

LETTER CARRIERS EASTERN HERO: ‘I REALLY DIDN’T KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT’ IN TALKING DOWN AN ACTIVE SHOOTER

By Mark Gruenberg

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WASHINGTON (PAI)—Letter Carrier Clinton Parker, a military veteran, says “I really didn’t know what to expect” when an Iraq and Afghanistan war veteran started shooting from the vet’s parents’ house in Watertown, Conn.

All he knew was that he knew the man, who was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and that local police had called him to help a bad situation from becoming worse. It took seven hours of talking, once Parker got inside, but he did.

Parker, of Connecticut Merged Branch 60, was one of four Letter Carriers receiving “Hero of the Year” awards at an October 3 ceremony in D.C. Four others won other awards.

They included a duo from Grand Rapids, Mich., who saved the life of a colleague who suffered a seizure, and Deborah Ochetti from the Twin Cities, who donated her bone marrow to a stranger with leukemia. She was named Humanitarian of the Year.

Letter Carriers President Fredric Rolando, who presided at the ceremony and detailed their acts, said such heroism, community service or both is frequent among his union’s members. And invariably, the winners dismiss their deeds as nothing special.

“It doesn’t take a hurricane to become a hero,” Rolando told the packed awards ceremony in D.C. hotel, including Postmaster General Megan Brennan and AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka.

“What it takes is someone who knows the neighborhoods he or she works in, who cares about the residents, who is aware of his or her surrounding and who is prepared to act when necessary, whatever the dangers.

“I would suggest that in their own quiet way, the Carriers gathered here have demonstrated the very essence of leadership and of serving others. They saw an urgent danger or an unmet need – and they stepped up,” Rolando declared.

In Parker's case, he stepped up after the police, alerted by the veteran's father – who was not in the house at the time – called him. The police knew both were vets. They figured one veteran might be able to connect with another, he told Press Associates Union News Service in an interview before the ceremony.

The shooter served two tours in Afghanistan and one in Iraq and came home damaged from the wars. Parker is still a drill instructor in the Connecticut Army Reserves and served with the Army's New York-based 10th Mountain Division.

The police had surrounded the house by the time Parker got there and the situation “had escalated into a standoff.” The fear was that it could become worse, especially in Connecticut. The site of the standoff is not far from Newtown, where a shooter killed 20 schoolchildren and six teachers.

“I was just glad I was able to help defuse the situation,” Parker modestly said. “I also give great credit to local law enforcement, especially Officer Mike Tripp of the Waterbury Police Department.” The award judges and the police disagreed with his low-key assessment.

The judges hailed Parker's role in the community, voiced “appreciation for a soldier helping a soldier” and said “being a hero has become a habit of his.” They noted that in the 1990s, Parker chased down a mugger who tried to steal a woman's purse in a supermarket parking lot, grabbed the mugger's car keys and held him until officers arrived.

And the Watertown Police Department told the judges that “in total disregard” for his own safety, “you entered the home and counseled the subject, which resulted in his surrender shortly thereafter.”

Parker's involvement didn't stop there. After the he ended the standoff, Parker escorted the vet to the hospital, made sure he was treated for PTSD and stays in touch with him. “He's getting help he needs. He's doing well and his family's getting the help they need,” he told PAI.

Besides Parker, other heroic winners were:

- Matthew Lamb, of Branch 451 in Johnstown, Pa., named National Hero of the Year for rescuing 20-year-old Adam Rucosky and his grandmother, Helen, from their burning house on Nov. 21, 2016. After seeing flames, Lamb escorted Helen across the street. She at first said no one else was in the house, but then remembered Adam.

Lamb ran back, tried to get in through two doors, was repelled by smoke and flames, then saw Adam, coughing and gasping, at a second-story window, also surrounded by smoke. Lamb positioned himself below Adam and told him to jump and Lamb would catch him. He did.

- Evelyn Woodward and James McKay of Branch 56 in Grand Rapids, who received the unit citation awards for heroes of the year, for saving a clerk who suffered a seizure, fell unconscious, hit her head and was bleeding. The two started CPR and chest compressions. The woman revived and recovered.

- Daniel Ochoa of Garden Grove, Calif., Branch 1100 as Western Regional Hero, whose single-handed “bucket brigade” of work throwing water from a swimming pool onto a house fire quenched the flames at Shirley Anne Ayala’s house – after moving a propane tank, which could have exploded, out of the way.

- Donte Cotton, of Dayton, Ohio, Branch 182, who “crawled through a tapestry of broken glass” from the windows of an overturned car to save a toddler. The car had hit an utility pole, which caused a nearby electrical transformer to spark. “My main concern was the little kid. My fatherly instincts kicked in,” he told the judges. ###

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