



2017 remarks for DAV representatives at Memorial Day events

SPEECH

(Acknowledgement of introduction, distinguished guests, officers and members of the DAV and Auxiliary, and others who are present)

Thank you for being here today. I am deeply honored to stand with you, commemorating the sacrifices of those military men and women who have laid down their lives in service to this nation.

I would like to take a moment and acknowledge any of those among us who have lost a loved one in the line of duty to this country. It doesn't matter how much time has passed—no words of condolence can even begin to adequately console a survivor's grief. Let me just say that I have the greatest respect and appreciation for their contributions and sacrifice, and we are proud to honor them today.

On Memorial Day, we often find ourselves reflecting on those individuals who so bravely and instinctually risked life and limb in the face of grave danger. It is of course fitting today that we remember the valiant actions of the more than 600 posthumous Medal of Honor recipients—those who selflessly sacrificed their lives in an attempt to save their comrades-in-arms.

Individuals like Marine Corps Captain James Graham. Graham led a fierce assault on an enemy position in Vietnam in June of 1967 saving his platoon from annihilation, and though wounded himself, chose to stay beside a mortally wounded man while fellow Marines pulled back behind friendly lines. In his last radio transmission, Captain Graham reported he was under assault by a force of 25 enemy soldiers. He died protecting his fellow Marines.

Individuals like Army Sergeant Donn Porter who, facing intense mortar and artillery fire in Korea in September 1952, fixed his bayonet and engaged in close combat after his outpost was attacked by two hostile platoons. Though Sergeant Porter was killed by an artillery burst, his actions thwarted a surprise attack on the main line of resistance and forced the enemy to break engagement.

And individuals like Coast Guard signalman first class Douglas Munro who, during the Battle of Guadalcanal in 1942, volunteered to evacuate a detachment of Marines facing annihilation by enemy forces. Munro maneuvered himself to shield the Marines as they loaded onto boats, exposing himself to enemy fire and sustaining fatal wounds. Munro is the only member of the Coast Guard to have received the Medal of Honor.

These individuals and so many like them live on as some of the most courageous heroes in our history. Those in the military and veteran communities know that we must ensure these individuals are never forgotten, and that their actions stay alive in our memories.

But for most veterans, it is the men and women we served alongside who—though their service and sacrifices for others—live on as heroes in our hearts forever. While few receive the nation's highest honor, many gave their lives in uniform. And many more were taken from us after as a result of injuries or illness contracted in service.

People like 21-year-old Marine Lance Corporal Joshua Bernard, who was killed in action in August of 2009 in Afghanistan's Helmand Province when he was hit by a Taliban rocket-propelled grenade.

Or mother of three, Army Specialist Katrina Bell-Johnson, who was killed in February 2005 in a vehicle accident in Iraq.

Or Army 1st Lieutenant Sharon Ann Lane, who died from shrapnel wounds in June 1969 when the 312th Evacuation Hospital in Vietnam was hit by rockets.

Or Army Corporal Melvin Randell Hill, who at 19 was killed in the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir in Korea in December 1950.

Listed as missing in action, Hill's family continued to search for him until—66 years later—DNA tests confirmed his remains and he was finally brought home to American soil.

Of the million-plus men and women who have died in American military service, the vast majority are these so-called 'everyday heroes.' They are brothers and sisters who fought alongside us, who have left unfillable holes in families, communities and hearts across this country. Their friendships, their bravery and their commitment to duty will never be lost.

Navy veteran Jack Crawford, who was serving aboard the USS Yorktown when it was sunk during the Battle of Midway in 1942, once remarked:

"There **aren't** many things you can take out of this planet...but you **can** take with you, wherever you go, **consciousness of duty faithfully performed.**"

This is the way of the military, where so often that 'duty' requires soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen to put their lives on the line.

The men and women who have given their lives in service to this nation are—indisputably—heroes. When their country called, they answered. Some volunteered and some were volun-told, but no matter how they found their way into the ranks of the military, each took it upon him or herself to serve faithfully and to their fullest.

This is commendable in a nation where so few among our citizens have donned the uniform and accepted the inherent risks. And this alone makes them heroes worthy of remembrance.

I would ask as you leave here and go about the rest of your day to keep the fallen in your minds and keep their families and friends in your heart—for it is their immense collective sacrifices that have helped keep our country safe and free.

Thank you.

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