



Dad & Dave: Lessons from Two Soldiers

By Dee Dee Raap

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I am the daughter of a soldier who fought in WWII from 1941 - 1945. I am the mother-in-law of a soldier who is currently on his second deployment to Iraq. Nearly 60 years separate their births, but these two men both hold a very special place in my heart this Veterans Day.

Dad was a first generation American born to Norwegian immigrants, and a proud member of America's Greatest Generation. He died four years ago, at age 81, and never met my son-in-law, a member of America's Millennial Generation. I wish Dad could have met 1st Lt. David Halpern. He would have been very impressed by his commitment, skill and leadership. Both joined the Army as young men – Dad saw it as job during the Depression, but Dave, raised in a family with military traditions dating back to the Civil War, saw it as a career.

Dad was a ranger in the Pacific Rim, landing in New Guinea, leaving the war in May of 1945 from the Philippines. Dave served his first Iraq tour in an area known as The Triangle of Death, and is in northeast Baghdad for this tour. Both Dad and Dave fell in love with women very special to me: my mom, and my daughter. Dad and Mom were married after the war, and Dave and Kelsey were married between deployments.

Both men served with honor. I played with Dad's medals – bronze stars and Purple Heart – as a little girl. Today, I wear the emblem of the 101st Airborne Division around my neck on a piece of metal engraved with the Screaming Eagles mascot on the front and "Protect Us Saint Michael Patron Saint Air Assault" on the back. Dad taught me patriotism, honor, and an unquestioning love for the flag. Dave reinforces all three.

Regardless of the generation in which a soldier serves, a soldier's family makes a huge sacrifice. While training for the second deployment, Dave would call the parents of each new soldier to discuss their son, applaud the job the parents had done, and assure the parents that he would do everything in his power to bring their son home, alive, from Iraq.

One day, Dave called a mother living in the south to tell her he was honored to have her son in his unit. A few minutes into the conversation, the soldier's mom started to cry, and said, "You tell your Mama she raised you right."

When Dad served in WWII, this country was bound together by sacrifice. One of biggest differences between WWII and Iraq is the lack of sacrifice by those who aren't fighting. Unless we are kicked in our gut by the fact that someone we love is trying to avoid IEDs, dodging bullets, trying to make sense out of a situation where the Iraqi Parliament takes August off because it's hot, we're not affected.

We sit at dinner, drink fine wine with friends. We go to the theater and to concerts, to football and baseball games, all while Dave and his soldiers wear 50+ pound Kevlar vests designed to keep them safe.

In Tennessee at the end of August, I wanted to feel something physical about Dave's world, so I tried on his Kevlar vest. It's weight stunned me—a vest that only reached my waist weighed 50+ pounds— and made me appreciate the physical shape soldiers have to be in to serve. Imagine wearing it in combat, going house to house, fighting insurgents. Imagine wearing it as the thermometer climbs to 129. Imagine wearing it when speed and agility mean the difference between life and death.

Just as our soldiers give up 15 months of their lives on their second, third and sometimes fourth deployments, somehow our lives should be affected as well.

On this Veterans Day, moms, dads, wives, husbands, family and friends across America love these American soldiers who are fighting in Iraq and other countries. They still suffer the pain of not knowing, the fear of death or injury. Times are different from WWII, but today's soldiers are still America's soldiers. Maybe the least we can do is support the families of our soldiers and be there for them as they support their soldiers.

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About Dee Dee Raap:

Dee Dee Raap is a service expert, national speaker and consultant who loves to help people make their journey great. Dee Dee believes we all serve, and how we serve, lead and live is guided by the authentic, timeless values inspired by our moms and other key people. Putting those values to practice every day not only makes service great, but helps organizations grow and retain employees, a result Dee Dee's clients and audiences know well.

For information on authentic inspiration to make service, leadership and life great, go to www.DeDeeRaap.com.

Congratulations on making your journey great!

