the land -- but more meaningfully in the programs which 'care for him. . . and for his widow and his orphan.'"

An evaluation of the manner in which the nation has fulfilled its commitments and the projection of guidelines for the future requires that the size and nature of the veteran population be shown. Thirteen percent of the total population of the United States on June 30, 1967, were veterans. This is slightly under 26 million human beings. Approximately two million of them have become war veterans since August 5, 1964, because a responsive nation so classified them with the passage of the Veterans Readjustment Benefits Act of 1966. Prior to that Act, the war veteran population of our land had decreased from almost 13 percent