

Memorial Day 2017

Good morning to each of you - veterans, families, and guests. And thank you for allowing me to share your Memorial Day with you.

This distinct honor of speaking with you today is surpassed by the humility I feel standing on this hallowed ground on this inspirational occasion. This holiday is the most important one, as it symbolizes the sacrifices that were made so that all other holidays can be celebrated.

My sentiments today are not solely my own, but also reflect the thoughts, passion, and love shared by the combat deployed men and women who have shared their collective burden of war with me over the years. The following words reflect their blessings of having served among those, who - like Private First Class *Jonathan "Nat" Spicer* - made the ultimate sacrifice.

Men and women who acted their best and displayed an innate quality of character that embodied unparalleled valor and selfless bravery. In the spirit of our living veterans, and through their passion and love, I share the following words of remembrance for their brothers and sisters in arms who sacrificed their lives so we can continue our way of life.

Today is a formal day intended to honor and revere those who have served and have ascended into the ranks of those never to be forgotten. They are *not* the Fallen, but rather the Ascended, to an afterlife deserving of their sacrifice. They remain loved by comrades, family, friends, and our communities.

We recognize those who made their remarkable impact on our world and who were ultimately willing to sacrifice for those *alongside* them knowing they would not return to those waiting *for* them. To those of us touched personally by this loss, this day is no different than the rest, as the absence of our loved ones is known every day.

Our nation's heroes - from the Revolutionary War to the War on Terror - have made it their calling to stand when no one else would, and answer our nation's call to battle to ensure the protection of the greater good. What else could be asked for from a citizen and a patriot?

For the burden of war is the greatest responsibility and a price paid so purely for that which is loved. This is the finest example of patriotism our society will *ever* know. A perfect example of the moral fiber and willingness that is borne from the fabric of our nation...that is, from the families who produce such awe inspiring character in these men and women. President Lincoln said that our Ascended gave their "last full measure of devotion." Their loss of life through their Service remains our *shared* burden, our communal debt, which can be repaid - only in part - through remembrance and commemoration.

John 15:13 states, "Greater love hath no one than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." It is a bond that cannot be replaced or replicated. It is what ensures that others will experience the joys of life - marriage, parenthood, continued learning - even though they themselves were robbed of such pleasures. This willingness to sacrifice for one another, is also evident in the profound grief and survivor guilt felt by those who return from war without their comrades alive or intact.

No one is unscathed from war, regardless of era and country. The Ascended are survived by the gravely injured, ill, forgotten, lost, disillusioned, disenfranchised, and heartbroken. Grieving silently, regretting privately, walking fearfully, and carrying guilt mightily.

There is a longing to undo what cannot be undone (both endured and witnessed) and a yearning to go back to being vital, to keep on protecting. The survivors' souls lay in a state of limbo, unable to heal and rest.

The men and women who have returned from war are the backbone of society because they have borne the struggle of experiencing humanity at its best and its worst. They have been tested and have lessons to be *heard*. They are passionate, sentimental, principled, and fiercely dedicated and are thereby a precious resource to our society.

So we must be aware of their loss of camaraderie, loss of hope, loss of purpose, and loss of engagement. We are obligated, whether as veterans of - or community around - the warrior class, to listen and learn so that our fellow countrymen and women never feel discarded by the communities they swore to protect. The bonds of serving cannot be replicated, but they *can* be augmented with genuine, sincere, and heartfelt connection.

So today, we celebrate the heroes of the Past by staying connected to heroes and patriots of the Present. We demonstrate our own patriotism through selflessness, community service, and willingness to see things through. We persevere and proceed to do great things in their memory.

In the words of Sebastian Junger, an experienced war journalist, “Maybe the greatest wound is missing the war you got it in.” This refers not to a desire for warfighting, but the yearning for something that is most meaningful, something that requires the best from oneself and others, something that has a greater purpose and mission, something that gives comrades a chance to give all they have to improve the lives of others who cannot defend themselves and to preserve the lives of those who stand beside them.

Of course, I am preaching to the choir in your presence this morning – for those who are here today are veterans and loved ones of veterans and we understand the purpose and meaning of the lives that have been sacrificed on behalf of our indebted Nation. Nevertheless, it falls to us to implore those who do not seek to appreciate the Honorable Service of our deceased and living veterans - *and* the sacrifices of the incredibly resilient military family members who bear the tragedy of war - the weight of grief, of confusion, of fear, of powerlessness - of Survival.

The only happiness of this day is in knowing we remain Free and that we are descendants and relatives of the incredible men and women who died in defense of our country and its freedoms on our behalf.

It is moments like today that provide us with a gift – of time and space and mindfulness to honor those men and women who have acted and given their very best. Today we memorialize them for giving their lives to honor the oath they swore to uphold. Men and women of valor who loved their brothers and sister in arms so unconditionally, their families so intimately, and their citizens so dearly that they were willing to sacrifice themselves.

I humbly thank you for joining me today to pay homage to the sacrifice, patriotism, pride, courage, and bravery of our beloved Veterans. I know that we will continue honoring them beyond today, as they continue to look down from their place and continue to watch over us.

Let us reflect on our Freedoms and why we have them. Let us *live up* to their sacrifices.

We pray for those who have returned less than whole, discouraged, and isolated in their experience. We pray for our families left behind with the emotional wounds of war.

May God Bless our fallen heroes and may God Bless you for remembering them, today and everyday.

Thank you.