



Is There Pride in Serving in Our Military?

The motto of the US Marine Corps says it well-Semper Fidelis. When Marine Sergeant Jesse Strong talked to his mother on the morning of September 11,2001, he said, "I am ready to do whatever I am called upon to do to protect my country!" He stuck to that promise with the honor, courage, and commitment of a Marine and a true hero. On January 26,2005, a rocket-propelled grenade killed Sergeant Strong and three other young Marines in Iraq during an ambush attack on their convoy. They gave the ultimate sacrifice.

People like Jesse Strong have given their lives serving in America's military throughout our history. Many have sacrificed much to give us the tremendous gift we have in our country. Jesse Strong's mother puts it like this, "Our country is free because of those in every generation who have stepped up to serve in our military. They are our true heroes, and we owe them our humble thanks and gratitude." Thanks to their sacrifices, I have never experienced the terror of never knowing when someone in my family might be taken away because of our beliefs or race or for no reason at all. I don't have to wonder if a stray step will cause a landmine to blow, maiming or killing me or someone else. Even a simple freedom-I can play outside under the open sky-is one that I would not have without the courageous and dedicated service of our military throughout many, many generations. That tradition of military service is one of incredible devotion and unquestionable pride.

I personally am privileged to know many men and women who have served and are serving in our military, from a broad span of ages, backgrounds, and military conflicts. When I wrote to these amazing people to ask if they believed there was pride in serving in America's

military, the answer that came resoundingly back to me was "yes!" My questions about their military pride moved beyond the original recipients until I started receiving emails from people I didn't even know. I heard from people who had served anywhere from Iwo Jima to Iraq. By the time I had perused pages and pages of responses, I knew I could never have any doubts as to whether there was pride in military service. The stories and answers spoke for themselves.

One of my respondents, Major Celina E. Noyes, who is a Special Action Officer in the Commanders Action Group, said, "I believe there's tremendous pride-As US service members we have a unique opportunity to serve our country, defend freedom and democracy, and also help others." She explained what she does at the Headquarters Air Mobility Command and added, "We deliver hope, fuel the fight, and save lives. Where else can you find a job like that?!"

A Marine wrote back with the unequivocal, "There IS pride in serving in America's Armed Forces. Pride in knowing you are in the 1-2% of Americans willing to lay down their life for this ethereal concept we call the United States of America. Pride in knowing you have successfully completed some of the hardest training in the world. Pride in living up to the reputation of those who have gone before, so as not to bring discredit or disgrace upon their works and the service."

Replying to my questions, a member of the MI Army Security Agency put her reason to serve simply, "Because I love my country."

Although he had been drafted into the Army, a Vietnam veteran also agreed that there was pride in serving, saying that those who have pride in our military believe that "our freedom and the values we hold dear ... are worth fighting for."

Air Force Major Gene Jacobus put it this way, "I believe there is pride in serving in America's military because we are united under a common bond of service. Service to something much greater than ourselves. Service to our country and our way of life ... service to you and your life."

The answer of Gold Star mother Victoria Strong was the story of her son's part in this service. Recollecting Jesse's Marine Corps boot camp graduation at Parris Island, she explained, "My heart was bursting with pride." On a different note of the pride in military service, she recounted what he had said upon his departure for Iraq-"If I do not return, it will be a privilege to give my life for my country." Although Jesse was killed in action, his courage and commitment are still with us in the proud legacy of freedom that he gave his life to defend.

This awe-inspiring level of service, devotion, and sacrifice is echoed in countless American heroes who have guarded and upheld that legacy since our nation's conception. Put together, the sum of their gift is unfathomable and priceless. Our heroes have given much to give us much. Many, like Jesse Strong, have given all. What is more worthy of our honor and pride? The words of Marine Commandant General James F. Amos describe this well "While it has come at a cost ... we have much to be proud of."

Semper Fidelis. Jesse Strong and all of the other incredible people who have given so much to protect our freedom are true heroes, not only Always Faithful... but also always worthy

of our deepest honor, gratitude, and pride. As long as we have heroes such as these, there will always be pride in serving in our military.