

VETERAN EXCELLENCE MAGAZINE

Every veteran has a story. We make sure it's told.

EDITOR'S DIARY • A NOTE FROM THE FOUNDER • MARCH 2026

Do You Have an Hour?

By Camille D. Ford | Founder & Editor-in-Chief

I spend weeks preparing to tell someone's story before we ever sit down together.

THE HOURS NOBODY COUNTS

I don't have a staff. I write every article in this magazine myself. I build every interview request, draft every follow-up, manage every press release, format every document that goes out under the name Veteran Excellence. I built the editorial calendar. I built the VA Facility Recognition Program. I built the media list. I do all of it because I believe in what I'm building, and because no one is going to build it for me.

Paul Ricoeur wrote that we are not born with selves but construct them through narrative, that every time someone tells their story, they're temporarily assembling an identity out of whatever's available, for this particular audience, in this particular moment. What this means for an interviewer is that the first version of any story you receive is always the assembled one. The practiced one. The version that has survived enough repetitions to feel solid.

My job is to get underneath it.

By the time I sit across from someone, I've done the kind of preparation most journalists reserve for 60 Minutes. I study the organization, the career arc, the public record. I write questions that aren't just questions, they're doors into rooms nobody's opened yet. And I ask for enough time to let those rooms open, because the truth doesn't surface on a schedule.

In some ways, I'm a narrative architect. I take what someone gives me in an interview and I write for hours, sometimes days, to build a story that belongs to them. Not a summary. Not a Q&A. A real narrative, structured and shaped and carried from the inside out. The writing doesn't happen in an hour. It happens in the weeks after we talk, at whatever hour the work demands, until the story is what it needs to be.

That's what it looks like when someone understands that their story has weight.

THE ONE WHO SHOWED UP

I've sat across from people who stayed long after the hour was over. Conversations that opened something neither of us expected. Moments where they paused, went somewhere in their memory, and came back different. Where the interview stopped being an interview and became something else entirely. People have cried. People have taken their time. People have gone somewhere real and decided to stay there. That's what this work makes space for.

I won't name the one who didn't. What I'll say is that I recently had an interview where I was given half the time the story required.

Thirty-minute interviews produce surface-level stories. That's not what I do.

If you're not willing to sit long enough for the story to surface, you're not asking to be seen. You're asking to be summarized.

When I followed up to ask for what I'd originally requested, I was told the time wasn't there. I understand schedules. I understand that a big name's calendar isn't their own. I understand all of that. What I want understood from the other side is this: I'm not a press request to be managed. I'm a journalist who spent weeks preparing to tell a story that nobody else is going to tell. I don't think that's what they mean. But that's what it costs me.

I want to be clear about what the alternative looks like. There are people who've given me two hours. People who scheduled two-part interviews because they understood that the story would need it. That's not unusual for this work. That's the standard. This isn't a conversation to have while you're unavailable. It isn't something that works when someone else is deciding what can and can't be said. The people who showed up fully, who protected the time, who came to the conversation without a handler, produced the strongest profiles in this magazine. That's not a coincidence.

WHERE THIS GIFT COMES FROM

There was no AI. There was no editor. There was no plan. There was just me, and the page.

There was a season in my life when I was a victim of domestic violence. In the middle of that, in the dark, on the other side of whatever the day had cost me, I would sit down and write. Not in a journal. On Facebook. In public. Four thousand words at a time. My hands moved faster than my thoughts. The words felt like they were already there, waiting, like whatever I was going through had pressure-built something inside me and writing was the only release valve I had.

I didn't know then what that was. I know now. It was the gift. It just didn't have anywhere to go yet. The gift is the same now. The source is not. I'm not writing from a place of surviving. I'm writing from a place of purpose. And I'm not going to let anyone's unavailability convince me otherwise.

I'LL BE HERE

The ones who show up let me give them something the internet can't. A search pulls together pieces, the record, the headlines, the career arc. It doesn't get to the core. That's what I'm here for.

I'll keep preparing the way I prepare, asking for the time the story requires, writing the profiles nobody else is writing. Some people will say no. Some will give me thirty minutes and think that's enough. Some will understand exactly what I'm doing and show up.

That's enough. It has to be. Because the veterans I'm writing for don't have the option of deciding their story isn't worth telling. They lived it. The least I can do is find someone willing to spend an hour talking about it.

I'll be here.

Veteran Excellence Magazine

Camille D. Ford | Founder & Editor-in-Chief | Veteran Excellence Magazine | 704-666-7728 |
veteranexcellence@veteranexcellence.org | VeteranExcellence.org

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