

Sprint Veterans Day
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Sprint World Headquarters, Overland Park, KS
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Good morning. Thank you for that kind introduction and those inspiring words from a true American hero, COL Donlon. I want to thank Chairman Hesse and Sprint for the invitation to speak with you today as we honor our Military Heroes. We all are impressed with your magnificent campus. WOW! Truly though, it is an honor to be here and I am humbled to be asked to share some thoughts on such an important component of our Nation's freedom...the men and women, past and present, that have elected to serve and protect the ideals and principles of our great Nation.

As your neighbors from Fort Leavenworth, it is always good to get out in the local community and share some time with our great community. For those of you that are unfamiliar with what we do at Fort Leavenworth let me spend a few moments to share with you and give you a quick update. (**Pause**) Former Army Chief of Staff General Carl Vuono once said, "***The path to a trained and ready Army runs through the gates of Fort Leavenworth***". As a Nation that finds itself in its ninth year of continuous combat, this statement has taken on even greater significance. Today the Soldiers and civilians who serve at Fort Leavenworth are providing our war fighters every possible tool to ensure they are successful on the battlefield.

Known as the "Intellectual Center" of the Army, it is the mission of the Combined Arms Center at FT Leavenworth to develop the next generation of Army mid-career leaders, to train units preparing to deploy to Iraq and Afghanistan, to capture the Army's lessons learned, and to convert them into our Army's doctrine. General Petraeus had this job twice before me, and if you are tracking his work at all, it was his efforts to come up with the Counter-Insurgency doctrine who's execution turned the Iraq War around and appears to be doing the same under his leadership in Afghanistan. That's what Leavenworth does for our Army and ultimately for our Nation

Now I don't think you invited me here to brag about what we do at Fort Leavenworth, so I guess I better get on to the real reason that you asked me here today, and that is to talk about this very special day our Nation has set apart since the end of WW1 – Veteran's Day – as well as to talk about the great young men and women – and their families who continually stand in the gap between the evil that is out there and our Nation's values and way of life. (**Pause**)

As I just said, since the end of World War I, our Nation has set aside this day to celebrate the men and women who served in the military, defending our Country against her enemies. From the Revolutionary War to today's conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan,

these men and women have answered the call of duty, and of country, and have executed their duty with honor.

One of the greatest leaders of the 20th Century and fellow Kansan, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, once said, ***“The history of freedom is never really written by chance but by choice”***.

America’s choice of freedom manifests itself in our Nation’s Constitution. ***We the people (Pause)*** have always represented the ideals and principles of freedom. From the earliest days of the Republic to today, we remain a people committed to a societal model of freedom, tolerance and inclusion for all. As President Eisenhower alluded to, we have ***chosen*** this path of freedom. ***(Pause)*** But as you know, it is not without costs – our freedoms and values are defended and maintained at a steep price – secured only through the blood and sacrifice of those brave Americans willing to confront the dangers of the world in order to protect the American way of life. These faceless heroes have selflessly and continuously laid their sacrifice on the altar of freedom to allow us to enjoy the fruits of that freedom. I know you recognize that and appreciate what they do and what they have done over the years, or you wouldn’t even be here today. And I’ll tell you, as a Soldier for over 35 years, it is an honor to be able to stand with you today and talk about our Veterans and their incredible service and sacrifices over so many years.

If you ever have the opportunity to witness a Veteran as they recite the Pledge of Allegiance or sing the Star Spangled Banner, ***(Pause)*** just watch them out of the corner of your eye. ***The words are alive to them.*** The bond that exists between them and their country, represented in the flag, is indelible. They know something about the concept of selfless service to one’s Nation only too well; and to the principles which are represented by our flag.

President Ronald Reagan once said, ***“Freedom is a fragile thing and it is never more than a generation from extinction. It is not ours by inheritance; it must be fought for and defended constantly by each generation, FOR IT ONLY COMES ONCE TO A PEOPLE. Those who have known freedom, and then lost it, have never known it again.”***

As you tour our Nation’s Capital you cannot escape the tributes to generations past. Standing in front of the Lincoln Memorial is the beautiful Reflecting Pool and at the opposite end stands the new World War II Memorial, built to honor America’s “Greatest Generation”.

