

Letters

Hug a WWII vet... while you still can

When one of our teenage sons returned home from the movie, "Saving Private Ryan," I asked him how he liked it. This was a couple of years ago, but I will never forget his response, for he said, "Dad, it makes you want to hug every old man you see."

You can read about these "old men," and women, every day. Unfortunately, they usually appear in the obituaries. Following is a sampling from our local papers over just the past couple of weeks of this Honor Roll of Patriots:

LESTER, 80, served in U.S. Marines Corps Air Wing during WWII in Pacific Theater, member of St. Charles VFW. DONALD, 75, educator and professor, served with 8th Air Force as B-17 Aerial Gunner. JOHN, 78, pipefitter, Marine Corps Sergeant, seeing action on Saipan and Iwo Jima. EVERETT, 78, carpenter, served his country faithfully during WWII, fought valiantly in the Battle of the Bulge. PHILIP, 90, Teamster, Army veteran of WWII. DORIS, 81, 1st Lieutenant in Women's Army Air Corps, serving as photo interpretation expert.

MITCHELL, WWII veteran and Purple Heart recipient. Dr. RICHARD, 75, cardiologist, Korean War Navy veteran. WESLEY, 80, chemist, served in Army Air Corps as a pilot, member of back-up crew for Atomic Bomb Missions over Nagasaki and Hiroshima. WILLIAM, 90, architect, worked for the War Department as a camouflage consultant.

MADELINE, proudly served as a Captain in the WACS, WWII. DIANA, 82, served as a WAVE in the Navy, past member of Jewish War Veterans. LEROY, 84, Chief Petty Officer on Navy first nuclear powered submarine, the Nautilus, personally selected by Admiral Rickover. EDWARD, 84, Air Force Colonel, WWII flying ace, one of the last survivors of the legendary Flying Tigers unit stationed in China. MILTON, 90, industrial engineer, serving with Seabees in WWII. ROY, 74, lawyer, Korean War officer in Tank Division. JOHN, 79, landed in Omaha Beach and fought in the Battle of the

Bulge. REVEREND OTTO, 79, Lutheran pastor, flew 19 missions as a bomber navigator over Germany. RICHARD, chef, Illinois National Guard with active duty during Korean War. DOROTHY, 82, occupational therapist, Sergeant in WACS, earning numerous military honors during WWII while serving in the Mediterranean Theater in Italy. JEFFREY, 49, 22-year Army career, Vietnam War Veteran.

These veterans were both ordinary and extraordinary all at the same time. They were diverse in professions, education, religion and heritage. Veterans don't talk much about the emotions they carry inside, or the adversity they faced. You walk by them every day, but do not know it. Many thousands of WWII Vets are now dying each week and month, just look for the little flags in the obituaries and read about their sacrifice, patriotism, loyalty, and love of country. You will not find listed the hundreds of thousands of soldiers who did not return from our wars, they were lost in the youth of their lives.

All veterans, living or dead, in war or in peace, have served America to preserve our legacy of freedom. So, if you have a chance to "hug a vet" this Memorial Day, do so while you still can... and simply say, "Thank you for what you did for us."

Steve Thompson
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