

Township of Verona
Veterans' Day Observance
Tuesday, November 11, 2025
Mayor's Remarks
Dr. Christopher Tamburro

On December 18, 1944, just before Patton's Third Army moved toward Belgium and the Battle of the Bulge, a 22-year-old armored infantry soldier wrote to his young wife: "I love you Darling and miss you dreadfully. Don't worry about me for all will be okay. You are with me every single second! God bless and keep you ever happy and successful and always loving me as I've you, which is with all my heart and soul. I love you, darling."

During World War II, my paternal grandfather, Corporal Donald C. Huber, like many of his fellow soldiers, was a prolific writer. He composed hundreds of letters like this one to his young wife, my grandmother, his darling Jackie, all of which she kept as prized possessions. He was not permitted to share his location or details of his assignments, so he would note "somewhere in Europe" as his present address. The censors would redact any details that did not meet Army standards, resulting in awkward black boxes on very personal correspondence. The restrictions resulted in my grandfather sharing stories of day-to-day activities and his reflections on the war without providing sensitive details. However, he was able to communicate extensively on one topic: his passionate and undying love for his young wife.

Despite attending different high schools in East Orange, the two found each other and had been dating as teenagers. When the United States entered the war and called up its young men by the millions, my grandfather dutifully attended basic and advanced training as an infantryman. In an act of true love, my grandmother traveled by train from New Jersey to Louisiana to marry my grandfather prior to his deployment overseas. Their affection only grew while they were separated by an ocean and the harsh realities of war. Despite circumstances

being against them, the young couple maintained a strong bond that would anchor their relationship for the next 65 years.

It was love that kept Corporal Huber strong and focused. His letters revealed that like the rest of the 20-year-olds in the midst of armed conflict, that he was nervous and scared, worried about what the next days and months would bring. But his affection for his wife transcended these concerns, a constant in the face of dramatic uncertainties. From thousands of miles away, Jackie provided support, encouragement, and a vision for their future life together when this seemingly impervious obstacle would relent. Don and Jackie's story was so beautifully representative of the millions of couples who waited patiently to be reunited – who persevered until peace could end their separation and who fought for their cherished families. While this was a powerful motivation, it represents only one of the ways that our servicemembers show their love and commitment.

The sacrifice of the young infantryman and his wife, like those of so many veterans and their spouses, was made for love of something much greater than the young couple. Like his contemporaries, Corporal Huber possessed a deep devotion to his country, which he held deeply for the remainder of his 91 years of life. Like so many of the soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, and coastguardsmen in battlefield and support roles across the globe, he recognized that the United States offered a promise to its citizens and the world that the country would defend democracy and freedom against those who threatened our shared values.

As a civilian, my grandfather lived the American dream, working diligently to build a successful career and support a beautiful family while being civically engaged. He was a member of the greatest generation, one which changed our country forever through their industry, strength, and common values. The veterans respected the American flag and what it

stood for – the greatness and promise of their country. They were church volunteers, scout leaders, and coaches who mentored youth for decades to come. Like the legions of servicemembers before them, these veterans identified and solved problems in their communities, establishing volunteer fire departments, rescue squads, and relief organizations. They inspired future warfighters and peacekeepers. Soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, and coastguardsmen from every time of war and peace since have set the tone for this country. Despite 80 years since the end of World War II, our Veterans continue to exude this love of country and the promise of America.

While fondness and loyalty for family and country bound our servicemembers mentally and spiritually, the greatest love that many have demonstrated during wartime was with their actions for one another. In the most tense of moments, while they were in combat for their country, they were truly fighting for the men and women with whom they served.

On June 4, 1971, U.S. Army Staff Sergeant Jon Robert Cavaiani woke up to his entire camp on Hickory Hill, north of the Khe Sanh Combat Base near the edge of the Demilitarized Zone, under fire from a major North Vietnamese Force. “Without regard for his own safety, he put himself in harm’s way several times to move around the camp’s perimeter to rally and direct his platoon’s return fire, using any weapon he could find to join them.”¹ When it became apparent that they could not hold the hill, superiors ordered them to evacuate. With Sgt. John R. Jones, another special operations soldier, he ensured that the men loaded in helicopters. The two remained behind to destroy sensitive equipment rather than risk it falling into the hands of the enemy. They were forced to stay overnight with a few of the indigenous Montagnard soldiers who remained. After digging in for an attack the next morning, they waited. When the time

¹ Cavaiani account source: Lange, Katie. “Medal of Honor Monday: Army Sgt. Major Jon Robert Cavaiani.” U.S. Department of War: DOD News, June 5, 2023.

came, the group could not repel the advancing enemy. Cavaiani ordered the remaining men to escape, then used a machine gun to slow down the advance of the other forces. He was able to ensure that everyone escaped with the exception of his friend Jones who was shot and killed while trying to surrender. Despite being struck several times himself, he managed to escape for 11 days, but was captured and endured as a prisoner of war for the next two years.

This extraordinary act of bravery was at its heart one of devotion – love for his fellow soldiers. Sergeant Major Cavaiani’s story represents one of so many both documented and private which bind together the members of our armed forces during times of utter hell. And Cavaiani’s was not his only remarkable act of love. He continued his service to our country in the special forces and became a motivational speaker for veterans’ groups when he retired, always exhibiting commitment and care and recognizing a lifelong duty to all who served.

It is vital that we respect our veterans as examples of love, sacrifice, service, and leadership. Even though their military service has concluded, their steady impact on our society, from the national level to our local communities, improves our towns and country. Whether it be imparting hard-learned wisdom, anchoring families, serving in government, leading civic groups, or participating in industry, veterans are leading the way and we would be well-served to follow.

We must recognize their contributions and do everything that we can to share our appreciation for their impact on our country. While we may never be able to adequately thank them for their sacrifices, let us always show love to our veterans with our actions and words like they have for their families, country, and comrades-in-arms. Doing so strengthens the fibers that bind our country and preserves the shared values that our veterans served to protect.

God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.

