

**The
American
Legion**



Suggested Speech

★ PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE ★ P.O. BOX 1055 ★ INDIANAPOLIS, IN 46206-1055
★ (317) 630-1253 ★ Fax (317) 630-1368

Memorial Day 2010

The American Legion National Headquarters
Public Relations
P.O. Box 1055
Indianapolis, IN 46206
(317) 630-1253
pr@legion.org

We remember.

Those of us who are still breathing cannot repay the sacrifice of those who gave their lives defending us, but at the very least, we can and we must remember them.

Men like Major Charles Joseph Loring, United States Air Force. Sixty years ago next month, a bloody and hellacious war broke out on the Korean peninsula. That war claimed 34,000 American lives and another 415,000 South Koreans.

Major Loring, a POW in Europe during World War II, continued his service during the Korean War as an F-80 pilot. On Nov. 22, 1952, Major Loring's aircraft was hit repeatedly by ground fire as he was dive-bombing enemy gun positions.

Instead of withdrawing, Charles Loring made a decision to sacrifice his life for his country. At 4,000 feet altitude, he aimed his F-80 directly at the gun positions that were threatening other pilots and friendly ground forces. He began another dive-bomb. He deliberately crashed into the enemy emplacements and eliminated the threat. For his actions, Major Loring was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

Memorial Day is for men like Major Loring. It is also for women like Marine Major Megan McClung. Major McClung was a public affairs officer who grew up in California and competed in six "Ironman" competitions.

Having served in Iraq while working for a defense contractor in 2004, Megan McClung re-entered active-duty and returned to the country in 2006.

It was during the routine performance of her job – in a place where danger is always part of the routine – that she was killed by a roadside bomb while escorting members of the media in Iraq.

A journalist who worked with Major McClung wrote, “She was a sharp and talented young woman...who can never be replaced.”

Sadly, none of the more than 1 million men and women who have died in service to this nation in wars and conflicts since 1775 can be replaced. Most were young – in the prime of their lives. Some were husbands, wives, fathers or mothers. All left a nation that is in their debt.

If you asked these heroes before they died how they would like to be honored, most would probably say “Take care of my family.”

The empty seat at the dinner table, the smaller gathering on Thanksgiving and the daughter who has no father to walk her down the wedding aisle are painful reminders that they are gone.

We must continue to live up to President Lincoln’s promise to not just care for him who shall have borne the battle, but for his widow and his orphan.

Remembering our fallen once a year is not enough. We must continue the legacy for which they died: the causes of democracy, decency and patriotism.

The American Legion serves as a catalyst for these principles.

Through our Blue Star Salute initiative, the Gold Star Banner program and The American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund, we breathe life into the Preamble of The American Legion Constitution which calls on us “to preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in the Great Wars.”

While Memorial Day is intended to honor our fallen, we should not forget those who have pledged to make the same sacrifice if called upon – the young men and women still serving in Iraq, Afghanistan, the United States and in more than 130 foreign lands.

We must continue to bear witness for those who never returned from the deserts of the Middle East, the jungles of Vietnam, the “Forgotten War” in Korea, the islands in the Pacific, and the European continent.

Several years ago, retired Navy Admiral Bill Owens wrote in The American Legion Magazine, “Many of us know the pain of losing a comrade who stood by our side. And we have shed many tears when our comrades were lost on battlefields around the world in pursuit of something they knew to be important, something they did on the command of their leaders and with confidence that that leadership would not let them down.”

Just as these heroes were confident in their wartime leaders – we must remain confident and committed to ensure that our national leaders know that the sacrifice made by these young men and women was in pursuit of something they, too, knew to be important.

In 2003 Army Private First Class Diego Rincon of Conyers, Georgia, wrote to his mother from Iraq: “Whether I make it or not, it’s all part of the plan. It can’t be changed, only completed. Mother will be the last word I’ll say. Your face will be the last picture that goes through my eyes. ... I just hope that you’re proud of what I’m doing and have faith in my decisions. I will try hard and not give up. I just want to say sorry for anything I have ever done wrong. And I’m doing it all for you mom. I love you.”

Nineteen year-old Diego never did make it home from Iraq. But we honor him by honoring the request that he made to his mother – to be proud of what he did and to have faith in his decisions.

America must remain the world’s beacon of freedom. We must represent the aspiration and hope of millions of people, that through hard work and perseverance, anyone can succeed in this fair and just society.

Writing in a letter from a Birmingham jail, Dr. Martin Luther King could have been describing countless American military missions when he wrote, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

So today, on this most sacred day, we pause to reflect on what has been given and sacrificed. Let us never forget. But let us also remember what resulted from these sacrifices. Let us remember the terrorist plots that were foiled and the killers that have been brought to justice because Americans were willing to pay the price. Let us remember the tyrannical regimes that have been toppled and the genocides that were stopped because Americans sacrificed life and limb. Let us remember that without a U.S. military, the world would be a far more oppressive and darker place.

Freedom is not a gift. It is an earned benefit that was paid for by the blood of our heroes. From the Revolutionary War to the War on Terrorism, the sacrifices and caliber of America's fighting men and women have been nothing short of inspirational.

One of the most poignant poems of World War I is titled "In Flanders Fields." In it, Canadian John McCrae seems to not only describe the fallen heroes of that war, but those of every era:

"In Flanders fields the poppies grow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Love, and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

Let us always remember them.

God bless you all, and God bless America.

#