

## **Veterans Day 2016**

*Text of Speech by Mayor Frank Bivona at Veterans Day Ceremony at Veterans Plaza  
November 11, 2016*

Thanks for coming to our celebration of Veterans past and present. I asked our Franklin Lakes resident and incredible vocalist Frank Jackson to join us this morning to start us off with God Bless America.

This week I attended a luncheon with over 400 veterans that the Wyckoff Y puts on each year for Veterans. Many of the veterans were older men who served in World War II and Korea. But the theme of the ceremony was Vietnam. Frank Crotty, a resident and Vietnam vet spoke first and gave his view on the war. It was a unique view which even nearly fifty years after its conclusion, gave me a new perspective. The gist of what he said was that even though the war was lost and a failure in so many ways, it paved the way for the end of the spread of communism and ultimately led to the defeat of communism during the cold war era and helped the spread of democracy in many countries.

The second talk was given by Jack McLean, the author of *Loon: A Marines Story*. He spoke of his decision to enlist after high school at the peak of the conflict and was thrust into one of the most deadly battles in the history of the war. Importantly, he spoke of his return to this country and how veterans were treated at the time due to the unpopular nature of the war. He went on to graduate from Harvard and today he continues to write and tell his stories.

I also heard about a lawyer Ben Cascio - who I know because he represents many clients in land use applications in town - I found out that he was a Vietnam vet and was awarded the Silver Star and Purple Heart for his piloting of medevac missions saving many lives and was himself seriously wounded. I was also seated next to William Smith, our Borough Attorney, and heard about his time in Vietnam. Amazing stories. I am sure that if I had the opportunity to speak with each of the 400 there I would have heard stories that would leave me in awe.

Someone at the luncheon asked me if I was a veteran. I said no. I think I was the only one there that wasn't. I turned 18 in 1973, the year they ended the draft. I had a draft card and was number 36 which meant that if there was a draft I would have been called. At that tender age I was elated that I didn't have to go off to war but never really appreciated the role that others played before me. I like many others went on to live our lives and conveniently forgot the sacrifices that were made so that we could live free. I now have a much greater appreciation for the soldiers who fought in Vietnam thanks to that luncheon and days like today where we stop and remember. We must never forget and be humbly grateful for what our veterans have done for us past and present.

And it doesn't stop there. Unfortunately we are reminded every day when we turn on the news and see the conflicts around the world and how the men and women of our armed forces protect our liberties each and every day. We are humbled by what they do for us, allowing us to go on with our busy lives and live in a country with the freedom and liberties that are unmatched around the world.

That brings me to a classic fitting poem for today by Charles Province:

### **IT IS THE SOLDIER**

It is the Soldier, not the minister  
Who has given us freedom of religion.

It is the Soldier, not the reporter  
Who has given us freedom of the press.

It is the Soldier, not the poet  
Who has given us freedom of speech.

It is the Soldier, not the campus organizer  
Who has given us freedom to protest.

It is the Soldier, not the lawyer  
Who has given us the right to a fair trial.

It is the Soldier, not the politician  
Who has given us the right to vote.

It is the Soldier who salutes the flag,  
Who serves beneath the flag,

And whose coffin is draped by the flag,  
Who allows the protester to burn the flag.