

In the Arena
By Tom Conroy
May 2007

Memorial to a Good Soldier

On Wednesday, May 16, 2007, my Massachusetts House of Representative colleagues and I bowed our heads in a moment of silence. We were asked to reflect upon the recent deaths in Iraq of four sons of Massachusetts. One of those four was First Lieutenant Andrew J. Bacevich,

I know Andrew Bacevich's father. At one time, he was my boss. He was a mentor. He is a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel, a former tank battalion commander during Desert Storm, and was a professor in Washington DC at Johns Hopkins University, where I studied foreign policy and was editor-in-chief of an international relations periodical.

Professor Bacevich's son Andrew died last week as a good soldier, but also as a kind of hero. It is our duty - it is just and appropriate - that we mourn the loss of those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country, heroes and tragic heroes alike, and remember them this Memorial Day. They gave their all, literally. Would that we had so much courage.

And yet, heroes need not be soldiers. Service to our nation can take many forms. We have heroes right here within our own community. Mary Ann Porreca, resident of Wayland, who has served in several capacities to maintain and improve the METCO program, is a hero. Judy Deutsch of Sudbury, who has advocated tirelessly on behalf of the homeless, a rational health care system, and services for the elderly, is a hero. Cathy Long of Lincoln, who has devoted countless days and weekends organizing and coordinating youth activities for children of many ages, is a hero. Sam Bacon, seventeen year old resident of Wayland, who has coached mentally disabled children in basketball and mentored them in life, is a hero.

Mary Ann, and Judy, and Cathy and Sam were honored this month in the State House. These modern day heroes, noble in character, have achieved greatly for honorable causes. They share with Andrew Bacevich a devotion to public service, a sense of duty, dedication, and commitment. Each demonstrated a willingness to sacrifice in order to make the world a better place.

Professor Bacevich served in Vietnam in 1970-71. He never attempted to dissuade his son from entering the fight in Iraq. He now regrets that he didn't warn his son of repeating history, and avoid fighting in war "that is probably headed for a dismal conclusion."

Last week, after hearing from Andy's colleagues that he cared about the men that he led, and that Andy tried to get his platoon's job done in an honorable way, the father had this to say: "I don't know that he was the greatest soldier in the history in the history of the United States of America, but I know he was a good soldier, and I know he was our only son."

Tom Conroy is the state representative for Lincoln, Sudbury, and Wayland.