



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 Speech for Veterans Day 2021

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

Military service by its nature is temporary. The legacy of that service, however, can benefit generations for centuries.

Veterans Day can be traced to the armistice which ended World War I. Though the peace of that treaty did not survive the fascist tyrannies of Hitler and Mussolini, the freedom enjoyed by Europeans today is the result of the service and sacrifice made by millions of U.S. veterans.

It is the legacy of those who have worn the uniform of the United States. A legacy of freedom.

It is a legacy that has spread the globe.

First lieutenant Ralph Puckett, Junior, was commanding officer of the 8th Ranger Company, 8213th Army Unit, 8th U.S. Army. Outnumbered and seriously wounded twice by the enemy in Unsan, Korea during a two day battle in 1950, he continued to lead his company of Rangers through machine gun fire in order to capture

objectives and direct artillery. When his wounds prevented him from moving, he told his soldiers to leave him behind so they could withdraw. Despite his objections, his soldiers dragged him from the hill to a position of safety.

Lieutenant Puckett would survive the battle and eventually retire from the Army as a colonel in 1971. Even his lengthy military career was temporary when compared to the legacy that still continues in Korea.

“Without the sacrifice of veterans, including Col. Puckett...freedom and democracy we enjoy today couldn’t have blossomed in Korea,” South Korea President Moon Jae-in said earlier this year during a White House ceremony in which Col. Puckett received his well-deserved Medal of Honor from President Biden.

Another distinguished hero, the late Admiral Jeremiah Denton, spoke of the long but temporary ordeal he experienced as a prisoner of war in Vietnam.

“If I had known when I was shot down that I would be there more than seven years, I would have died of despondency, of despair. But I didn’t. It was one minute at a time, one hour, one week, one year and so on. If you look at it like that, anybody can do anything...” unquote.

That type of toughness, commitment and perseverance is not unusual among veterans. Their exploits are legendary.

After Harriett Tubman led hundreds of slaves to freedom through the underground railroad, she served as a cook, nurse and spy for the Union Army during the Civil War.

Frederick W. Smith served two tours as a Marine in Vietnam before launching the Federal Express network, a company that would grow into an \$84 billion global enterprise.

Baseball great Jackie Robinson, surgeon Michael DeBakey and computer scientist Grace Hopper were other Americans whose contributions to culture and society reach far beyond their military service.

Even so, can any CEO or cultural icon truly claim to have greater responsibility than a platoon commander leading a team in combat?

For these young people, a bad day at work does not mean a blown account or lost business. It can mean watching a best friend die, losing a limb or being immersed in the collateral suffering that is synonymous with war.

Even veterans who have not experienced combat share a bond with those who have. They have all expressed a willingness to die for their country if called upon. They have all subjected themselves to a military justice system which requires strict obedience and

professionalism. And they have all pledged loyalty to the U.S. Constitution.

In the book “Walk in My Combat Boots” by James Patterson and Matt Eversmann, the authors interviewed veterans of various eras and published their accounts.

Navy Reservist Ryan Leahy spoke of the rivalry as well as the bond. While on active-duty, he felt a sense of dread in 2007 when he was approached by a Marine Vietnam War veteran in a bar. “He is going to give me crap about being a Navy guy,” Leahy recalled in the book.

Leahy, who had not seen combat, was surprised when the Vietnam vet instead thanked him.

When he asked why, the Vietnam vet said “You guys saved my life more times than I can count. I can’t tell you the amount of times we would have been dead, but we were able to pick up the phone and you guys came in and got everyone out.”

Leahy would later use that moment to mentor others. “Listen, you’re not pulling the trigger, you’re not doing what you see in the movies, but most people aren’t,” he would tell his people. “What you’re doing by keeping a reactor up, getting that F-18 off the flight deck – you’re literally saving people’s lives. You’re only one or two degrees away from physically saving someone’s life, so have a little bit more onus and understanding and pride in what you do.”

We, in The American Legion, welcome and encourage conversations such as these among veterans. We call them Buddy Checks. We remind all veterans that their service matters. We remind them that their well-being matters, especially to us. Most importantly, we offer our friendship and assistance.

Through that friendship, The American Legion has made suicide prevention among veterans its top priority.

Buddy Checks are one tool. But we must also do whatever it takes to encourage veterans to seek help from the Department of Veterans Affairs or other trained professionals. We must remove all stigmas associated with asking for help or being diagnosed with PTSD, depression or any condition that could lead one to take his or her own life.

All of us here can help. Memorize the Veterans Crisis Line number and offer it freely to those in need. That's 1-800-273-8255, extension 1. That's 1-800-273-8255, then 1.

Follow up and ensure that veterans that you encounter know that you are an ally and can be counted on for support.

You can also show your support for these great men and women by hiring a veteran in your workplace, patronizing a veteran-owned business or donating to a veterans program. And you can simply thank them for their service.

For many veterans, our nation was important enough to endure long separations from their families, miss the births of their children, freeze in sub-zero temperatures, bake in wild jungles, lose limbs, and, far too often, lose their lives.

Military spouses have had to endure career interruptions, frequent changes of address, and a disproportionate share of parental responsibilities.

Fewer than 10 percent of Americans can claim the title “veteran.” Less than 1/2 of 1 % of our population currently serves. Yet some seem intent on trying to balance the federal budget by diminishing the quality of life

programs designed for the families who have already disproportionately made these sacrifices.

Veterans have given us freedom, security and the greatest nation on earth. It is impossible to put a price on that.

We must remember them. We must appreciate them.

God bless you all for being here, God bless our veterans and God bless America.