

Every time I have this opportunity, I like to expound on this town's unique military culture.

Is there any other place in the United States that hosts a Veterans hospital on its north side, an active Air Force base on the south end, and a colonial heritage that connects us to one of the world's most famous battlefields?

This heritage is embedded in our community's DNA and is reflected in our patriotic ceremonies like today's.

It also is in our everyday subconscious – when we send our children to Lane or Davis Schools, when we glance at that sculpture over there, and when we greet and acknowledge friends and coworkers and neighbors who, unknown to us, have military service on their resumes.

I would like to talk briefly about one of them. Like hundreds of others, he probably won't have a building or a street or a statue with his name. And that's really my point.

Bedford Fire Lieutenant Mark Casey grew up in Lexington, and he recalled that while a student at Lexington High School, he didn't want to follow the typical path. Indeed. After junior year, he committed to a four-year enlistment in the Marine Corps. As a senior, he told me, "I was excited to get school over with."

Mark said he wanted to do what he called the stereotypical Marine thing. After graduating in June 2002, Mark headed for South Carolina – boot camp at Parris Island and Infantry School at Camp Geiger. Soon followed multiple deployments – to Iraq, Afghanistan, Iraq again, as well as some time in Japan. Mark was discharged from the active military in 2006 with the rank of sergeant.

He returned home and soon became a Bedford firefighter, and today he lives in Burlington with his wife and their two-year-old.

As a non-commissioned officer, Mark experienced war from a front-row seat. But what is especially embedded in his memory are the poverty and desperation of civilians he encountered, men and women, old and young.

"I was I Falluja in 2005," he said. "There were open sewers in the streets. In Afghanistan, I saw families living in mud huts." Do those memories enhance his appreciation of the comfort and security of everyday life around here? Without a doubt, Mark said. He continues to support veterans' charities, although there are times, he said, when he almost has to remind himself of his military years.

Bedford has publicly honored veterans, and supporters of veterans, for generations. Most of this recognition is bestowed after the subject has passed away. Captain Jonathan Willson. Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers. Colonel Roy Kirtland. Anthony, Hunt and Hamilton. Fred Genetti. Travis Desiato and Brian Hart.

On Veterans Day we honor them, But let us also honor hundreds of other veterans that are here with us every day, in our neighborhoods, our workplaces, our stores and playgrounds and government agencies. There are Mark Caseys all around us, doing their jobs, raising their families, building communities, men and women who served and continue to serve.