

## 'Lt. Dan' Sinise at GI fest

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Actor Gary Sinise doesn't settle for photo ops when he visits soldiers fighting overseas. He talks to them, checks in via e-mail with those he met once he's back in the United States and, when time permits, entertains them both here and abroad with his modest cover group, the Lt. Dan Band.

The "CSI:NY" star is a natural to kick off the first GI Film Festival this weekend.

"It seems perfectly appropriate and fitting to put this festival together to honor the service of our veterans," says Mr. Sinise, who will introduce "Forrest Gump," in which he memorably played Lt. Dan Taylor, a character who lost both legs in Vietnam.

The three-day festival, to be held through Monday at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center in Northwest, will include film screenings of both military-themed favorites and new releases and panel discussions featuring soldiers, journalists and filmmakers.

One short being shown is "In Times of War: The Ray Parker Story," which lets a World War II veteran tell in his own words how he got captured by Nazis and lived to tell about it. Another, "Shakey's Hill," follows actual footage of soldiers in Bravo Company of the 5th Battalion as they fight their way toward a weapons cache but end up battling North Vietnamese troops. "Divergence" offers a fictional romance between an Iraq war veteran and a woman who brings her own personal pain to the relationship.

Mr. Sinise says the treatment many Vietnam War veterans endured after returning home provoked his determination to give something back to soldiers.

"We wanted to sweep them under the rug," he says of the approach too many took toward Vietnam veterans. "Not only did they deal with the scars of the battles they fought, but [they] had to come home and feel shameful for doing it. We don't want that to happen again."

Mr. Sinise's grueling "CSI:NY" schedule means he can only travel sporadically on weekends, but he still manages weekend furloughs to bring his band to both stateside soldiers and their loved ones.

"The troops are deployed somewhere, but the family members are still there," he says. "You can continue to pitch in and help out."

Some have derided the acting community for not doing more to support the troops, i.e. visit the men and women overseas once in a while even if the actors don't believe in the cause for which they fight.

Mr. Sinise won't take the bait, ticking off the names of a few entertainers who have gone overseas, including Drew Carey and "Mad TV" comic Michael McDonald.

"Everybody has to make up their own minds. Some need a little nudge," he says diplomatically.

This weekend, Mr. Sinise won't be the only celebrity on hand.

The festival's Hollywood Advisory Committee includes Ernest Borgnine ("From Here to Eternity"), Chuck Norris ("Delta Force," "Missing in Action"), director John Milius ("Red Dawn") and director John Dahl ("The Great Raid"). Pat Boone and "Full Metal Jacket" standout R. Lee Erney are also expected to attend.

For more information, visit [www.gifilmfestival.com](http://www.gifilmfestival.com).

-- *Christian Toto*