



## WE HONOR VETERANS

### **Hospice of the Panhandle Reflections of a Veteran Volunteer**

Memorial Day 2015 provides an opportunity to reflect on several significant milestone anniversaries of wars in which Americans have fought and died. These include the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the American Civil War, the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II and the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War. Unfortunately, many Americans only think of Memorial Day as the “kick off” for summer. While there is debate as to when and where Memorial Day was first celebrated it is generally agreed that General John A. Logan of the Grand Army of the Republic designated May 30, 1868 “as a day for strewing flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of our comrades who died in defense of their country, and whose bodies now lie in almost every city, village or hamlet churchyard in the land...”

Today this remembrance has been extended by many to all who have served in the defense of our country. In one sense, at the Hospice of the Panhandle every day may be considered Memorial Day. A key focus of Hospice is to identify and provide loving care and assistance for those who have served our country. Hospice of the Panhandle honor Veterans is a collaborative program of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and local hospices who have joined together for a pioneering program focusing on respectful inquiry, compassionate listening and grateful acknowledgement of those who have served our country and can benefit from hospice services. Hospice of the Panhandle is proud to participate in this program.

As in all aspects of hospice work, volunteers play an integral role in providing these services to Veterans and their families. Upon entering the hospice each Veteran is offered a Veteran recognition service which is provided by a Veteran volunteer. It consists of a certificate of appreciation and an American Flag pin. The patient and family are also offered the services of a Veteran volunteer who is available for friendly Veteran-to-Veteran visits, transportation or 11<sup>th</sup> hour services.

Participation by the author of this article in the program is very rewarding. It has provided the opportunity to hear and experience many memories shared by those who have served our country. These include a Veteran of the Battle of the Bulge; one who spent 44 months in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, France and Germany (this soldier was able to meet Pope Pius XII, after he

and some friends “borrowed” a jeep for a side visit to Rome); a Vietnam Vet who served in the battle portrayed in the movie “We Were Soldiers”; a nurse who cared for wounded soldiers in England; a Navy Veteran who served on the USS Hornet, the aircraft carrier that launched Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle’s raiders over Japan. The most memorable visit for Hospice of the Panhandle was with Mac, a World War II Army Veteran. Ironically the hospice had selected June 4<sup>th</sup> to present his certificate and flag pin. On June 4<sup>th</sup> 1944 he was in England having completed 20 months training for D-Day. Mac also spoke French. Just prior to loading on to his ship he was asked to translate for two officers one of whom was General Dwight Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander! Mac went on to land on Omaha beach, climbed a cliff and fought his way to Paris. He received the Croix de Guerre for his service.

An additional service is offered for the families of Veterans who die in the hospice inpatient Facility located in Kearneysville. A Veteran volunteer is called and comes to the facility, meets with the family and conducts an Honor Ceremony in which the deceased’s body is covered with an American Flag. The volunteer then leads a procession from the room to the exit of the facility. The flag is then folded and words of appreciation and condolence are offered.

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