

**The
American
Legion**



For God and country

Suggested Speech

★ MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS ★ P.O. BOX 1055 ★ INDIANAPOLIS, IN 46206-1055
★ (317) 630-1298 ★ Fax (317) 630-1368

Veterans Day

2019

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

Horrible, ghastly and ghoulish. These are some of the adjectives Medal of Honor recipient David Bellavia used to describe the battlefields that he saw in Iraq.

But even so, the U.S. Army staff sergeant said it was also a place where he saw love.

Quote: “You see people doing these things for each other that they would never, ever do in any other circumstance — it’s a sight to see,”-unquote.

It was during the height of the Iraq War in the second battle of Fallujah where Staff Sgt. Bellavia distinguished himself by rescuing an infantry squad that was pinned down by machine gun fire while the soldiers went house to house to clear the city of insurgent strongholds. Bellavia’s actions during a pre-dawn mission on Nov. 10, 2004, made the former noncommissioned officer the Iraq War’s first living recipient of the military’s highest award for valor.

Putting himself in that position is “what sets him apart,” according to retired Sgt. First Class Colin Fitts. Fitts credits Bellavia’s actions with saving the lives of 3rd Platoon, Alpha Company, that day.

While Staff Sgt. Bellavia’s valor is exceptional even amongst the extraordinary, his mindset is common within the women and men who serve our great nation. His heroism is one story of the millions of living veterans.

By virtue of your attendance today, it is clear that you hold our nation’s heroes in high-esteem. But how many of their stories do we all truly know?

Like the story of Army Private First Class Monica Lin Brown. Pfc. Brown was a combat medic assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division when she was deployed to Paktika Province, Afghanistan.

On April 25, 2007, a roadside bomb tore through her convoy, wounding five soldiers. After the explosion, 19-year-old Brown ran through insurgent gunfire and used her body to shield her wounded comrades while mortars fell less than 100 yards away, her citation reads.

The military said her "bravery, unselfish actions and medical aid rendered under fire saved the lives of her comrades and represents the finest traditions of heroism in combat."

Her bravery and actions in the remote, Southeastern Afghan province would lead her to become the first woman to earn the Silver Star in Afghanistan, and just the second woman to do so since World War II.

Again, the exceptional in the extraordinary.

Comradery, warrior ethos, esprit de corps — all words we can use to describe what it means to be a veteran and to have served in our nation's military. In each other, we find community. We find it at American Legion posts and in unit Facebook groups. We find it in the familiar decal on the rear window of a car passing by. We often see ourselves in one another.

When news got out that a Vietnam War veteran had no living relatives to attend his funeral, the veteran community was there.

Friends of Wayne Wilson had put out a call for people to come to his burial service at the Silverbrook Cemetery in Niles, Michigan, and expected only a handful of people to attend.

They underestimated the power of The American Legion.

Three thousand people showed up to pay their respects.

“None of us figured that it would be as big as it was,” said Sergeant-at-Arms of American Legion Post 51 Richard Stuart. “Every veteran has the right to have a funeral like this.”

These are just three stories. Three stories — from the millions out there to be told and heard. So before you leave here today, I have something to ask of you. Find someone here and ask them to tell you their story. Every single woman and man who has raised their right hand and pledged to give their life for their country if needed, did so for a reason. Ask them why.

These stories and memories of ours are powerful. They are one of our most powerful weapons in securing a future for those who will follow us.

As veterans, we are acutely aware of the sacrifices made by our servicemembers. We are equally aware of the cost of those sacrifices. We know the value in the lessons that our military service bestowed upon us. These are things that we cannot afford to lose to time.

American Legion National Commander Bill Oxford calls upon us to build a foundation for the future. Sharing the stories of our heroes and their contributions to freedom is part of that future.

The American Legion knows these stories well. We were founded on the heels of the first World War. The stories that arose from the ashes of the War to End All Wars follow us. Like the legend of Marine Sgt. Major Daniel Daly in the Battle of Belleau (*bellow*) Wood. Or that of William Henry Johnson, an African American soldier from World War One who was at long last awarded a much-delayed Medal of Honor by President Barack Obama in 2015.

For the past one hundred years, The American Legion has been dedicated to serving those who have served. The commitment to caring for America's veterans is one that transcends partisanship. It is a commitment that covers all races. All genders. And all faiths. The American Legion knows that service doesn't stop when the uniform comes off.

As we honor our nation's living veterans today, it is fitting to bring to mind a piece of wisdom from Staff Sgt. Bellavia – who said, quote:

“All throughout our history, we have had people that have dissented, that have disagreed, and we've found ways to put everything aside and focus on what's best for this nation, what's best for mission success.” – unquote.

So to those who came before me.

To those whom I had the privilege to serve with.

And to those who have followed.

Thank you for your selfless service as today we honor those who have worn our nation's uniforms.

God bless you all for being here. And God bless these United States.