

# VETERANS OF AMERICA I SALUTE YOU

BY RICK RUBIN

Annually, on November 11, it is our duty as Patriotic Citizens to honor American Veterans of All Our Wars, the brave men and women, whether clerk-typists in Korea or expert infantrymen in Kansas, who have actually or potentially defended our American way of life.

Personally, I feel this day is one of the more significant of our American holidays, and each year I try to pause and remember one or more specific groups of Veterans. I say specific because there are more than 25 million Veterans in the country who, together with their immediate families, make up two-fifths of the population. You can't salute them all at once. A person needs something more concrete.

For example, one group I delight in honoring is the Veterans of the 25th U.S. Infantry Regiment (Colored), six of whom had won the Medal of Honor in the Philippines. On August 3 of that year a dozen or so members of this organization, angered by the treatment they had received from the (white) citizens of nearby Brownsville, Texas, made what has been described (by white people at least) as a shooting sortie into the town, killing one citizen.

Whether any man of the 25th Regiment had ever been killed by the citizens of Brownsville, I can't say, but I am reasonably certain that no one had ever been convicted of doing so.

The soldiers returned to their post unobserved, and during the subsequent official investigation not one of the 160 men of the three Colored companies would inform on his fellow soldiers. On November 5, President Theodore Roosevelt discharged "without honor" every man of the three companies, observing that if no one admitted guilt all of them would have to pay the penalty.

The discharge without honor meant all pensions and payments were forfeited, including those of the six Medal of Honor winners, and none of the men was ever reinstated or given a pension. And so, each year I salute the Veterans of Brownsville.

Would it seem so unsophisticated if I salute the first Americans to die under Hitler's bullets, to be blown to heroes' graves by Mussolini's airplanes? American Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade of the Spanish Civil War, I salute you on Veterans Day.

I salute those other unlucky Veterans, Communists and Socialists, German-American Bundists, the homosexuals and psychotics and other disreputable types who were drafted into the Army in time of war and were then, though not actually convicted of any crime, discharged under circumstances less than "Honorable" to hunt for jobs as best they knew how.

I salute the Veterans of Coxey's Army, who in 1894 marched on Washington, D.C. to petition for relief legislation and bonuses for Veterans, but were instead rushed by guards, shot and injured, and saw their leaders arrested for the crime of trampling on the grass.

And I do not forget to honor the World War 1 Veterans Bonus Army Marchers of 1932. Several policemen were injured while evicting them from vacant government buildings where they were living, and in the process killed two of their number. The Army was called in by President Herbert Hoover, and led by General Douglas MacArthur, advanced in full battle dress with machineguns, tanks, tear gas, drawn sabers and fixed bayonets.

General MacArthur observed the marchers were "animated by the essence of revolution" and further commented that if President Hoover had "let it go another week, I believe the institutions of our government would have been severely threatened."

So, to be fair, I salute not only the Bonus Army of 1932 but also the soldiers who attacked them (and subsequently became Veterans themselves), and further I salute Veteran General MacArthur.

I salute the Negro combat troops of World War 1 who served with French Divisions overseas so as not to cause trouble and won many citations for bravery under fire — perhaps the only Veterans of our history who not only had to learn foreign weapons and foreign military organization, but even a foreign language just to serve their own Army in time of war.

And I further salute some who returned home from World War 1 and were among the 70 Negroes, several still in uniform, who were lynched during the first postwar year. Even if they had learned uppity ways from those alien Frenchmen, they were American Veterans none the less.

Of course the first Veterans I hail each year are my own comrades-in-arms of the Korean 'Police Action' who, if they were less than totally successful as soldiers, were less successful still at draft dodging — although many no doubt now march in the parades of November 11.

Then I move on to other defenders of the American Dream: the Nisei members of the 442nd Infantry Regiment and the 100th Battalion, who voluntarily joined the Army out of concentration camps across California, Idaho and Utah, won five Distinguished Unit Citations with the 5th Army in Italy and the 7th Army in the Rhineland, and are said to be the most decorated Regimental Combat Team in American history.

Then they returned home to such places as Hood River, Oregon to find the American Legion did not want a bunch of lousy Japs repossessing their lawful homes and farms. The government they had served voluntarily and well was prepared to pay depreciated 1945 prices for their cars, equipment and other possession confiscated in 1942.

