

MEMORIAL DAY 2011

We Will Remember Them



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

It is an honor to be here today with so many of my fellow Americans who understand that freedom has a cost.

Just weeks ago, we were in awe of the courage of the SEAL Team 6 members who bravely put their lives on the line to take the life of one of the most notorious and evil men in the history of our planet.

But today is not their day. Today belongs to their brothers and sisters who've given all to defend our way of life. But their bravery reminds us once again of the courage of those who've served and their willingness to sacrifice on our behalf.

If what President John F. Kennedy said is true: "A nation reveals itself not only by the men it produces but also by the men it honors, the men it remembers," there is no better place to do just that than here, right now, with all of you in this great nation of ours.

If we've learned anything from the wars in which we fight today, it's that courage and sacrifice are not proprietary values that belong to a bygone generation.

A little more than seven years ago, a Marine named Corporal Jason Dunham was leading a patrol along Iraq's Syrian border when he got word that a nearby Marine convoy was being ambushed.

He led his patrol to the site of the attack. While halting a convoy of cars, the Marines began a search. An insurgent jumped out, grabbing Corporal Dunham by the throat.

After engaging the insurgent in hand-to-hand combat, an enemy grenade appeared and without hesitation, Corporal Dunham threw his kevlar helmet over the grenade with his body on top to help shield his fellow Marines from the grenade's blast.

Though he initially survived the blast, Corporal Dunham eventually died of his wounds.

The family of Corporal Dunham, who was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor, lives every day knowing that their Marine gave his life so we may continue to live in freedom and enjoy our way of life.

Today we honor a long line of patriots who died in battle, as a result of combat wounds and many more who succumbed to service-connected injuries years after their time in service was over.

We remember them in the deeds of our comrades whose final moments of service embody the highest values and selflessness that can be shown by our countrymen. We honor individuals like:

- Captain John P. Cromwell, U.S. Navy, who, during World War II, stayed aboard a sinking submarine off Truk Island to prevent the military secrets he possessed from falling into enemy hands, or

- Staff Sergeant Ambrosio Guillen, U.S. Marine Corps, who exposed himself to attacks to supervise the defense of a company's position and the treatment and evacuation of the wounded during the Korean War, or
- Army specialist Ross A. McGinnis who in 2006 saved the lives of four soldiers by diving on a grenade while inside a Humvee in Iraq.

In every climb and place and throughout decades of turmoil and expeditions we've asked our young men and women to further our security at the cost of life and limb.

It's fitting to wonder how we can see fit to honor their contributions on this one day every year. How do we ensure Memorial Day is more than just a single day of remembrance, gratitude, and honor?

First, we must teach others about the sacrifices of people like Corporal Dunham.

We must ensure future generations understand that their patriotism and the debt of gratitude we owe those who've served is sacred.

We can recognize their sacrifices by taking care of their comrades who served. Their history deserves a place at your dinner table, at work, at church or a youth group meeting-wherever it may be, honor their sacrifices and cherish their memories.

We can also ensure the cost of dealing with the life-long impact of military service is not another battle fought alone for America's veterans.

As troops move into Afghanistan and out of Iraq, they're subject to some of the most devastating injuries veterans have ever survived.

The list includes traumatic brain injuries, painful and permanent scars from burns, amputations, severe nerve damage and paralysis, blindness, deafness, and shrapnel wounds caused by suicide bombers and improvised explosive devices.

Meanwhile, we recognize that a life can be sacrificed long after the final shot of a conflict is over. We must recognize too that not all fatal wounds are visible.

We must vow to honor our nation's obligation to those who suffer from Agent Orange and other service-connected life threatening exposures. We recognize the toll that suicide has taken on our community of veterans who sadly felt there was no way out and those who died on the streets because the country they served could not provide them with the resources they needed to live meaningful lives after their service had changed them.

While we are saddened by these losses; there is no doubt that Americans share a proud heritage of duty and honor forged in the heat of terrible battle. Freedom has a price and on this Memorial Day weekend, while we all gather to enjoy barbecues, families, and our precious liberty, I thank you for taking the time to honor those who paid the ultimate price for our freedom and those still fighting on the front lines at some very scary places, but also share these stories of sacrifice with others.

Your attendance shows the deepest respect to those who gave us the best gift and those who are still fighting on the battlefield.

As General John Logan, National Commander of the Grand Army of the Republic during the Civil War, once wrote: "Let no neglect, no ravages of time, testify to the present or to the coming generations that we have forgotten as a people the cost of a free and undivided Republic."

#