This WWII generation – known as the “Greatest Generation” - came from a full range of backgrounds and values, but they all shared a few things in common. Within each burned a love of freedom, and the moral courage to safeguard it. Whether a

career Soldier or a Citizen Soldier, all of them answered liberty's call, and shouldered the responsibility of safeguarding freedom in its darkest hours – when tyrants and dictators threatened to extinguish it from this world. How great and noble was their sacrifice.

And I think that if you were able to ask them what led them to serve, what drove them to continue to fight when things seemed hopeless, each would reply, “**Because my friends were counting on me**”. They fought for the love of freedom, for the love of their Country and for their buddies. They recognized their duty to serve their Nation in a time of need...and their glorious response to that calling will forever be etched in the annals of our Nation's history.

I know many of you have seen the movie “**Saving Private Ryan**”. Without a doubt, the film has left a lasting impression on our generation regarding the debt we owe to our past generations.

The film opens with a harrowing realistic re-enactment of the D-Day invasion of Normandy. We see the action through the eyes of Captain John Miller (played by Tom Hanks). Through the rest of the film, Captain Miller leads a search party to locate Private Ryan, whose three brothers had just been killed in action. The last surviving Ryan son is to be sent home to comfort his grieving mother.

As the Soldiers penetrate deep behind enemy lines, they open a Pandora's Box of moral questions. Why are these eight Soldiers being called to risk their lives to save this one lone Soldier? What makes this Soldier's life more valuable than their own? Don't these eight Soldiers have mothers as well? Are they just pawns in some cynical Public Relations maneuver by the War Department? How much is one man's life worth?

There are no easy answers to such questions, but in the end, the Director, Steven Spielberg shows us the only answer possible. As Captain Miller lies mortally wounded with the majority of his squad killed, he clutches Private Ryan and gasps, “**Earn this. Live a good life. Earn this**”.

In other words, these men have laid their lives down for you, now it is up to you to live a life worthy of such sacrifice. **What a moral weight to lie on one man's shoulders!** And yet, fifty years later, the former Private Ryan, now an old man with children and grandchildren in tow, visits Captain Miller's grave at Normandy. “**I lived my life the best I could**”, he speaks anxiously to Captain Miller's gravestone. “**I hope in your eyes I have earned what you have done for me**”.

Like Private Ryan we all have a moral duty to...“**earn what they have done for us**”. There are countless gravestones, such as Captain Miller's, in cemeteries

throughout the world that signify a similar sacrifice - a life laid down for freedom's cause. Each of them represents a son, a daughter, a father, a mother - **sacrificed on our behalf**. We, who enjoy the rewards of such sacrifice, must always strive to make our lives worthy – much as Private Ryan did. May we always remember and honor these brave Americans through the lives we lead.

Today as we celebrate the service and sacrifice of those who have served this Nation, our Nation finds itself in its ninth year of continuous combat.

As the Chief of Staff of the United States Army, General Casey, said about the nature of this conflict:

“We are locked in a war against a global extremist network that is fixed on defeating the United States and destroying our way of life. This foe will not go away nor will they give up easily, and the next decade will likely be one of persistent conflict. At stake are the power of our values and our civilization, exemplified by the promise of America, to confront and defeat the menace of extremist terrorists. At stake is whether the authority of those who treasure the rights of free individuals will stand firm against the ruthless and pitiless men who wantonly slay the defenseless. At stake is whether the future will be framed by the individual freedoms we hold so dear or dominated by a demented form of extremism. At stake is whether we will continue to expand freedom, opportunity, and decency for those who thirst for it, or let fall the darkness of extremism and terror”.

Much like those generations past, today's generation of young Americans understand the implications of what is at stake and have answered Freedom's distress call. The so-called pundits that cite America as a declining power have not witnessed this generation in action. ***Rest assured I have seen their courage, intelligence and determination firsthand, and can promise you America's future is in very good hands.*** The simple fact that America is able to produce such a magnificent and dynamic generation is proof positive that this country's brightest days still lay ahead of it.