I salute the American Legionnaires who castrated, hanged then shot full of holes one Wesley Everest from a railroad bridge near Centralia, Washington on Armistice Day 1919, and thereby defended the American Way of Life against the 8-hour day and other such foreign inspired 'Wobbly' (IWW) demands.

I salute sharp-eyed American Legionnaire Homer Chaillaux who reviewed a Legion pamphlet titled *Americanism: What Is It?* Legionnaire Chaillaux found the pamphlet contained too much emphasis on freedom of speech and too little on the fundamentals of religion. In addition, the paper was made in Japan, and the American Eagle on the cover was printed in red. He forced the pamphlet, clearly un-American, to be withdrawn.



PRAIRIE FIRE

I salute the Military Order of the World War, a group of former WW1 officers who, in their *National Bulletin* reported that the American Civil Liberties Union actually "believes in rampant free speech."

I salute as well a man who, as Colonel, shared with Ethan Allen leadership of the expedition that captured Fort Ticonderoga in 1775; who later that year led the capture of the fort at St. Johns, and in 1776 almost captured Quebec; who attacked the British on Lake Champlain with a fleet of leaky small boats, and in 1777 repulsed an attempted invasion of Connecticut; who was wounded in the thick of fighting at Saratoga while leading his troops to victory; who commanded Philadelphia in 1778, West Point in 1780, and went on to become one of America's best known Veterans. Colonel Benedict Arnold, I salute you.

I hail Private Edward Donald Slovik, called 'Eddie', one of thousands of American soldiers convicted of deserting in the face of the enemy during World War 2, but the only one since 1864 to be executed for doing so. On January 31, 1945 he was shot to death by a firing squad and rushed into Veterandom.

I salute Colonel Charles R. Forbes, commander of the Veterans Bureau under President Warren Harding who, after Harding's death, was found to have operated a gigantic swindle which milked the Bureau of more than \$200 million in less than two years. At a time when disabled Veterans in hospitals lacked bandages, bedding and drugs, Colonel Forbes condemned carloads of these items and sold them off a fraction of their cost.

I salute, too, the Veterans of U.S. Military Actions other than declared wars; Hawaii 1893, China 1900, Panama 1903, Dominican Republic 1904, Nicaragua 1911, Mexico 1914, Haiti 1915, Mexico 1916, Dominican Republic 1916... who got just as dead, wounded just as painfully, but by some oversight got no GI Bill, no homecoming parade, no Veterans' special bonuses or even so much as a casualty statistic in the *World Almanac*.

I salute the men who fought to destroy the dictatorship in Cuba, the Anti-Batista fighters, now no more able to get a good job than those earlier anti-fascists, the men of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. I salute the Bay of Pigs invaders who, if they weren't either Americans or in the American Army, at least took our pay and did our work, however unsuccessfully. I salute the former officers and men of the Revolutionary War who participated in Captain Daniel Shay's Rebellion of 1786, an attempt to overthrow the government of Massachusetts.

I salute the members of an alleged special group that is supposed to have spent World War 2 high up in Colorado, having been adjudged by the Army as too subversive to be of any use but not subversive enough to kill or kick out or not draft in the first place.

I salute Veterans of the Revolution who knew it was right and proper for a people to throw off the shackles of an unjust government, and I salute the men of the Union Army in the Civil War who knew that it was wrong and unlawful for a people to throw off the shackles of an unjust government.

I salute American Veterans who invaded Latin American countries to protect them from outside intervention then invaded again to intervene on behalf of American property rights.

In fact, I stand ready to salute any group or individual Veteran who fits my peculiarly warped view of defenders of the American Dream. I salute those first Americans to die for their country, the American Indians. I salute those Pilgrims, Puritans and Protestants who killed them and were killed by them, and thus became the second Americans to die for their country. I salute the soldiers, sailors and airmen (and women) in Vietnam who died for some country. I am not quite sure whose. Nor do I slight the American boys in the Congo, in Korea, in Formosa, Spain and Morocco, nor the military advisory groups in dozens or perhaps even hundreds of other countries, all dying or at least ready to die, without benefit or declared war or GI Bill of Rights, in defense of freedom and the local USIS library.

Veterans of America, myself included, I salute you!

Rick Rubin is a Portland artist and writer. This article was among *The Best of the Realist*, printed by Running Press of Philadelphia, and was originally published in *Realist* 71, November, 1966.

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