

**LTG William B Caldwell, IV**  
**Address to the VFW Convention**  
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When they told me there were going to be several thousand veterans here, I was shocked that so many people would want to hear me speak? .....

Then my staff reminded me..."lets put it in perspective, you are speaking just before the President, sir" ....guess I am the warm up....

Being from the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne I remember when a reporter asked General Gavin during WWII why he enjoyed jumping out of planes ...and he said he didn't, in fact it scared him - the reporter then asked "then why do you do it?"... General Gavin answered "...because I love being around those who do" ..... Which is why I am proud to be here today surrounded by patriots who have served their country so honorably.

Thanks so much for this invite -- the opportunity to speak to such a distinguished group of Veterans is a great honor in and of itself... To also receive this award - I am just really humbled.

**Sixty-six years ago**, our world was suddenly changed by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The call went out across our Nation for able bodied men and women to serve. Many of you in this room answered that call. From the fields of Europe, to the beaches of the Pacific Islands; from the mountains of Korea, to the rice paddies of Vietnam; from the jungles of Panama and Grenada to the scorching deserts of the Persian Gulf...time and time again our Nation called ..... AND ALL OF YOU ANSWERED THE CALL! All of us serving today thank you for your service.

**Six years ago**, our nation was changed yet again by the horrific events of September 11th. Well let me tell you what **didn't** change.... When the call went out, IT WAS ANSWERED!! It was answered by the men and women who are currently serving our nation in Iraq and Afghanistan, and other places around the world.

And what about those who answered that Call .....What is their character made of – well let me tell you about a few of these Soldiers ... and when I say soldier, I mean every man and woman... every Soldier, Sailor, Airman, Marine and Coast Guardsman; active and reserves, currently serving this nation, .....every one..... A volunteer

These modern day Warriors are doing an incredible job under the most difficult conditions in Iraq....and in Afghanistan.

They are fully committed – and are stretched .....but our Soldiers are **stepping up** and answering the call.

- **Stepping up** like CPT Brennan Goltry from my “All American” 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division who received a Silver Star and his **second** Purple Heart when his convoy was ambushed in Iraq.

When the lead humvee was disabled CPT Goltry ordered his driver pull in front of it to provide cover. He spotted an enemy shooter, opened his door, and returned fire. He received two gun shot wounds in his left leg but continued fighting until that enemy was killed.

He took cover and gathered his men, some of whom were also wounded. Under continuous enemy fire and with complete disregard for his own safety or his injuries, CPT Goltry led his men in an assault against the enemy and destroyed them. Because of his actions many of his Paratroopers are alive today.

- **Stepping up** like 1LT Brian Chontosh, who, while serving in the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division (HOU-RAAH) in Iraq was ambushed by a well coordinated attack of automatic weapons, RPGs, and mortars. The road ahead was blocked and his platoon was caught in the enemy’s kill zone. Maneuvering his vehicle directly at the entrenched and firing enemy, he was able to get into a position where his .50 cal machine gunner could neutralize the enemy. He then dismounted and cleared the trench until his ammo was gone. Twice he picked up enemy weapons in order to continue his counterattack. He then used a discarded enemy RPG to kill yet another group of enemy fighters. When the smoke cleared, 1LT Chontosh had cleared over 200 meters of trench and killed more than 20 enemy....for his actions he received the Navy Cross.

- **Stepping up** like Senior Airman Jason Cunningham – an Air Force medic and part of a Combat Search and Rescue mission searching for two American Soldiers evading capture in an enemy occupied area of Afghanistan. His helicopter crash landed after it was shot down by RPG and small arms fire. His crew formed a hasty defense and immediately suffered three fatalities and five critical casualties. Despite heavy enemy fire, Airman Cunningham remained in the burning aircraft treating the wounded. As he moved his patients to a more secure location, mortar rounds began to impact within fifty feet of his position. Disregarding the extreme danger, he continued to move casualties and exposed himself to enemy fire on seven separate occasions. When his casualty collection point was compromised, he braved an intense small arms and RPG attack to reposition the critically wounded to a safer area. Even after he was mortally wounded and in dire need of medical care, he continued to direct casualty movement and transferred treatment to another medic. In the end, he was responsible for ensuring that ten gravely wounded Americans were evacuated to safety ....for his actions Airman Jason Cunningham was awarded the Air Force Cross posthumously.

The most important thing to take away from these stories is that while the enemy, the battlefield, and the uniforms we wear may change,... the people wearing those uniforms do not. Our Soldiers today are **as** dedicated, courageous and committed as ever – Just like in previous conflicts.

And with every step our Soldiers take in Iraq and Afghanistan the VFW marches along with them here in the states ...supporting them, and aiding them wherever you can.

Last year you helped 107,000 veterans to recoup almost one billion dollars in government-earned compensation and pensions.

Your Military Assistance Program, MAP, provides tremendously to our family readiness group functions – like welcome home and farewell activities. The MAP set up more than 200 computers in “internet cafes” where families can keep in contact with their deployed loved ones!

Your partnership with the Wounded Warrior Project is unmatched and immeasurably aids our Soldiers who have been wounded in service to our Nation. We sincerely thank you for your undying support to our troops.

The VFW understands Soldiers and their hardships. Your dedication and hard work is immensely appreciated and on behalf of all of us in uniform..... Thanks!

Over the past few years a lot of Veterans have asked me; “What can I do to help the Soldier?” I always say the most important thing you can do is to TELL THEIR STORY.

-- Tell your friends, families and community the stories of bravery you heard today.

-- Tell them about our Soldier's dedication .... Their commitment and sacrifice.

-- Tell them their Soldiers are out there fighting for them.

Your commander, Gary Kurpius (KER-pus) **is** telling their story. Recently he returned from a trip to Iraq. While there he accompanied American and Iraqi patrols through the streets of Baghdad. His visit afforded him the unique opportunity to see first hand what most Americans only get to see through the media. Upon his return, he echoed a lot of the things that I have said here today. He said; “there are many success stories that are happening every day...” ....and that the troop's morale ...is high.

In closing, I would ask you to remember all those who have perished in the service of our Nation. I am reminded of a few loses that have personally impacted me. Great Soldiers like LT Mike Cerrone, CSM Donovan Watts, and CPT Kimberly Hampton, to remember just a few --

They join the rolls of great men and women from past conflicts that paid the ultimate sacrifice for our safety and our freedom.

They will NEVER be forgotten

They will always be our Heroes

Their Sacrifice will never be in Vain.

Because WE WON'T LET IT!

Thanks for allowing me to join you all today – you are great American heroes and there is nothing more rewarding than being here with all of you.

God bless you all!