

Sea Stories

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I have several books in my library that are collections of anecdotes and sea stories. Some are memories of military member from World War II. Others are stories from Vietnam veterans. Others are amazing occurrences from the Civil War. All of them are valuable collections to me.

One thing that I own that I treasure greatly is a series of cassettes. My father sat down with my mother's father and interviewed him about his childhood and his life in the military. He joined the Navy in 1928 and retired in 1952. He was stationed at Pearl Harbor when it was bombed by the Japanese in 1941. He flew the Berlin Airlift at the end of the war.

One reason I cherish these tapes is that my own grandsons will be able to listen to their great-great-grandfather tell his stories about his life in the Navy in his own words and in his own voice. His stories won't be lost to the past. Instead, they will remain an active part of my family and military heritage for generations to come.

One sad thing that I see far too often is a grieving family at the graveside of a veteran or military retiree and hear them talk about how they wish they had either gotten their loved one to write or record their stories. Now, as the remaining family members get older, there is the greater likelihood that those stories will be lost to posterity.

I am very grateful that our nation has one day a year when we specifically pause to honor and remember our veterans. It is an opportunity that we can express our appreciation to them for their service and sacrifice. It is also a chance for us to pause and listen to their stories.

I believe that one of the greatest ways we can honor our veterans is to ask them about their service. No one served in a job that is unimportant, though many times it seems so. Each person performs a necessary task, whether training another, cooking meals, or putting rounds on target.

A few years ago, my wife and I were in Norfolk, Virginia to attend the wedding of a friend. We went out for breakfast and saw a group of Marines in uniform having breakfast together. They had finished their meal and were preparing to leave when an older gentleman came in wearing a ball cap that read "Retired Marine" on the front. He came in alone and ordered his breakfast. As he sat down alone, the Marines came to him and asked if he minded if they had a cup of coffee and joined him for a few minutes. Of course, he welcomed them.

As my wife and I finished our breakfasts and left, the Marines, young and old, were enjoying each other's company and carrying on in the best tradition of the Corps – the younger ones were learning a part of their heritage and honoring the older Marine with their attention and respect.

Honor a veteran, not just on Veteran's Day, but whenever you see one. Ask about their stories and then give them you undivided attention. They have earned that and much, much more.

Semper Fi in the Lord and I hope to see you in Church on Sunday.