

**The
American
Legion**



For God and Country

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Veterans Day Speech

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Ordinary people accomplishing extraordinary things.
Simply put, that's who veterans are.

Young and old - rich and poor - black and white - and nearly every category in between, they are men and women who served or still serve America.

Some have endured great hardships, separation from family and drastically altered lifestyles. Some have experienced the horrors of war. All sacrificed something so that we could enjoy the freedoms we have today.

Often their service did not end when they took off the uniform. A prime example is Marine Sergeant Klay South. By all accounts, he was an ordinary young man prior to joining the Marines. His mother even suggests that the Greenwood, Indiana, native was rambunctious and stubborn and too much of a thrill-seeker to settle for a 9 to 5 job.

Five years ago, on Veterans Day 2004, Klay found himself on the wrong end of an Iraqi insurgent's AK-47 during the second battle of Fallujah.

Shot in the face and leg, Klay also bore the brunt of a hand grenade that shattered half his face. After years of painful therapy and more than 40 reconstructive surgeries and procedures, Klay now has a titanium jaw, 22 false teeth, and a constant numbness throughout his face. But his story doesn't end there. Nor does his service to his country.

Klay now spends most of his time visiting fellow veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan in military hospital wards. He delivers backpacks full of gifts such as iPods and portable Sony Play Stations, and organizes regular outings for wounded warriors at local restaurants. In fact, Klay has now made helping his fellow warriors his life mission. He is founder and president of an organization called Veterans of Valor, a small group that has helped thousands of men and women who have shed blood for this country.

Klay, an ordinary young man from Indiana, continues to accomplish extraordinary things.

And Klay is not alone.

While far too many veterans are homeless or unemployed, it is no coincidence that corporate titans such as AOL's James Kimsey, Federal Express CEO Frederick Smith and Viacom's Sumner Redstone honed their leadership skills in the U.S. military.

More ordinary people accomplishing extraordinary things.

It would be a stretch to believe that these extraordinary accomplishments are mere coincidence and not due to the discipline, motivational skills, calmness under pressure and other leadership traits that are instilled in every man and woman that has served in the greatest military force on the planet.

Francis Currey was an orphan who grew up in a foster home in upstate New York. He enlisted in the Army in 1943, one week after he graduated from high school.

During the Battle of the Bulge, Sgt. Currey's unit was defending a strong point in Malmedy, Belgium. His platoon was forced to withdraw its position in favor of a nearby factory after German tanks advanced. Finding a bazooka in the building, Sgt. Currey crossed the street to secure rockets, while enduring intense fire from enemy tanks and hostile infantrymen.

Sgt. Currey and a companion knocked out a tank with one shot.

The sergeant then approached a German-held house and killed or wounded three enemy soldiers in the doorway with his automatic rifle. From his forward position, he saw five Americans pinned down from tanks and weapons fire that was still coming from the house. He got anti-tank grenades from across the street and used the weapons to drive the German tankers from their vehicles into the enemy-occupied house.

In full view of the Germans, he found a machine gun whose crew had been killed and opened fire on the retreating Germans, allowing the five trapped Americans to escape.

For his actions, Sgt. Currey, who was previously judged by his military superiors as “too immature” to be an officer, earned the Medal of Honor.

When then-Governor Ronald Reagan introduced returning POW John McCain at a speaking engagement in 1974, the future president asked, “Where do we find such men?”

He was speaking of many veterans, when he answered, “We find them in our streets, in the offices, the shops and the working places of our country and on the farms.”

In other words, President Reagan was referring to ordinary people accomplishing extraordinary things.

And it isn't just the men.

Army Specialist Monica Brown was still a teenager when she went on a routine patrol as a medic in Afghanistan in 2007. Caught under insurgent fire in Paktika Province, she and her platoon sergeant ran a few hundred yards toward a burning Humvee.

Dodging rounds by only inches, Specialist Brown helped pull injured soldiers from the vehicle and rendered life-saving first aid. For her actions, she was awarded a Silver Star, the nation's third-highest combat decoration.

When she enlisted at age 17, the native of Lake Jackson, Texas, had aspirations of becoming an X-ray technician, but the Army convinced her that being a medic would offer her the greatest opportunity to help her fellow soldiers.

But to credit the Monica Browns and other brave heroes in our military with helping only their comrades is short-sighted.

They are helping us.

It is America, not America's military, that al Qaeda and other terrorists have declared war on.

But it is our Armed Forces that carry the great burden and responsibility of defending us. Fortunately, our military is made up of ordinary people accomplishing extraordinary things.

Fewer than 10 percent of Americans can claim the title "military veteran." And what a list of accomplishments can those 10 percent claim!

From defeating Communism, Fascism and Imperialism, to keeping the peace during the Cold War and battling terrorism today, America owes a debt to her veterans that can never be repaid.

When remembering the millions of people who have been liberated by American forces around the globe from history's most evil oppressors, Winston Churchill's words about the Battle of Britain come to mind, "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

Today is important because we choose to honor the living veterans from the Greatest Generation to the Latest Generation. But we must honor them with deeds, not just words.

We must heed the words of our first Commander-in-Chief, General George Washington who said, “The willingness with which our young people will fight in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional as to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their country.”

Born of their extraordinary accomplishments comes our extraordinary debt.

And part of that debt is owed to the military families who have sacrificed so much for their country.

We must honor all of these families and not just with Blue and Gold Star Banners, but with compassionate hearts. PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury and life-altering war wounds not only affect the veteran, but can also take an enormous toll on the family as well.

While veterans are often ordinary people who accomplish extraordinary things, it is often an extraordinary family that supports the ordinary veteran. And it is the veterans that have given us this extraordinary country.

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

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