Our military members today represent the very best of America. They are a generation of men and women that saw our Nation brutally attacked, yet elected to voluntarily serve – knowing full well that they would confront the enemies of our Nation on obscure battlefields halfway across the world. Yet much like Captain Miller, they have never wavered or questioned their duty to their Nation. This generation quietly count themselves worthy to stand among the generations of Americans that have gone before them, quietly standing in the gap between the evils of the world and the values of our Nation and our Constitution and the American people.

This generation of Americans is a reflection of you - the people of the United States. They are an all-volunteer force, comprised of citizens from all walks of life throughout our country. Indeed, they are a microcosm of our society – where all our country’s races, religions, and creeds – equally share in the task of defending our Nation and its Constitution. Consequently, their character and ethic are a reflection of your own. They stand for the principles and values that you and our Nation hold dear. This generation of American heroes is comprised of your neighbors, friends, and relatives, who have answered America’s call to service during a time of war.

Many in this country do not yet fully realize the incredible value and impact that this 9/11 generation is having, and will continue to have, on our society, but that is OK – for they would want it no other way. For they are a humble, resilient and focused generation. They represent our Nation’s future - among their ranks are the future leaders of our society – **leaders of industry, leaders of our communities, and leaders of our Nation.**

I have no doubt that history will be kind to them. Their service and sacrifice have protected the free world from tyranny and evil, they have restored freedom and inspired hope where it was absent, and they have confronted and repulsed extremism, violence, and exclusion in all corners of the world. Much like past generations, they seek moderation, tolerance, and inclusion for all of humanity. They protect, defend, and advocate for the downtrodden and defenseless. They are indeed a reflection of you – **the American people.**

I’d like to share with you a couple brief stories of Soldiers that I believe epitomize what I’m talking about:

A year ago Easter Sunday morning, I stood in the corner of the operating room of our CSH in COB Speicher Iraq watching Private Brandon Marraco receive 56 pints of blood to keep his body alive. Brandon lost all 4 of his limbs when an IED hit him on the driver’s side of his vehicle, as well as 2 inches from the jugular vein in his neck. The Soldiers were lined up all night donating pint after pint of blood just to save their buddy. We did not know if Brandon would make it but 6 weeks later during my R&R leave, I stopped by and saw him at Walter Reed. And there sat an energetic spunky Brandon Marrocco, surrounded by his family, telling me he was going to walk off the plane to meet his platoon when they returned from Iraq. And then sure enough, 6 months later, Brandon flew to Honolulu to join his unit in the welcome home celebrations. His platoon all had gateside passes, and greeted him when the plane arrived and after everyone else in the plane got off, down the ramp came Brandon Marocco with two prosthetic legs walking into the cheering arms of his buddies in his platoon.

I also had the honor a couple years ago to meet CPT Scotty Smiley, the first blind Soldier to remain on active duty. Scotty lost his eyesight when a suicide car

bomber exploded in front of his Stryker vehicle while he was standing in the commander's hatch in Mosul Iraq. To make a long story short, Scotty today is commanding a company of Soldiers at West Point, New York and teaches leadership in his free time to a classroom of cadets – he doesn't really have to teach it – all he has to do is show up. Scotty was recently selected as the Army's Soldier of the Year, completed an MBA at Duke University, has spoken to motivate Mike Krzyzewski's Olympic Dream Team, and is now the father of two wonderful children.

You have to ask, where do we get such men and women? Where does our Nation find such selfless service and sacrifice. The answer is that we find them right among you - the great American people – in the neighborhoods of Kansas City, or the farms and mountain homes of Colorado or Vermont. Without your loyalty and support of our Servicemembers and their families and the values of our Nation, we could never put together such an Army as we have today and accomplish the incredibly challenging missions that have been given to them.

I'd like to leave you with a brief thought, one that sums up the reason that so many of us are gathered here today, and in ceremonies such as this throughout our country. That simple thought is our shared belief that America is the greatest country in the world. The reason for this belief is simple; it is because of brave men and women, including many of you here today, that have stood up to be counted when freedom was threatened – sacrificing so much in the process. May God bless each and every one of you.

In closing, I ask that we all remember those service members who have paid the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our Nation. We are forever indebted to them for their service and sacrifice. May we always be worthy of their sacrifice.

May we also remember those that are, at this very moment, standing watch for us around the globe in the name of freedom and democracy.

And may God continue to bless the United States of America!

Army Strong!