

Major General Timothy C. Hanifen USMC (Retired)
Memorial Day Speech
at Historic Christ Church, Weems, Virginia
28 May 2018

Welcome - "To God Be The Glory, The Honor And The Power Now and Forever More..." I would like to thank and acknowledge Master of Ceremonies: Colonel William Johnson, USA (RET.), Program Chair: Lieutenant Colonel Michael H. Schoelwer, USMC (RET.), Officiant: the Right Rev. David H. May, Rector, Grace Episcopal Church, Members of Gold Star Families that are present, the Northern Neck Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America and the Northern Neck Marine Corps League.

I am very honored to have the opportunity to speak with you today as we commemorate Memorial Day and at 3 pm Local time, execute our 1 minute National Moment of Remembrance.

In preparation, I took the virtual photograph tour of Christ Church several times, letting it's structure, history and presence prayerfully soak into me. What a beautiful and historic surrounding for our service.

I am struck by the history and the thought that since 1735, these walls and this congregation has seen its men and women answer the call of the nation from before its birth to this present day. I also realize and appreciate that I stand among many veterans with a great deal of leadership and combat experience. Across nearly three Centuries (283 years), this church and its congregation and the veterans past and present have borne witness and testimony to the Wars of the Nation and our people—both here and abroad.

We have seen our young men and women put aside the ways of peace and go to war. Some have been buried on battlefields here and in more recent times, foreign lands. Some have returned home broken in body, mind or spirit and needed our healing help, friendship and support for many years. And Some have returned home safely. They lay down their arms and went on to build a better United States and better tomorrow for us all.

Today, especially today, we remember our fallen. We remember them and the stories of their lives and of those days of danger never to be forgotten by us who remain.

In my experience, there are two "big" fears among many fears, faced by those that serve and go to war. I think they are common human fears and the crucible of war accelerates and magnifies them greatly. They are the fear of their enormous sacrifice "Being wasted" or a "Meaningless death" and the fear of "Being Forgotten."

I must talk of fear so I can speak of “Hope” and “Of Meaningful Lives Well Lived.”
Two Thoughts for you: One is a testimony, the other a quote.

First, the Testimony. I am a Christian and have faith in God the Father, God the Son-Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and God the Holy Spirit. The Lord who created us, gave our lives purpose and meaning. He orders each of our steps to fulfill that purpose and ultimately returns us home to be with Him.

This faith and knowledge assures us that we are not alone, the chaos we experience in life and in combat is simply overcoming the resistance to and achieving the victory over evil that is the fulfillment of His will for good and for each of us. It is also the tempering of our spiritual steel in the literal and figurative “fires” of life by a Loving God who insures everything that happens is for our personal and the greatest collective good for all concerned. This happens whether our lives are long or relatively short. So there is always “TRUE MEANING” in way we live, the choices we make, the challenges we face and yes, even in the manner and timing of our deaths.

The second is the fear Of “Being Forgotten.” There is a quote I would like to share. It is by George Eliot: “Our dead are never dead to us, until we have forgotten them.” A great quote — George Eliot was actually the pen name for Mary Anne Evans. Gentlemen, leave it to a “Lady” who was a Victorian era novelist, poet, journalist, translator and one of the leading writers with over 40 published books to capture and share the key insight which profoundly resonates within all our hearts. (https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/george_eliot_148896?src=t_dead)

So we are here to recall the names of our fallen comrades, friends and fellow Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines Coast Guardsmen and Health Service personnel. We remember them and the meaningfulness of all who have lost their lives in both war and peace. We honor each of them by remembering their names and recalling their lives in our thoughts, in the shared stories of our service together and in Memorial Day services and ceremonies like this one held around the country.

I would like to share the names of a few of my friends that have gone before me:

- Capt Brian James, Capt Kevin Donnelly, and Lt Col Keith Sweeney and their families. They died in aircraft accidents preparing for combat across the years.
- Col Dan Cushing USMC (Retired), a close friend and a Marine veteran of two wars who died by his own hand after 30 years of service. I will never understand it.

And most especially I remember and want to share the names of the two aircrews lost under my command in Iraq in 2007 — one from combat action — Morphine 12 — crew of seven, and one from a post maintenance check flight accident — Dry Ice 41 — crew of five. I would like to read their names to you.

Morphine 12 was HMM 364 from Purple Foxes, HI shot down in Fallajuh, Iraq, on 7 Feb 2007. The crew: Captain Jennifer Harris (USNA 2000), 1st Lieutenant Jared Landaker, Sgt Travis Pfister, Sgt. James Tijerina, Cpl. Thomas Saba, HM1 Gilbert Minjares, and HM3 Manuel Ruiz. By God's Grace, I actually met and spent over two hours with the Morphine 12 CASEVAC aircrew talking tactics and getting their views on the battlefield, threats and challenges on my battlefield reconnaissance prior to deployment. The only one I had not met was Cpl Saba as he was new to the Wing. Morphine 12 was shot down on 7 Feb 2007 by a heat seeking missile while they were returning to base from a CASEVAC flight to Bagdad. They were (4) days away from returning home to the United States.

Dry Ice 41 was B Company 1-52 from Sugar Bears, Alaska, crashed at Al Taqqaum Airfield, Iraq on 14 Aug 2007. The crew: CW2 Jackie L. McFarlane Jr., CWO Christopher C. Johnson, SSG Sean P. Fisher, SPC Steven R. Jewell, and SSG Stanley B. Reynolds. Dry ICE 41 was one of my Army CH-47 Chinook aircraft. They were performing a post—maintenance check flight to get the aircraft ready for a night mission. At 2,500 feet over Al Taqquadum Air Base, the transmission and rotor system seized and tore itself away from the aircraft. They died.

Today We Remember as individuals and as a nation, but it is a day not to be stuck in time or to dwell only upon sorrow, loss and woe. Instead, I say it is time to remember and to be grateful. Today, I am overwhelmingly grateful. I am grateful for our people, our Constitution and our Republic with its democratic principles and Ideals.

I am grateful we Americans are the people of "E Pluribus Unum...out of many one" from the Great Seal of The United States. We are one and bound as Americans by our Constitution and American exceptionalism.

I am grateful that our honored dead lived, fought and died for everyone of us and our posterity.

I am grateful that we had in the past and still have today such men and women who will answer the call.

I am grateful for the courage of our fallen and those serving who "Protected, Preserved and Made Prosperous" our nation and people in the past, in the present and going into the future.

I am grateful for courage, for it is courage by which a nation and people survive and are sustained across time.

Now, I am not going to tell the Veterans who have seen combat anything new. Webster's defines courage as "Facing danger or risk without fear." But every combat veteran here knows that definition is wrong.

The real definition of courage is "Facing danger or risk WITH your fears and doing the right thing anyway." Yes, I am grateful For courage.

I will end by reading something written for another Memorial Day. It still has great significance today and is worth remembering.

"...But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate, we can not consecrate, we can not hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us, that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion, that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

Abraham Lincoln, "The Gettysburg Address" November 19, 1863
<http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/gettysburg.htm>

Ladies and Gentlemen, the best way to keep the faith and honor the sacrifice of the over 1,308,000 fallen Americans service members is to re-dedicate ourselves and fulfil the words of Abraham Lincoln now and forevermore.

Have a blessed and thankful Memorial Day. Please remember all those who have served, died and made today and all our tomorrows possible for us as Americans. Thank You. To God be the glory honor and praise now and forever.