



THE AMERICAN LEGION
Veterans Strengthening America

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

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Suggested Speech For Memorial Day 2025

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Ladies and gentlemen, Veterans, Friends of Veterans and family of Veterans:

Society likes to use the word “hero.” There are sports heroes, action heroes and political heroes. But is there any group more deserving of the title than the more than one million men and women who have sacrificed their lives in defense of this nation?

Including among them was a gridiron hero named Jack Lummus. Jack was an All-American football star, as well as a terrific centerfielder for Baylor University. He attended a New York Giants training camp and signed with the football team as a free agent. He was playing in his eighth professional game, when the scoreboard flashed that there had been an attack at Pearl Harbor.

Jack knew what to do. After the team's championship game against the Chicago Bears, he enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve.

It was as a Marine that Jack would go from sports hero to genuine American hero.

He has since been inducted to the New York Giants Ring of Honor but that is just a small part of his story.

On February 19, 1945, Jack Lummus was among the first to land at Iwo Jima. A leader of a rifle platoon, First Lieutenant Lummus slowly but relentlessly advanced with his men against entrenched enemy forces. He disregarded wounds inflicted upon him by grenade shrapnel and other small arms fire. He neutralized enemy soldiers positioned in three pillboxes before eventually stepping on a landmine.

Jack attempted to stand even though his legs and lower torso were badly mangled. Rushed to surgeons who attempted to save his life, Lieutenant Lummus said: Quote - "Well, Doc, the New York Giants lost a mighty good end today."-unquote.

He died on March 8, 1945 and America lost a mighty good hero. For his actions at Iwo Jima eighty years ago, Jack Lummus was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

Lieutenant Jack Lummus was one of the most famous heroes of one of history's most famous battles. But there are so many others that we can also remember...People who died while fulfilling their military missions.

Navy Lieutenant Commander Lyndsay Evans and Lieutenant Serena Wileman conducted multiple combat missions against Houthi terrorists in 2023 and 2024. The aviators both earned multiple combat medals for their actions in the Middle East.

On October 15, 2024, the two trailblazing pilots lost their lives when their EA-18G Growler jet crashed during a training exercise near Washington's Mount Rainier.

Even within the safety of the United States, the military is an inherently dangerous profession comprised of professionals willing to sacrifice for us.

Sacrifice for others...This was the final act of yet another hero, Army medic Calvin Bouknight (*boke* night).

“He died so others could live,” said one of his eulogizers at a ceremony that occurred last year at Arlington National Cemetery.

The speaker was not exaggerating. Specialist Bouknight was killed in 1965, while shielding and protecting four of his fellow soldiers in Vietnam. He was posthumously awarded the Silver Star.

Approval for the esteemed award was slow, a common practice to which most people familiar with the military medal process can attest. As a result, his original gravestone had no acknowledgment of his Silver Star. It was through the determination of other veterans that the injustice was finally corrected, and his gravestone updated in 2024.

A native of Washington, D.C., Specialist Bouknight lived only 24 years, but his legacy is still remembered sixty years after his passing.

On the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund website, Bouknight was remembered by his platoon leader. His fellow soldier wrote:

“I witnessed Specialist-5 Bouknight’s actions, which resulted in his receiving a posthumous Silver Star. I submitted by statement for a Medal of Honor, but it was rejected, since in the deadly confusion, I was the only witness to his intrepid gallantry. I will never forget those moments where a Conscientious Objector rose up and became a dynamic hero in the face of deadly odds.” – unquote.

Fifty years ago, the Vietnam war ended. Much like our withdrawal from Afghanistan, history will be kinder to those who fought the war than it will be to the policymakers who managed it. For it is the veterans – not the politicians—who give us our freedom.

The true heroes are not the quarterbacks who successfully execute Hail Mary passes or the baseball players, who hit walk-off home runs. It isn't the Hollywood actor who looks good dodging imaginary bullets and fake explosions. It is the military veteran...the police officer... the firefighter and others who risk, and far too often LOSE their lives protecting and defending all of us.

The heroes that we honor today are not exclusive to any gender, race or religion. They come from all economic classes and backgrounds. They hail from all 50 states, and some have migrated from other countries. They are a diverse group wedded to the belief that America is a nation worth dying for.

The heroes that I mentioned had earned prestigious awards and military decorations. But just like the “soldiers known only to God,” countless veterans have not been recognized for their bravery due to a lack of surviving witnesses who could document their final acts.

They are no less heroic.

We are gathered so that we can remember their sacrifices and celebrate the fact that throughout our history, this great country produces such men and women of honor. We must not forget them.

We should also remember the proclamation signed by a distinguished veteran in 1955.

Quote: “I, Dwight D. Eisenhower, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim Memorial Day, Monday, the thirtieth of May 1955, as a day of nationwide prayer for permanent peace.” – unquote.

It is a prayer that every American and every decent human should share not just on Memorial 2025, but the rest of the year as well.

Thank you for being here. God Bless you, God Bless America and may God please watch over our Gold Star Families.

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