

Women & Infants Veterans Day Reflection*
Care New England Health System Annual Tribute, *Honoring Our Heroes*

November 7, 2016—Thank you very much General (Reginald) Centracchio, it is a privilege and an honor to have served you for so many years and to call you a dear friend. It is a humble moment today to have you introduce me, and I hope God forgives you for all that you have just said!

General, Doctor Colonel (Steven) Carr, Doctor Lt. Commander (Lisa) DiMaria, distinguished members of the Care New England Health System, all our health care providers, and especially our veterans—the heroes we honor here today—and their families:

Allow me first to say a word of sincere gratitude for your kind invitation to be with you on this special annual event “*Honoring Our Heroes*” as we salute and thank those who serve, those who have served, and especially my good friend, Dr. Stephen Carr. I had the privilege of working with him for many years: first, at the 143 Airlift Wing at Quonset Point, and most recently at JFHQ (Joint Force Headquarters) in Cranston. I was delighted to see that we were honoring him, especially today since I have seen his wonderful work up close and his sincere care for the men and women who wear the uniform of this nation and their health needs. He has always been a fatherly and calming presence for our medical corps and has the respect of us all. I also want to greet and thank Mrs. Beverly Hopkins, Saint Kevin School’s Music Director, and the boys and girls chorus of Saint Kevin School—the finest parochial school in the state with the brightest, most talented and best-looking children anywhere in the Diocese and where I also happen to

serve as pastor! The children encouraged me to talk a long, long time since after this is over they will head back to class! I give them credit for a good try anyway!

Some of you may know that I just finished a 36-year career of commissioned service in the United States Air Force and the Rhode Island National Guard. I look back with sincere gratitude for the many opportunities that were mine as a Catholic Chaplain serving in the military, during both peace and war times. I have met and worked alongside some fine men and women, including General Centracchio, Doctor Carr, and Commander DiMaria, whose sacrifices and the sacrifices of their families are so many and so often hidden.

It was only a few years ago that deployment of our troops to the Middle East to assist in the war effort there was an ongoing and massive effort. We here in Rhode Island were not exempt, and in fact, during the last two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the State of Rhode Island deployed the **most troops** in the nation, per capita. But we have paid a high price for it, laying to rest 29 of our own since the terrorist attacks of 2001. We pledged then, and continue every day, to never forget them.

I was called to deployment several times. On one of those trips in a far distant, dusty, and hot land, I met a young man named Todd. He was a 24-year-old airman from Travis Air Force Base in California and was serving a one-year rotation tour. He was about halfway through his tour of duty working 12-hour shifts in 130-degree heat, six days a week. His job was to be sure that the electronic apparatus on the fighter planes were in good working order since they are vital to the safety of the pilots. One day we were speaking beside the F-15 that he was working on and he described how he had married just before being deployed and how the

thoughts of his wife back home kept him focused every day. As he spoke about her, his eyes brightened and his face beamed and so I asked if he might have a picture of her with him. Without hesitation, he produced his wallet and a picture of their wedding day. As we looked at it, he suddenly grew very silent and when he looked up again I could tell that he was overcome with emotion. I spoke to him but he could not even utter a reply and instead he just slowly nodded his head and looked down at the ground. As I put my hand on his shoulder and thanked him for the important work that he was doing there and the sacrifices both he and his wife were making for us, he silently produced a crumpled piece of paper that had been tucked behind the picture in his wallet. It was well-worn from use and had obviously been folded and refolded many times. As he showed it to me, he looked up and with tears in his eyes a big smile spread across his face at the words written in dark, black letters on that worn piece of paper:

"I am so proud of you. Love, Cindy."

Then, regaining his voice he said quietly, "Father, she keeps me going even out here!"

My friends, if a snapshot could be taken of what we do here today and a reason given for why we do it every day it is that note from Cindy. We are honoring those who, like Todd and Cindy just starting out in life with hopes and dreams for the future, put it all aside and without hesitation or complaint venture to very dangerous places far from home to *"do his or her duty"* and, just as a new wife named Cindy said, make us all *"... so proud."*

Our veterans from years past who have left us, those who are still with us, and those who currently are serving and with us today in this room, **do make us so**

very proud. We can never repay them, and we are privileged to know them and to honor them. And let us also remember to always keep them and their families in our prayers—and to support them with our sentiments of esteem—especially during this holiday season when there will be many empty chairs around many dining room tables for those who are serving our nation on far distant shores. May God bless and protect them and all our veterans, and may He continue to Bless America through all of you! Thank you, God bless you, and God bless America.

***Note:** These are the remarks delivered by Colonel and Chaplain of the Rhode Island National Guard Rev. Robert L. Marciano (Retired) at the Care New England Health System’s Annual Tribute “Honoring Our Heroes” held on Monday, Nov. 7, 2016 at Women & Infants Hospital in Providence, RI. Honored was Stephen Carr, M.D., a veteran and physician at Women & Infants Hospital.

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