

Generations

Honoring our veterans

Today is Veterans Day, America's annual tribute to pay homage and honor to all military veterans who served in the armed forces.

Only one day a year doesn't seem enough to thank all the brave, courageous, gallant men and women who left the safety and security of their homes to fight for freedom and democracy in all parts of the world.

Recently, someone asked me to define what I thought true courage was and I naturally first thought about all the veterans and current service personnel who wore and continue to wear a uniform in an effort to protect us all.

But, delving deeper, exactly what is courage? Did Nelson Mandela sum it up best when he said: "I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear."

Or was it perhaps America's Mark Twain, whose wisdom gave us, "Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear, not absence of fear."

Do we all exhibit courage every day of our lives when we open our eyes from a restful sleep and prepare ourselves for the rigors of the day? We travel to our jobs, some on busy interstates, some only a mile or two away, and the fear is somewhat quelled as we listen to our favorite songs on the radio. But will we make it to where we're going safely?

At work, we do the best job we can, but self-doubt chips away at confidence, and the battle between the two compels us to buckle down and conquer doubt no matter how great the depth of fear.

And then we come home from work, embrace the warmth of family and friends and, lying in our beds pre-

paring for sleep, we challenge ourselves by asking what we accomplished that day. Did we do it right? Did we do enough? Did we do too much?



Peg
DeMarco

Courage battles fear, and it comes in all forms, all shapes, all sizes, and it's measured in all ways. But since this column is dedicated to our veterans, here are two very different examples of courage during World War II that I thought best illustrate courage.

First, the name Audie Leon Murphy might not be familiar to you, but your mother/father, grandmother/grandfather will know the name. Murphy was the son of poor Texas sharecroppers, served in World War II, later became an actor, and even made a hit movie about his life.

Beginning his service as an Army private, he quickly rose to the enlisted rank of staff sergeant, was given a battlefield commission as second lieutenant, was wounded three times, and fought in nine major campaigns across the European theater.

He also rose to national fame as the most decorated U.S. combat soldier of World War II. Among his 33 awards and decorations was the Medal of Honor, the highest military award for bravery that can be given to any individual in the U.S. for "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty."

What Murphy accomplished during his service is most significant and probably will never be repeated by another soldier, given today's high-tech type of warfare.

Could there be an equal to

Murphy when one measures courage?

Consider Desmond Doss.

Never heard of him? Not many people have, and I didn't know about him either until I read his story.

Doss' religion forbade him from carrying a gun or threatening another human life, which was inconvenient when he was drafted into the World War II. To accommodate Doss as a conscientious objector, the Army placed him in a non-combatant position.

Naturally, Doss became the target of ridicule from the other soldiers and fought off inner turmoil as well as the taunts of others around him.

He was serving as a field medic in Okinawa when the Japanese attacked his unit on top of a cliff, cutting down nearly every man. Doss quickly rigged up a stretcher that could be lowered by a series of ropes and pulleys to the ground below. Then, by himself and under fire, he retrieved each soldier in his unit one at a time and lowered them to safety.

President Harry Truman said it was 75 men whom Doss pulled to safety when he presented him the Medal of Honor, but Doss, who did the carrying, insists it was closer to 50. Of course, it didn't matter about the number because it took amazing courage for Doss to do what he did, even for one soldier.

So, although Murphy and Doss did completely different things to show us true courage, what each of them also showed us was an act of self-sacrifice, and that's what every veteran has done and continues to do for all of us.

Thank you.

Peg DeMarco is a Morganton resident who writes a weekly features column for The News Herald. Contact her at pegdemarco@earthlink.net.