

November 1, 2009

LONG-AGO LETTER STILL A FITTING TRIBUTE TO OUR VETERANS

My friend Sam Griffin, the retired publisher of the Bainbridge Post-Searchlight, recently shared a letter written to him in 1942 by his father, Capt. Marvin Griffin, later to be governor of Georgia, as he and his men, members of the Georgia National Guard's 101st Coast Artillery/Anti-Aircraft Battalion, were preparing to embark for Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea.

\Gov. Griffin was a colorful character, always ready with a quotable quip, but on this day Capt. Griffin was clearly pensive as he and his men were about to taste the first fruits of battle. Even 67 years later, its message is a fitting Veteran's Day tribute to those who have served in our Armed Forces. Here are excerpts:

\“For purposes of making war our troops have traveled a greater distance from home than has ever been accomplished before. This in itself is a splendid principle in that if there is any fighting to be done, let's do it in the other man's backyard and not bring the row up to our own front door step.

“The best defense is a good offense. This is a policy not espoused by a certain clique in our own country during peacetime, but this same clique is the first to yell protection when danger is imminent.

“War is an all day job. There is no glamour in war, and the glamour leaves when the parades and martial music terminates. You must work at war while you are in it, and make it a business. It is a stern and solemn business with all to lose and nothing to gain from the personal standpoint, yet it is a duty one must perform when called on for the sake of one's country. We have so many who like parades and plumes, but not so many who like to think of the realities of war.

“We will make contact with the enemy before long in one way or another, and while the men in your Daddy's organization are not the most polished soldiers in the world today, they are strong and they are willing and have the urge to win. They are not afraid of the enemy, and yet they recognize his possibilities and realize that he is formidable.

“Their success in combat will depend to a great extent on the quality of leadership, and I hope and pray that I will not leave a stone unturned to provide the proper leadership when the time comes. A new fighting force is naturally officered by many men who have not been tempered by fire. Some officers who do not appear on the surface to be outstanding often turn out to be the best under combat conditions while others who make a fine soldierly appearance and do most of the talking and parading often crack and prove detrimental to the cause. While we may have a few of the latter in our organization, I am glad to say that I believe them very few.”

Marvin Griffin survived 30 months of war and was named the battalion's commanding officer before returning home to Georgia to take the post of State Adjutant General and begin the transition to a post-World War II environment for Georgia veterans.

Despite the sacrifices of his troops and others like them, not much has changed since that letter was written. There is still no peace on earth. We are still threatened by those who hate us and our way of life. War is still an all day job with all to lose, a stern and solemn business; a duty one must perform when called on for the sake of one's country.

Whether you are a Democrat or a Republican, liberal or conservative, hawk or dove, you live in the greatest country on earth with more personal freedom than most people walking this globe can comprehend. For that privilege, you can thank the men and women of our Armed Forces. They have always responded when it mattered. They did in 1942. They still do today.

Author Somerset Maugham said, “If a nation values anything more than freedom, it will lose that freedom.” Remember that on this Veteran's Day.