

MEMORIAL DAY 2002

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM



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



"It is possible for me to loathe war – and with reason – yet still honor the brave men, many of them boys, really, who fought with me and died beside me.

"I have been haunted by their loss these forty-two years, and I shall mourn them until my own death releases me.

"It does not seem too much to ask that they be remembered on one day each year. After all, they sacrificed their futures so that you might have yours."

Reflecting on the meaning of Memorial Day in his 1987 essay, "Okinawa: The Bloodiest Battle of All," the popular historian William Manchester spoke for more than his own generation of veterans, those who served in World War II.

His words ring true in the hearts of all veterans from all of America's wars and armed conflicts. They address a powerfully felt need to make sure our nation honors its war dead.

William Manchester has earned his right to speak for our nation's veterans. He was one of the many brave Marines to suffer severe wounds in the battle for Okinawa.

He has faced the terrors and the rigors of combat ... and returned to the United States a veteran disabled for life.

William Manchester overcame the wounds he suffered, and became one of the great voices of our times. And, in the depths of his soul, this famous man is very much the same as his fellow veterans.

His experience of war changed him. It altered his life forever. It transformed him in ways that most civilians can never understand.

And it left him, forever, with the haunting memory of the men and women who died while defending the cause of freedom ... for America and for people throughout the world.

He is so right.

- *It is not too much to ask* that these, our war dead, be remembered on at least one day each year.
- *It is not too much to ask* the same on behalf of veterans who, like William Manchester, came home from war disabled.

These are the sentiments that weigh on my heart at this moment as we observe Memorial Day, 2002.

And I thank you for joining me at this ceremony as, together, we share the experience of those sentiments once again.

Clearly you know the meaning of Memorial Day. You would not be here today if you did not. You can hear the voices of the past telling us to honor their sacrifices by living fully the freedoms that they bought for us with their very lives.

The brave men and women we honor today made the ultimate sacrifice for liberty. And we can honor their lost lives by remembering them this day.

Their passage is marked with headstones and tiny flags that flutter in the breeze.

They are names carved into stones and memorials across our nation and on distant shores.

They will be forever in our memory, forever in our hearts, and we will be forever thankful to them.

Therefore, when William Manchester and all those who have served ask: Is it too much to ask that they be remembered on one day each year? We can answer: No, it is not too much...it is an honor to fulfill that duty.

Some veterans fear that their service to our nation will be forgotten. I doubt that. No freedom-loving American could forget them.

I remember well the words on everyone's lips last autumn in the tragic wake of September 11:

EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED, FOREVER!

In so many ways, that's true. But in others, life is very much the same, thanks to a new generation, which is serving just like those of World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf. They have been called, and they have responded.

Sadly, though, too many have made the same ultimate sacrifice as previous generations.

We in veterans' organizations have always prided ourselves on remembering our fallen brothers and sisters, because they were part of our lives.

Where some see only headstones and tiny flags, we see lives unfulfilled but filled with dignity and honor. They are our nation's true heroes.

Their heroism was prompted by faith in the fundamentals that have guided this nation from its beginnings, the idea that liberty must be protected, whatever the cost.

Today, the men and women of our armed forces face the harsh realities and hardships of combat in Afghanistan, the Philippines, Yemen, and other places we may not know about.

Each morning when our country's bravest and best arise, they cannot know if they will lie down at night to sleep.

News reports remind us each day that some of these young Americans will not live to see their homeland ever again. Others will return home disabled for life as a result of their sacrifices.

Deep within us, we are touched by their valor and willingness to do what is necessary to keep our nation free.

The price paid for liberty has continued to grow from those first shots fired at Concord and Lexington to today's far-flung battles...and tomorrow's as well.

Looking out across the hallowed ground of Arlington National Cemetery, or any of the other sacred resting places, can the price those men and women paid ever be fully appreciated? And what of those who face a life of disability and pain?

Those who have been disabled in the service of our nation bear a burden of diminished ability, not diminished spirit. They are a reflection not of what has been lost but what can be gained, what can be achieved despite disability.

Our disabled veterans should be honored and respected just as those who sacrificed their lives. They continue to serve and make this nation great. And we should celebrate their accomplishments as well.

As we speak, our nation is beginning the construction of a memorial honoring those who fought and those who died in the largest war in the history of humanity – World War II.

And we've begun a drive to build another memorial in Washington, D.C., that's very close to my heart – The American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial.

Some have asked why money must be raised for such memorials when living veterans need help right now.

My answer is simple. We must do whatever we can to encourage all Americans to remember and honor those who have paid the high cost of our freedom.

We in the Disabled American Veterans are committed to making sure that our veterans are remembered with honor and respect.

We have wonderful allies in all the veterans' service organizations with whom we have joined hands, demanding just treatment of veterans.

The Independent Budget for veterans programs – a joint project by the DAV and other veterans' organizations – is a great statement of solidarity among our nation's veterans.

Not only do I take pride in being part of that drive for unity, I believe it is absolutely necessary.

For those of us who are veterans, let us recall our duty once again as we think of the young Americans who are doing their duty today in the world's most dangerous places.

As we defend the rights of those who served in past wars and armed conflicts, let us reaffirm our dedication to the veterans of tomorrow.

Often on Memorial Day, it has been said that the best way to honor the dead is to serve the living. *This* year, on *this* observance of Memorial Day, let us recommit ourselves to this great principle of service.

For, as the late President John F. Kennedy said of our nation's veterans:

“Without belittling the courage with which men have died, we should remember the courage with which men have lived.”

So, for at least one day each year, let us honor and revere those who gave their lives so that we all may live in freedom.

And, as we do so, we will build the foundation of just treatment of the veterans of tomorrow.

Thank you.