

Our veterans



**Philip
Dine**

I never served a day in uniform, but I have always admired those who have served or do serve.

The affinity began with my father, who led an infantry unit in fierce battles during World War II, though like others in the Greatest Generation he rarely spoke about it. They had done their duty, accomplished the mission, and they returned home and simply tried to pursue their careers and take care of their families.

I watched with pride, though, as he put on his crisp Army uniform every so often and left home to do his reserve training, or when he traveled periodically to Boston University to teach communications to Air Force officers. Or, later, as he put on the

uniform and, retired both from the military and journalism, would march in a Fourth of July parade.

The fact that he rarely spoke about the war, and almost never about his own role in it, only increased my respect—and my curiosity.

My second interaction with the military occurred during my time as a journalist, which broadened my understanding of the service and sacrifice of our men and women in uniform. I had the opportunity to cover conflicts behind the Iron Curtain and then in Kosovo, to report from a damaged Pentagon on 9/11, to cover the global war on terror and homeland security and our counter-intel activities, to report on wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan and to interview ordinary people in neighboring countries who were affected by those conflicts.

It was fascinating, if sometimes harrowing—whether living in Army tents in the Kuwaiti desert with U.S. soldiers about to enter Iraq; spending time on an aircraft carrier where for security reasons my stories could only carry a dateline of somewhere in the Arabian Sea, though I knew we were right off the coast of Iran; flying in a military helicopter over remote Helmand province, from where Osama bin Laden had planned the terror attacks on our country—but most of all it was revealing in terms of the courage, focus and skills of those I was writing about.

To be clear, I knew full well that you could combine my experiences over two decades and together they wouldn't approach the valor, bravery and patriotism reflected in just one day's service of a single soldier, sailor, airman or Marine. On the contrary, the point is that those experiences helped me better appreciate what was required of them to meet the unending challenges, and how they unflinchingly did so.

Which brings me to NALC, where I have the fortune to work for and with letter carriers, who uniformly (pun intended) respect the job and the public service aspect—on top of which so many are wearing your second uniform for our country.

I have the pleasure of conversing with hundreds or perhaps more of you about where you served, what you did, what it meant to you and how it translates into your work at the Postal Service and your role in NALC. Better still, I've had the chance to observe all of that play out in action, through your singular focus on completing the mission, your determination to overcome any obstacles, the manner in which you exert leadership, or the situational awareness that often leads to heroic actions on the route, including saving residents from fires or criminal threats, health crises or car crashes.

At every level of this union (carriers, activists or leaders) I know the odds are high that I will encounter people who have risked all to keep this nation free—after all, more than 1 in 5 of you have done so—and that I will not only hear intriguing tales but also will emerge ever more informed about the military and how it functions.

The NALC benefits immeasurably from your presence, and in particular the sense of cohesion and determination to get the task done that you bring with you. Some of this is described in ways far more profound than I ever could by our veterans themselves—men and women alike, active or retired, from across our nation—elsewhere in this *Postal Record*. If you retain anything about veterans from this magazine, let it be the words of Jennefer and Ben and Linda, of Ted and Dawn and the other vets.

To all our NALC military veterans, thank you for your past and present service, the example you set for so many others, your attention both to the smallest details and the big picture, and your friendship. You have made our craft better, our union stronger, and our country safer.

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