

TEN YEARS AFTER 9/11



Suggested Remarks for the Use of DAV Speakers at Observances of Veterans Day, 2011

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



A couple months ago, our nation solemnly observed the tenth anniversary of that tragic day – 9/11 – when a small group of fanatics hijacked four airliners in American skies.

Those terrorists landed a brutal blow against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

While brave American passengers stopped the fourth plane from crashing into our nation's capital, they sacrificed their own lives in the act.

Since those tragic hours of anguish that forever changed our nation, its people, and its veterans.

One of those who answered the call to duty was Stan Roberts. When a roadside bomb blew up under his vehicle, Stan paid dearly in the defense of your freedom and mine.

He sacrificed a leg for America that day. His arm was severely damaged. And perhaps worst of all, the blast injured his brain.

Stan is but one of 625,000 veterans who, after fighting for us in Afghanistan and Iraq, have filed with the VA for benefits as disabled veterans. The human cost of these wars has been enormous, and the disabled join hands with millions who served in earlier wars.

Now, let me take you back 60 years to the Korean War and a medic named Raymond Kasten. Ray was on the front line as the Chinese and North Koreans sent human waves of devastation during a bloody push south.

We can only image the din of the battle and the gruesome wounds Ray treated during the Korea War.

Memories of those attacks – memories of the wounded and the dead – still haunt Ray's heart today. In the 60 years of pain that Ray has suffered we see all the heroes who suffered post-traumatic stress since the World Wars, Vietnam, the Gulf War, and the many military conflicts that have put our own in harm's way.

And the burden of post-traumatic stress falls with a heavy fist on Stan Robert's generation. Nearly a million of them have returned to Iraq and Afghanistan two, three, four and five times.

But wounds to the brains and the hearts of our veterans are not the only wounds they suffer, as Stan's case shows all too well.

As we mark this day to honor veterans, we are remiss if we don't use the occasion to reaffirm our commitment to the men and women who so honorably served and continue to sacrifice after their time in uniform has ended.

There are lots of ways you can get directly involved in the lives of disabled veterans and their families – ways in which you can make a *real* difference to *real* people right here in your community.

In fact, you already started down that path when you turned out for today's observance of Veterans Day.

I thank you for showing your earnest concern to local veterans ... and for making a statement about veterans before your whole community! That's right, your presence at events like this one is a significant service to those who have served our country.

As I speak to you today, my thoughts go back in our nation's history to the summer of 1783. The American Revolution was drawing to a close. General George Washington was about to dismiss the army into a new nation, and the soldiers were going home as free human beings.

The end of the war brought a new day for all Americans. In the Declaration of Independence, a republic had been proclaimed. Now, that republic was a reality. It would build new democratic institutions and lay the groundwork of freedom.

But that bright new prospect had come at a very high price, as General Washington pointed out. He stated plainly that the soldiers had purchased liberty with "the price of their blood."

While those soldiers were joyous in their victory, the great general would not permit himself to share the festive mood.

There would be a time – later – for George Washington to celebrate. That would come as he marched his victorious troops through New York City.

On June 18, 1783, however, several worries bore down on the general's heroic heart. And he shared his concerns in a letter to the governors of the various states.

His words urged his fellow citizens to care for the soldiers returning from the war. He reminded America's leaders that this was a sacred duty. "A common debt," he called it, "a debt of honor."

General Washington expressed particular concern about those who were coming home seriously ill and injured. Allow me to quote what the Father of our Country said about assistance to disabled veterans:

"Nothing could be a more melancholy and distressing sight than to behold those, who have shed their blood and lost their limbs in the service of the country, [living] without a shelter, without a friend, and without the means of obtaining any of the comforts or necessities of life."

"Nothing but a punctual payment of their annual allowance can rescue them from the most complicated misery."

Speaking plainly about what could happen, George Washington even brought up the nightmare image of disabled veterans "compelled to beg their bread from door to door."

That foul vision crossed no one's mind on the day the victorious army paraded through New York. It was a wonderful day. In a letter to a friend, one woman described the high spirits of the soldiers and the crowd that cheered them along.

“The troops that marched in,” she said, “were ill-clad and weather-beaten, and made a forlorn appearance. But then they were *our* troops; and, as I looked at them and thought upon all they had done and suffered for us, my heart and my eyes were filled.”

If only such fervor had lasted! If only the American people had held fast to those feelings of respect and gratitude! But the years right after the Revolution told a different story.

Fear gripped the hearts of many otherwise reasonable people. Recalling how the soldiers had been trained in the arts of war, they felt threatened. Without cause, many looked upon their liberators as brutes capable of great violence.

And General Washington’s dreadful prediction came true. In some places, there *were* beggars on the streets – beggars who had lost their arms, their legs, or their sight in combat!

These are sobering thoughts at a time such as this – a time when far too many American veterans are homeless on the streets of our cities, the fields of our rural landscapes, and the forests of our wilderness!

Times have changed, of course. But the carelessness of so many people has not changed at all over the past 235 years. People get tired of war. People forget.

And veterans suffer – even in this, the greatest nation on the face of the earth.

But, in this moment of crisis, your presence today echoes the words of George Washington, who pleaded with Congress to remember “the veterans who have patiently endured hunger, nakedness, and cold ... who have suffered and bled without a murmur.”

Today, you show your commitment to the brave men and women who have served and sacrificed on behalf of our great nation throughout our history. And I encourage you to carry that forward and do whatever you can to help pay America’s debt of honor to our veterans.

Volunteer opportunities abound. You can support organizations that provide services to veterans. If you’re a veteran, consider becoming a member of one or more of those groups. And, of course, you can always advocate for veterans by urging your elected officials to enact and adequately fund legislation beneficial to our veterans.

Veterans stood up when their country needed them. You and I can stand up for them.

Again, thank you for being here today to honor all who have served and sacrificed in our nation's armed forces. May you be blessed. And, in this time of continuing war, may those blessings fall upon the United States of America.

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