



Flags wave at the annual Veterans Day Parade through downtown Vancouver.

Columbian file

Honoring those who serve

Military naysayers have no appreciation for the effort that keeps us free

By TOM KOENNINGER

My service to my country was insignificant. But that doesn't stop me from taking as much pride in it as any veteran who has seen military duty in peace or war.

I was in the Navy through four years of reserve and two years of active duty during the Korean conflict.

My highest rank was a rating as journalist third-class petty officer — JO3. That's low on the pecking order of military ranks, and high on the saluting order. When my Navy discharge arrived, my right arm was worn out from saluting scores of officers.

Duty assignments took me many places in this world: England, France, Germany, Greenland, Cuba and Portugal. I was stationed in New York City for a year, working with the media there in a public informa-

tion role. We covered the Military Sea Transportation Service, Navy ships manned by civilian crews that transported troops, dependents and cargoes to bases overseas.

I was aboard the first springtime convoy to reach the American base at Thule, Greenland one July. I've ridden a highline basket from ship to ship.

My Navy assignments put me on vessels ranging in size from lifeboats to the battleship Missouri.

More good than bad memories remain from military experience. One in particular stands out: the predawn morning that the Missouri left the Atlantic Ocean to enter the harbor at Lisbon, Portugal. Just before the sun rose, the sky was banded in colors of red, gold and purple, and the American flag that the ship flew blazed brightly against a deep blue horizon.

Pride in service and pride in country — patriotism — came together for me that day, just as they do at the annual observance of Veterans Day.

This community, in particular, can take pride in a military legacy represented by Officers Row and the Vancouver Barracks. Its history is enriched by the military detachment, Fort Vancouver, the Hudson's Bay Company trading post and the commanding presence of Ulysses S. Grant and George C. Marshall.

Add to that history the Henry Kaiser Shipyards, whose ships contributed to the World War II victory, and voluntary and conscripted service by thousands in all the wars and conflicts through Operation Desert Storm.

Those who would scoff at military service and mock patriotism have no appreciation for the effort that keeps us free.

The military naysayers probably did not attend the "Celebrate Freedom" activities that began Friday with a Marshall Lecture by Gen. Andrew Jackson Goodpaster.

Certainly, these protesters were not found along the route of the two-hour parade Saturday that was organized by several veterans organizations. They probably weren't in the audience Saturday afternoon at the gazebo on the Barracks parade grounds when the restored Vietnam-era helicopter was dedicated to the memory of veterans.

It is doubtful they attended the USO-style dance Saturday night at the Pearson Air Museum, or will be found at the Brahms Singers Concert at 3 p.m. today at First Presbyterian Church on Main Street.

Nor will they be among the solemn memorial service crowd that gathers at 11 a.m. next Thursday at the Vancouver Barracks Post Cemetery to remember those who died for their country.

But thousands of others, people with an understanding and appreciation of military service, will have participated in the events.

Emerging from the traditional Armistice Day jubilation that marked the end of World War I, Veterans Day means much more today.

We are a free nation at peace. Veterans Day helps us remember the price we paid for peace — and freedom.



Tom Koenninger is vice president/editor of The Columbian.