



The VIC Program Unearths Human Treasures

By Blake Boles

HENDERSON, NV (October 21st, 2016) -- Every old soldier has a story.

"Greg" Louis Rappaport was more than cordial upon having received visitors on short notice, at the Merrill Gardens assisted living home in Henderson, Nevada. He regaled anyone who would listen with anecdotes about his being an All-American football player at Arizona State University, before it was even a college. He showed old pictures of himself; he was indeed a mountain of a man, with a neck like a tree trunk. He talked of how nice the interviewers were from ESPN. He showed off his 'shadow-box' of US Army medals that he had earned, all the while downplaying his Bronze Star with Cluster for five acts of bravery. He talked about how he didn't tell his future wife in Youngstown that he loved her, for fear that she would be brokenhearted if he didn't return. "She was the most beautiful woman in the world. And I mean that!" he said. He talked about her dimples. He talked about how, after he returned from fierce combat in Europe, he called his future wife in Ohio out for a date and the first thing she said was, "I know who this is. What took you so long?!"

He talked about how hard it was under Patton's command. He talked about all the men –good men—that didn't make it back; that there were 11 million service members in WWII and that 900,000 didn't have the opportunity to live the life that he lived. He talked about getting a letter from President Obama, as he was receiving a certificate of appreciation from the Nevada Department of Veterans Services for being one of Nevada's heroes. He talked about how disappointed he was that a college girl on the recent news couldn't identify who was in World War II.

He talked about how war is hell.

Greg is 101 years old. He is just one of many Nevadans honored by NDVS for his military service during yet another Veterans In Care (VIC) Ceremony. The VIC Initiative was created by NDVS because Director Kat Miller realized that there were probably many veterans in assisted living homes in Nevada that were 'off the radar'. As a result, a concerted effort was made to reach out to all assisted living facilities in Nevada to find all veterans unaccounted for. NDVS contacted well over 400 facilities. Out of those facilities, they expected to find a few hundred veterans that might not be identified. What they discovered, to their shock and delight, was that the grand total might be well over 3,000. Amazingly, the great majority of these veterans are eligible for VA benefits, yet are either not aware of them, nor are they taking advantage of them.

During VIC ceremonies, not only are veterans honored, but Allies, and family members. This strikes a chord in Director Miller, a 34 year Army veteran. "I will never forget when I came back from training in Grafenwohr (Germany)," says Director Miller. "I came back late at night, and I decided not to wake my three year old son. My mother called early in the morning; and I was tired, and fumbling for the phone. My son, Noah, picked up the phone just as I did. My mother said, 'Hi, Noah. Is your Mom home?' And before I could answer, my son said, 'No, Grandma. Mommy doesn't live here very much.' You want to talk about a dagger to the heart." That's just a tangible reason, Miller says, that families should be honored for their service, just as much as service members. Miller readily acknowledges that families are a vital support network, a bedrock, for service members to go out and do their jobs.

The VIC Initiative is possibly the most innovative –and most heartwarming—programs in the United States. More than being just a feel-good moment, it affords previously unknown veterans the opportunity to talk directly to a Veteran Service Officer, allowing them to access benefits that they might not have known they were eligible for.

In a quiet private room, away from the hullabaloo of the ceremony, Bronze Star awarded combat veteran, former All-American, and centenarian Greg Rappaport finished our meeting by saying, "I really appreciate you coming here to visit me. I really do." He meant it. As do we, sir. The honor is ours.

Nevada Department of Veterans Services – "Veterans In Care" Initiative (VIC)
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