

The Story of One Hero

-by Herb Flanders

Back in 1981, in the September after I graduated from high school, I headed off to Athens to enroll in the University of Georgia. Having never stayed more than a few nights away from my parents, I was one scared puppy but I wasn't about to let that on to the world around me. Outwardly, I at least thought I projected an image of cool confidence but inwardly I knew there were more than a few fears at work.

I reported to Room 827 of Russell Hall, a huge dormitory that housed roughly 1000 male students, the bulk of whom were freshmen much like me. Russell was affectionately referred to, as "The Zoo" and the antics of former residents were legends passed from room to room and class to class. Entering my new home, I discovered that my roommate had already arrived and made himself comfortable.

His bed was made up, at least in the manner typical of freshmen male – pillow tossed askance on the bed, blanket half drooping onto the floor, and sheet completely untucked but primarily on the rather thin mattress provided by the University System of the state of Georgia. A few trinkets and knick-knacks were on his desk and there were remnants of a hastily eaten snack remaining there as well. He appeared to be relatively normal – a slob – so I figured we'd get along just fine.

When he returned to the room later that afternoon I had my first face-to-face encounter with Bubba Carroll, graduate of Stone Mountain High School and member of the University of Georgia Redcoat Marching Band. We became great friends and ultimately shared that very room for three years.

Bubba changed a bit during our college years. While he remained nutty and goofy and he retained his offbeat sense of humor, he definitely changed.

His side of the room was neater than mine and by our junior year you'd never find crumbs or wrappings from a meal or snack. His bed was typically made up and his closet was organized; he even had shoes that were shined and on a moment's notice he could find an item in his cabinets. It happened gradually, slowly, certainly not all at once, but it happened.

Why? Because Bubba was a member of ROTC, Reserve Officer's Training Corps, and was preparing for a career in the United States Army. Uncle Sam turned him into a mature adult who could fly helicopters, lead troops and wear our nation's uniform. And that's just what he has done.

Today, Bubba is known as Robert and is an officer in the US Army. He led troops in the Gulf War and is just finishing up a tour of duty in Korea. He is married to Dianne and is the father of two children. He stands ready to fight for this nation and to give his life if necessary, although as a peace-keeper who wears a uniform, he'd far rather see disputes settled without bloodshed. He looks pretty average, pretty normal and ordinary, but like millions of others, he is a hero, nothing more and nothing less.

When you're celebrating the 4th this year, say a special prayer for Bubba and the other heroes who serve or have served our land. Without them, we wouldn't be chomping on a hot dog or relaxing on the lake; without them, we wouldn't read the newspapers of a free press nor have the choice on where we worship or even if we do. Without them, there'd be no freedom in the ballot box nor trial by jury or due process. For over 200 years, these heroes have kept the flag flying. Thanks be to God for them!

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