



The Heroes That Walk Among Us

By **BRIAN NETTZ**, GCCS

Even though Memorial Day is over, I wanted to reflect on the meaning of heroism as it relates to my staff. Recently I had an employee die. Mesothelioma. As many of you know, its lung cancer from exposure to asbestos and asbestos was commonly used in the Navy during the fifties; asbestos was at that time the "wonder material". Chuck was an assistant equipment tech. He was in his late seventies when he "retired" here but he often came by and did welding for us. He looked like he was in his mid fifties. He was a former Navy deep sea diver, rodeo clown, rodeo rider, welder, alcoholic, and hell raiser. He was a neat guy.

We never really understood the significance of Chuck's armed forces services. He didn't talk about it, but we did know that Chuck went to a support group once a week on Thursdays and that Chuck was monitored for radioactivity weekly as well. You see, Chuck was in Operation Crossroads- the tail end of the nuclear bomb testing in the bikini atolls. He dived for a salvage ship examining the wreckage underwater

to submarines, ships, etc. that had been placed within the blast radius. It was dangerous work. The ocean floor was sandy, the dust kicked up and reduced visibility and they cut and welded alongside heavy naval chains and ship hulls.

As if all that was not enough, the salvage ship was so "hot" radioactively, that they were not allowed into harbor. They had to anchor outside of Tokyo harbor for two weeks washing the ship and themselves constantly with a special soap to remove the radioactivity. I asked Chuck if it upset him that he had to deal with all this stuff based upon his service to our country. Like nearly everyone in his generation he replied very matter of factly, "We were full of piss and vinegar at the time. We knew it was important work. It meant something important to our country and we'd be damned if we were gonna let the Russkies beat us."

So for me, Memorial Day hit just a little closer to home.

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