

## **The Veteran Thank Them**

I've met quite a few veterans in my life. Was raised by one of the very greatest of the Greatest Generation. Knew a lot of WWII Pacific Theater vets and ex-POW's, compliments of the same man who raised me. As time passed and the Greatest Generation and its ideals have faded mostly from our civil discourse, vets from Vietnam crossed paths with me. My sister lost some schoolmates there, being six years older than me. Lately it's been the women and men from Afghanistan and Iraq, whose evidence is some disabling issue whether it be a loss of limb or hearing due to an IED.

I've closely known those who are currently enlisted. Been to two graduations. Got the full dose of what it means to lay down one's life for your fellow woman or man. God, Country and Family are constant themes, in that order, pronounced publicly by speakers almost all of whom have served in combat situations.

Do we really appreciate the sacrifices these people made and continue to make?

I grew up in the horror of the Vietnam War. I was eligible for the draft in 1973, but my number was so high, WWII or WWIV needed to occur. I considered enlisting until my father told me how bad an idea it was, because he said, "That war is immoral." Being fifty-three then, I believe he knew all war was immoral.

I remember listening to the recordings of his interview that was transcribed into the book, *Faithful: Because of Love the True Story of the Defenders of Bataan*, I clearly remember him stating to the person interviewing him, "I am a pacifist." War does that to you when you are on the front line.

I don't know how Dad escaped so many near death experiences, several during the war itself. One of the chapters in the book mentioned how he and five other POW's served as pallbearers at one of the Japanese prison camps for a captain that died of diphtheria. Since the Cap was Catholic, they asked my dad to say the prayers. After the service the six of them carried the body to the crematorium. The Japanese insisted all dead POW's were to be cremated. Well, the captain had diphtheria and everybody in the funeral party got it. One man survived out of the six, which is the reasons I can write. He was my Pop. A series of serious physical health issues plagued him after the war up until the time of his death in 1999. But you never knew it. Optimistic, kindhearted to the extreme, a motivator of people, member, with his one and only beloved, of the Third Order of the Franciscans; people just loved him and he, in turn, loved them in all sincerity.

We have many many, essentially infinitesimal things for which to thank God. We should include daily, thanks to Him for those who laid down their lives for us or were and are still willing to do so.

Haven't been through basic training, except the one life deals you, but I know from those who have, how tough it is. Going to those graduations of service men and women stirred a longing for what our Armed Forces represent. They provide the environment for our freedom and often do the dirty work to keep us safe. And they do it as one unit and nation under God, as the various keynotes at those graduations, made clear the number one unifier, is Him.

Are they perfect? None of us are. But we owe them our lives as they did, or are willing to lay down their lives for us. Don't just thank a vet this Monday. Thank them every day even if it is only in the solitude of your prayers.

Because from what I've witnessed, these folk clearly...

- Love Him, one nation under God
- Love everyone else. They are your brother, your sister as the service constantly reminds those who enlist.

We have so much for which to be thankful. Just don't forget to do it.

A lot!

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