



THE AMERICAN LEGION
Veterans Strengthening America

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

PO BOX 1055, INDIANAPOLIS, IN, 46206-1055 • WWW.LEGION.ORG • P: (317) 630-1350 • F: (317) 630-1223

Suggested Remarks for Memorial Day 2022

The American Legion National Headquarters
Media & Communications
P.O. Box 1055
Indianapolis, IN 46206
(317) 630-1298
pr@legion.org

Their mission was noble; evacuate desperate civilians yearning to escape a brutal regime. The 13 U.S. servicemembers who died during a terrorist bombing in Afghanistan last August will not be the last American heroes to make such a sacrifice, but they represent the best of a generation.

There was Navy Corpsman Max Sowiak of Berlin Heights, Ohio. His high school football coach described him as fearless. He was 22.

Army Staff Sergeant Ryan Knauss of Corryton, Tennessee, was a member of the 82nd Airborne. He was 23.

Marine Staff Sergeant Darin Hoover of Salt Lake City was serving his third tour of duty in Afghanistan. He was 31.

Marine Corps Sergeant Johanny (JOE-honny)

Rosario Pichardo of Lawrence, Massachusetts, was a member of her brigade's Female Engagement Team, responsible for screening civilians while respecting cultural sensitivities. She was 25.

Marine Corps Sergeant Nicole Gee of Sacramento, California, posted an Instagram photograph of herself cradling an Afghan baby and the caption, "I love my job," just days before the attack. She was 23.

Marine Corporal Hunter Lopez of Indio, California, was the son of two Riverside Sheriff's Department officers. He was 22.

USMC Corporal Humberto Sanchez of Logansport, Indiana, was on the homecoming court during his senior year in high school. He died at 22.

Lance Corporal Jared Schmitz of St. Charles, Missouri, liked to play video games, according to his father. He was 20.

Lance Corporal Dylan Merola of Cucamonga, California, had been in Afghanistan for just more than a week. He planned to attend college and study engineering. He was 20.

Lance Corporal Kareem Nikoui (nick who ē) of Norco, California, served in Junior ROTC before joining the Marines. He was 20.

Not only are these diverse men and women forever in our hearts, but for those who knew them, they are forever young.

They came from every background, yet they shared a common goal – to serve America and make life better for others.

It was the same ethos that drove our Korean War veterans seventy years ago.

George Andrew Davis, Junior, was a World War II flying ace with the Army Air Forces before taking his remarkable skills to the newly created U.S. Air Force. Flying an F-86 Sabre, he downed 14 North Korean, Chinese and Soviet aircraft.

He led his last aerial patrol mission on February 10, 1952, near the Manchurian border. Major Davis spotted 12 enemy MIG-15 aircraft speeding toward friendly fighter bombers. He sped through the rear of the enemy formation and downed two enemy MIGs. Rather than evade the enemy, who by then had been concentrating fire upon his aircraft, he reduced his speed to engage a third MIG-15. It was during this engagement that he sustained a direct hit and lost his life.

Major Davis was 31. He was promoted posthumously to lieutenant colonel and awarded the Medal of Honor. His citation states, “his indomitable fighting spirit, heroic aggressiveness, and superb courage in engaging the enemy against formidable odds exemplified valor at its highest.”

From the American Revolution to the Global War on Terrorism, more than one million American veterans have made the Supreme Sacrifice. They died so that we could continue to cherish the things they loved – God, country, and family.

That is why we are gathered here on Memorial Day... to honor the memory of our fallen warriors who have given everything for their country.

We are also reminded on this day, that brave men and women have always stepped forward to take the oath of allegiance as members of America's armed forces, willing to fight and if necessary, die for the sake of freedom.

In reflecting on the sacrifices of their comrades during World War I, the founders of The American Legion saw four common pillars as to why Americans so often answer their nation's call – even to the point of sacrificing their lives.

They do it to provide a strong national defense – to keep America safe and secure against those enemies who would destroy our American way of life.

They do it for their fellow comrades ... for those fighting by their side against all odds and for those who eventually separate from the military but proudly claim their status as veterans.

They do it for American core values of God and country – family, patriotism, and our freedom to worship as we please.

They do it for their children ... so that they can grow up in an America that is strong and free.

It is through this last pillar – children – that we must continue to honor the spirit of these heroes. We must share the legacies and tell the stories of those who are no longer here.

Nearly 7,000 American men and women have died while fighting the Global War on Terrorism. Many were parents.

The loss felt by Gold Star families is forever.

There are many tangible things we can do to honor the service of our fallen heroes. First and foremost, is to take care of their loved ones. In some cases, this means providing financial assistance to help their children obtain higher education.

Across this great country, The American Legion is raising funds to ensure that college education will be a reality for these families. This is why The American Legion established The American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund.

It is also why we wear the Poppy, a symbol of hope that sprouted on a Belgian battlefield.

Memorial Day is not about picnics and parades – though there is nothing wrong with enjoying and celebrating our American way of life.

Memorial Day is about gratitude and remembrance. It is about honoring the men and women who made it possible for us to gather here today in peace.

But the reason that there is a Memorial Day – the reason that we are gathered here – is to remember those who made our way of life possible.

They truly are the guardians of our freedom.

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