

WWII hero and former longtime Manhattan DA Robert Morgenthau named Veteran's Day Parade Grand Marshal

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NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
Saturday, November 7, 2015, 4:08 PM



Robert Morgenthau will be the Grand Marshal for this year's Veteran's Day Parade, which will mark the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II.

Robert Morgenthau was always a man of conviction.

Long before his decades as Manhattan district attorney turned him into a “Law & Order” character, the patriotic prosecutor’s patriotism and embrace of social justice made him a World War II hero.

The 96-year-old U.S. Navy veteran — accompanied by one of his shipmates from the USS Lansdale — will serve as this year’s Grand Marshal at the annual Veterans Day Parade up Fifth Ave.

The Nov. 11 extravaganza — led by the United War Veterans Council — marks the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, along with the 25th anniversary of Desert Storm.

“The parade will be kind of fun,” Morgenthau told the Daily News. “There was no one to say welcome when I got home except my family.”

Organizers expect more than 250 groups and 20,000 marchers when the 96th parade steps off on 26th St. at 11:25 a.m. The 1.3-mile route ends at 52nd St., just north of St. Patrick’s Cathedral.

Morgenthau and pal Robert Dott survived when their torpedoed ship sunk in the Mediterranean on April 24, 1944. The two spent several hours adrift in the icy water before two U.S. destroyers arrived.

Just 14 months later, he again escaped with his life after a kamikaze attack tore an 18-foot hole near the waterline of the USS Bauer — leaving behind an unexploded 550-pound bomb.

The device never detonated.

“I made a deal with the Almighty, although I didn’t have much bargaining power, if I got out of there alive I’d try to do something useful with my life,” Morgenthau told the News. “It’s all about being lucky.”

The young son of Henry Morgenthau — treasury secretary under President Franklin Roosevelt — was more courageous than fortunate, even before the bombs began flying.

He helped shatter the military color barrier by putting a quartet of black steward’s mates on an anti-aircraft gun aboard the Bauer.

Morgenthau’s faith in the quartet was rewarded when the sailors stayed at their post even after the kamikaze hit.

“In his courage under fire, his moral courage in assigning black sailors to a combat role and his extraordinary lifetime of public service, Robert Morgenthau truly represents the Greatest Generation,” said Vietnam veteran Vincent McGowan, a leader of the parade’s organizers.

Morgenthau needed permission from his father to enlist in the Navy before his 21st birthday.

He was serving as executive officer and navigator on the USS Lansdale when a German torpedo sent the destroyer to the bottom of the sea.

Dott recalled standing on the deck, in disbelief as the Lansdale took on water as German planes buzzed overhead. His life jacket was shredded by the torpedo blast, and he survived by grabbing on to a the jacket of another sailor.

With his distinguished career as Manhattan district attorney way in the future, Robert Morgenthau (inset) stands proudly aboard the USS Bauer after surviving a kamikaze attack in World War II.



Credit: United War Veterans Council



Morgenthau illustrates enemy planes shot down by the Bauer. This Wednesday, the former Navy man will be grand marshal of the Veterans Day Parade on Fifth. Ave.

Dott, still close to Morgenthau, is bringing his two sons to the parade, both Vietnam vets.

After surviving 17 kamikaze attacks off Okinawa, the crew of the Bauer received a Presidential Unit Citation “for extraordinary heroism in action against enemy Japanese forces.”

Morgenthau said he never hesitated in returning to the heat of battle, despite the near-death experience aboard the Lansdale.

“I signed up for the duration,” he said. “I wanted to beat those bastards. I must say I found the Pacific more difficult.”

Back on dry land, Morgenthau graduated from Yale Law School and was appointed Manhattan federal prosecutor in 1961 by his boyhood pal and fellow war hero, President John F. Kennedy. He was Manhattan district attorney from 1974 until his retirement in 2009.

Morgenthau downplayed the importance of being Grand Marshal, deflecting attention to the nation’s thousands of war heroes.

“On behalf of my shipmates and all of our veterans, and the families of those who never came home and the families waiting for those serving today, I call on our fellow Americans to remember the debt of honor they owe those who serve,” said Morgenthau.

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