

the dean's corner

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No Greater Love



Jacky Bayne, who served in the U.S. Army from October 1966 to November 1967 in southern Vietnam. Bayne lives in Fort Mill, S.C.

“It is to these men and women we pay tribute, and it is to them we say thanks for their service, not only to this country, but to each and everyone of us who luxuriate in the freedom they bought with a price.”

Recently I had the good fortune and humbling honor to speak on Veterans Day. Now I am the unlikeliest of such people to do so. During the era of Vietnam, the war in which I would have been called upon for duty, my lottery number rolled up at 312. I decided to wait it out, so I claim no special bravery or any unselfish patriotism. Thankfully, Veterans Day gives people like me the chance to remember again all who sacrificed everything for freedom’s ring. It also gives people like me a chance to say thank you.

We commemorate Veterans Day because of this same day in 1921. On that day, a soldier whose name is known only to his family and to God was delivered in a flag-covered coffin in an inornate carriage to Arlington National Cemetery. He came in the same carriage as Abraham Lincoln. This unknown hero had given his life for others in the trenches of Western Europe. His nameless soul

was delivered that day, as the Army New Service (ANS) Web site puts it, “on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month.”

From that day to this, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier reminds all Americans that freedom, that ideal we love and cherish and is indeed the very lifeblood of our country’s *raison d’être* — its reason for being — never comes cheap. The price paid for freedom has been with the blood, the sweat and the tears of this country’s young men and women. Our Lord reminds us in John 15:13 just how extraordinary this is. “Greater love has no one than this,” he said, “that a man lay down his life for his friends.” The cost of freedom is great; but the cost of slavery, oppression and tyranny, greater still.

We celebrate those who served on Veterans Day regardless of where they served. And our veterans served everywhere. They served in the hedgerows of Normandy, in the 38th parallel, in the dense,

hot jungles of Vietnam, in the solitary places of Korea and in the blinding sands of Desert Storm. It is to these men and women we pay tribute, and it is to them we say thanks for their service, not only to this country, but to each and everyone of us who luxuriate in the freedom they bought with a price. They helped us understand that, *Igitur qui desiderat pacem, praeparet bellum*, that is, if you want peace you must, unfortunately, be prepared for war. They bought us this right, as the ANS puts it, through the flak of Berlin, the treacherous seas in Solomon Slots or Mig Alley. They bought us this right on the beaches of Guadalcanal and at Inchon.

The sacrifices of our men and women in uniform know no bounds, even when they returned to civilian duties. One such story recounted on the ANS Web site sums it all up. William Feehan served in the Korean War. When he returned home, he demon-

strated in civilian life the fearlessness and self-effacement he learned in war.

Feehan entered the New York Fire Department in 1959, rising eventually to First Commissioner. On the morning of September 11th, 2001, Feehan responded to the scene of the World Trade Center in Manhattan. Although well past retirement at the age of 71, and heedless of personal safety, he rushed into the towering inferno. Like so many other firefighters, many of whom had also served previously in the armed forces, Feehan died saving others. "Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

Let us now praise these heroic men and women by saying thank you.

In an effort to recognize the vision of our veterans' efforts, we at Dacus are trying to capture their oral histories via the Veterans History Project (for more see the Web site: www.loc.gov/folklife/vets/).

We have interviewed numerous veterans, but we know we are missing many others. If you're a veteran, call us at 803-323-2131 and tell whoever answers that you want to talk about the Veterans History Project. If you're not a veteran but know someone who is, please help them get in touch with us. We need your help. While the project showcases first-hand accounts from the following 20th century wars, World War I (1914-1920), World

War II (1939-1946), Korean War (1950-1955), Vietnam War (1961-1975) and Persian Gulf War (1990-1995), other accounts are eagerly sought.

We seek civilians who were actively involved in supporting war efforts (such as war industry workers, USO workers, flight instructors, WACs medical volunteers, etc.). We want to hear your valuable stories, too.

In closing, let me say a special word to all those veterans of one war in particular, Vietnam. Many in my generation behaved badly during this war, not only by refusing to go, but also by ridiculing those who did. Moreover, when these men and women did return, they were treated contemptibly by many who had stayed behind and enjoyed not only the warm, safe comforts of liberty, but the permissiveness of an over-indulgent nation.

It's no secret that many Vietnam veterans were spit upon, cursed, shouted at, even attacked when they returned home. Indeed, the matter reached so great a pitch that service men and women were counseled *not* to wear their uniforms home.

So to those men and women who served in Vietnam, who returned scared, sometimes in obvious physical ways, sometimes in ways that remain obscure to the human eye but fully debilitating still, we say thanks. On behalf of my generation that either did not serve, or would not serve, let

us take this time to praise these honorable men and women. This was not a war of their making. Yet when duty called, "thou must," many of them, but youths themselves and hardly of voting age, answered, "I can." I say thank you, and I apologize on behalf my generation that did not grant a well deserved hero's welcome. Theirs, too, was no greater love.

Take up our quarrel
with the foe:

To you from failing
hands we throw

The torch; be yours to
hold it high.

If ye break faith with
us who die

We shall not sleep,
though poppies grow

In Flanders fields.

Note: Historical background for this text comes from www4.army.mil/ocpa/speeches/index.html. Adapted from a talk delivered on Veterans Day, Nov. 11, 2004.

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Dean of Library Services

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