



THE AMERICAN LEGION

Veterans Strengthening America

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

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Suggested Remarks for Veterans Day 2025

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Americans never forget. This is what Veterans Day is really about. We remember the brave and honorable men and women who have served in our Armed Forces since the founding of our nation.

Ten years ago, a veteran received overdue but well-deserved recognition nearly a century after his brave and legendary service. William Shemin (pronounced *shimmon*) was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his World War I heroism.

While fighting in France as a member of the Army's 47th Infantry Regiment, Sergeant Shemin repeatedly left cover and exposed himself to enemy machine gun and rifle fire while rescuing wounded comrades over a three-day period. Even after being shot in the head, he refused to accept medical help until his platoon was safely withdrawn.

His bravery inspired his fellow soldiers to recommend him for the nation's highest military award. Senior brass rejected the

request reportedly because Shemin was Jewish, and discrimination was far too common.

The request at the time was downgraded to a Distinguished Service Cross, the nation's second highest award for military valor. Shemin responded with the humility that epitomizes so many heroes, saying, Quote: "War is not about medals. I love my country. I love my men. That's all that counts." Unquote.

While Medal of Honor recipients are an elite class among the special group of people that we call "veterans," Shemin's love for his country and his fellow soldiers is typical of the men and women we honor today.

It is a brotherhood and a sisterhood. A bond cemented with blood. Just this summer, six soldiers risked their lives and gave aid to the wounded while subduing a shooter who opened fire at Fort Stewart, Georgia. The instant reaction of the 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team was credited by law enforcement with preventing fatalities.

“The fast action of these soldiers under stress and under trauma and under fire absolutely saved lives,” Army Secretary Dan Discroll said, before adding: “They are everything that is good about this nation.”

While not all veterans see combat, an expressed willingness to sacrifice one’s life is a requirement. It has been part of the commitment for military service since George Washington commanded our first troops. And it is not the only commitment to service that our veterans make.

Only about six percent of American adults today have served in the military. Yet it is this small and talented group that enables our communities to function.

Chances are that if you surveyed your local police or fire departments, you would find that a disproportionately high percentage of their members are veterans. When an emergency hits, there is a good chance that it is a veteran who is first to respond.

In most American communities, July 4, 2025, was a day of celebration.

For central Texas, it was a day of horror. Flash floods ravaged Kerr County and killed 138 people, many young girls attending a summer camp. The death toll could have been more than double had it not been for the extraordinary actions of Coast Guard rescue swimmer Scott Ruskan and his crew.

The 26-year-old New Jersey native led the search and triage operations at Camp Mystic and is credited with rescuing 169 victims in distress.

Ruskan's actions were personally recognized by the Secretary of Homeland Security. He responded with the modesty that is so common among U.S. veterans.

Quote- "I'm just doing a job. This is what I signed up for, and I think that any single Coast Guard pilot, flight mechanic, whoever it may be, would have done the exact same thing in our

situation. We just happened to be the crew that got the case,” - unquote, he told the media.

Whether it's hurricane relief, defending our interests abroad, or search and rescue, America is fortunate to have such people willing to voluntarily risk their lives for us.

When a veteran leaves the military, he or she is likely to be a key contributor to our communities. It may be as a schoolteacher, construction worker or first responder. They may be a business owner, real estate agent or medical professional. Regardless of occupation, veterans take their missions seriously. They vote in higher percentages than nonveterans. They are more likely to volunteer in their communities. And they are less likely to live in poverty.

In short, veterans make our neighborhoods better. By virtue of your attendance here, you have shown an appreciation for veterans. The people here are veterans, friends of veterans, families of veterans, co-workers of veterans and neighbors of veterans. It is up to us to ensure that every veteran

feels that his or her service to this country is appreciated by their fellow Americans.

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, roast in faraway deserts, lose limbs, and, far too often, their lives.

Their families serve and sacrifice as well.

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

The children often had to deal with changes in schools, separation from friends and, hardest of all, the uncertainty of whether or not Mom or Dad would live through their next combat tour.

Warriors need advocates, and that is why The American Legion exists. We are here to serve veterans, their families and our communities. Veterans need each other, but, more importantly, our country needs our veterans.

You cannot fight a war without veterans and while the idea of a society without conflict is appealing, let us not forget that wars have liberated slaves, stopped genocide and toppled terrorists.

The memories of war, the sacrifices made and difficulties transitioning to civilian society have taken a toll on too many veterans.

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, more than 17 veterans a day take their own lives. Some believe the number is much higher. Regardless, The American Legion believes one suicide is too many, and we call on all Americans – all of us at this gathering – to *be the one to save one*.

Reach out to a veteran you think may be struggling. Ask how he or she is doing. Most of all: LISTEN.

Remember the three numbers – 9-8-8. This is the national crisis line for anybody who is having suicidal thoughts. A situation that may seem hopeless today will certainly look better

tomorrow when you realize that you have the support of people who truly care.

There is no better way to thank a veteran for their service than to let him or her know that we got their back. After all, veterans have had America's back for 250 years, humbly and proudly keeping our nation free, no matter the danger.

Just "doing their job" as an Army sergeant from World War I and a Coast Guard rescue swimmer from 2025 alike would say with the same measure of modesty.

Thank you, God bless America and God bless our veterans.