



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

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So here we are again: another Memorial Day and yet another holiday weekend rife with endless sale circulars, backyard barbecues and movie premieres. For many the holiday's true meaning gets lost in all that noise. That's why for several years I've used this column to remind you – to beg you, really – to please take part in some of our local Memorial Day ceremonies and parades. I don't mean stop at a red light and wave from the car. I mean get out and walk with them, talk with them, and thank them. Events are usually organized by veterans themselves so they are simple but meaningful ways to show our appreciation. Best of all, when you shake their hands and hear their stories, you come to better appreciate how blessed we really are.

In that light, allow me to share two items that drove that point home for me. This week I had the privilege of joining the Long Island Air Force Association in honoring 39 local Vietnam veterans at the Cradle of Aviation Museum. Along with Major

General Anthony Kropp (retired) and Colonel Michael Bank, Commanding Officer of the 106th Rescue Wing-Air National Guard, I presented them with Vietnam 50th Anniversary Commemorative Medals. But what struck me was that none of these men gave a darn about what medals I hung on their necks or any of the hoopla. Instead they were somber in the face of their memories but truly humbled that their countrymen recognize their sacrifice. A recognition that is shamefully long overdue.

Then some of you from the neighborhood may already know Dr. Lewis Licht, a Marine Corps veteran who I've nominated for the New York State Veterans Hall of Fame. He flew 27 combat sorties as a radio-gunner, providing air support to Allied troops fighting in the Pacific during World War II. For his brave and devoted service, Corporal Licht earned the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal with three gold service stars, the Navy Unit Commendation Medal, the American Campaign Medal, the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with two bronze service stars, the World War II Victory Medal, the Philippine Presidential Unit Citation, the Philippine Liberation Medal with one bronze service star, the New York State Conspicuous Service Cross with four silver devices, and the New York State Conspicuous Service Star. You get the idea. He's 92 now and the epitome of a real "hometown hero," and he's ours.

Sacrifice and honor are not dead, but it is threatened when people, especially young people, are unaware of the sacrifice that came before them. Our founding father, President George Washington wrote,

The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive the Veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their nation.

I'll end this column as I always do, with a reminder that when our vets were called, there was no debate or hair-splitting. They went into the battle because we asked and they went honorably. I hope we can each take a few minutes this beautiful weekend to say thank you.

To all my veteran friends, and to the nearly 140,000 veterans that call Long Island home, my family and I thank you. And I wish all our neighbors a safe, peace-filled Memorial Day.