

'Bent Miles

"My Two Cents"



What are Heroes?

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Publisher

The other day on the news, it was reported that folks in today's military are not getting the medals they have in other conflicts or wars. The report sounded as if it were an entitlement.

In this article I'm going where others seem to fear to tread. In order to stave off some hate mail and in an attempt to clarify my position, as a patriot, I offer the below.

I'm a Vietnam veteran and was there during some of the bloodiest time of our involvement, TET offensive of 1968. When we returned, we had no parades; we faced peace

marches and suffered accusations of, "baby killers" and treated as if we had some control over initiating and ending of hostilities in Southeast Asia. That, of course, could not have been any further from reality. It has always been the lot of the soldier to do as he is told. He is often expected to do this without question.

Our soldiers have been and continue to be some of the most benevolent humanitarians in the world and I'm immensely proud to have served and proud of our military.

However, I do have a rub with the military leaders and our news media. The term hero has and continues to be used indiscriminately.

Today's Politian is jumping onto the popular, "Our Troops" bandwagon for, what I'm afraid are ulterior motives. Today's military leaders are all too quick to render similar homage to "our heroes".

I just love how mundane, inexperienced reporters try to lead a discussion into a topic for which they have absolutely no experience: being a soldier.

Yesterday, they jumped onto what they were sure to be a Pulitzer Prize winning story. The Coast Guard had challenged and fired upon an unmarked boat for violating the waters on the Potomac River near the federal buildings.

After being caught up in the initial intrigue, as anyone else, I wondered if

it might be a training exercise.

After making a huge deal out of it and speculating to the point of milking the cow dry, the media must have gotten word that it was a training exercise. So, to soften the blow to their ego, they pondered the thought, “Could it be an exercise”. Then, words to the effect, “If it is an exercise what dolt would do such a thing on 9-11?” were forthcoming.

Knowing they had egg on their face, they then became indignant at how anyone in the government could approve of such and act during the time the president was presiding over 9-11 proceedings. “How could, they, the military possibly do such a thing without clearing it through the media. Don’t they know how important we are? How could they make such a decision without first clearing it with us?”

This is the same ignorance with which they approach the topic of heroes. The military has very specific standards for conveying each level of awards to the armed forces members. This should not be altered because of the ignorance on the part of the news

media or because some general wants to up the reenlistment.

What does the term hero mean? In all my time in the military, I wrote up only one service member for valor. This is what separates heroes from the rest of us. They risk life and limb for someone else.

Regardless of what they call our sports players, “football heroes, baseball heroes”, none of them fit the bill. None of them risk their all for someone else. There is no valor in the multi millions of dollars they take home.

Now, we are going to get to the part where few dare to tread. Just because I put on a uniform did not make me a hero. Just because my “friends and neighbors” decided I needed to be shipped off into harm’s way—some friends—did not make me a hero.

A dear friend and colleague of mine, a retired sergeant major, once said to me, “Mr. Tucker, you know that just putting on the uniform makes them heroes!” Sounds good, but it is just not so. Heroes are few and far in between and that is the way it should be. In a time of great need,

they—in character or out of character—somehow commit an act of great valor, often times not even recognized and definitely not for the sole intent on receiving a medal.

As I reminded my friend, how many times had he and I served on court marshal boards of rapists, robbers, drug users, and drug dealers, and—yes—even murders in uniform.

So, yes, it takes more than being in an unsafe place—most of us have been there—putting on the uniform, or wanting an award to be a hero. So, the next time you use that word, please remember for whom it is reserved, those who committed an unselfish act of valor for someone else. Those of us just doing our jobs, no matter how rough or dangerous they are do not qualify.