

**The
American
Legion**



For God and country

Suggested Speech

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Scripture tells us that there is no greater love than a man laying down his life for his friends. The men and women that we honor and remember today, have proven that they are not just friends to us as Americans – but they are friends to men and women in countries around the world.

One such man, Sergeant William Stacey, epitomized what it meant to be a noncommissioned officer in the United States Marine Corps. He was described by a journalist embedded in Afghanistan as having “a bright and concentrated flame within him that could cut through stone. It spelled death and failure for his enemies and gave life to his comrades.”

On January 23, 2012, the 23-year-old from Redding, California –already on his fourth deployment to Afghanistan – was killed by an IED blast while walking patrol in Helmand Province.

Like many going into combat, Sergeant Stacey wrote a letter to be read in the event that he would give his life.

“My death did not change the world,” Sergeant Stacey wrote. “It may be tough for you to justify its meaning at all. But there is greater meaning to it. Perhaps I did not change the world. But there will be a child who will live because men left the security they enjoyed in their home country to come to his. And this child will learn in the new schools that have been built. He will walk his streets not worried about whether or not his leader’s henchmen are going to come and kidnap him. He will grow into a fine man who will pursue every opportunity his heart could desire. He will have the gift of freedom, which I have enjoyed for so long. If my life buys the safety of a child who will one day change this world, then I know that it was all worth it.”

Ladies and gentlemen, I would argue that the sacrifice made by Sergeant Stacey and countless other American heroes, has indeed changed the world. There is a simplistic and naïve belief that war doesn't solve anything. I suppose that's true unless you count winning America's independence, the preservation of the Union, the elimination of slavery, and the toppling of fascist, imperialist and terrorist regimes.

Sixty years ago, America was engaged in a horrific war on the Korean peninsula. Many died there so today many can live.

87-year-old Herbert Miller survived combat in World War II but would not be alive today if not for the actions of Captain Emil Kapaun (Ka PAWN), who encountered Miller as he lay in a frozen and blood-drenched ditch in North Korea.

Suffering from a grenade wound and a broken ankle and now captured by the Chinese, Miller was lifted and carried by Father Kapaun, a Catholic chaplain – who selflessly put the needs of his fellow soldiers ahead of his own. When Miller protested, Kapaun simply said, “if I put you down, they’ll shoot you.”

Many other tales of Kapaun’s heroics were later recalled by survivors of the North Korean prison camp. After coming down with pneumonia and dysentery, Kapaun died in a camp hospital that the POWs called “the death house.”

For his heroism, Father Kapaun was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor on April 11, 2013. Prior to Chaplain Kapaun's capture, all able-bodied men in his unit were ordered to evacuate when it was clear that the enemy was quickly surrounding them. Fully aware of his certain capture, Kapaun elected to stay behind to provide medical aid and comfort to his comrades.

During the Medal of Honor presentation, President Obama said that Father Kapaun was "an American soldier who didn't fire a gun, but who carried the mightiest weapon of all: the love for his brothers so powerful that he was willing to die so that they might live."

We owe it to Father Kapaun, Sergeant Stacy and the nearly one million other men and women who have died defending America since our nation's founding to live life to the fullest. We owe it them to "Earn This" as Capt. Miller implored his surviving comrades to do in "Saving Private Ryan," a fictional story but a dead-on accurate portrayal of the bravery demonstrated by America's military again and again.

We can earn this by remembering their families, who have sacrificed so much. Long after the battlefield guns have been silenced and the bombs stop exploding, the children of our fallen warriors will still be missing a parent. Spouses will be without their life partners. Parents will continue to grieve for their heroic sons and daughters that died way too early.

We need to be there for them – not just as members of The American Legion family – but as American citizens. Nobody can replace these fallen heroes – especially in the eyes of their families – but we can offer shoulders to cry on, assistance with educational expenses and assurance that their loved one’s sacrifice will not be forgotten.

Americans must remember that freedom isn’t free. In fact, it’s only possible because our fallen heroes have paid its high price. A price paid, which enables us to have ceremonies and observances like this in towns across this great country.

The first Memorial Day was not called Memorial Day. It is believed to have been celebrated with a parade of freed slaves and Union soldiers marching through Charleston, South Carolina in 1865.

Waterloo, New York, is considered the official birthplace of Memorial Day because after it was observed there on May 5, 1866, General John Murray and General John A. Logan called on all communities to honor the war dead every year.

Logan had been impressed with how the South had honored the fallen Confederate soldiers for years. In 1868, Logan, the head of the prominent veterans group, the Grand Army of the Republic, issued a proclamation that “Decoration Day” be observed nationwide. The date chosen was May 30 – specifically because it was not on the anniversary of a battle.

Still, many Southern communities did not want to honor “Decoration Day,” because of lingering resentments from the Civil War.

The alternative name, “Memorial Day” wasn’t commonly used until World War II. Federal law recognized the holiday as “Memorial Day” in 1967.

As the unofficial beginning of summer, let us never lose focus of what Memorial Day means. It is not about beaches, picnics or auto races. It is a day to remember.

It is a day for us to remember the promise President Lincoln made to “care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan.”

Remembering our fallen once a year is not enough. The widows, widowers, fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters and children remember EVERYDAY.

The empty seat at the dinner table, the smaller gathering on Thanksgiving, and the voice of a loved one heard only as a distant memory in one's mind are constant reminders that they are gone.

We owe it to the heroes that died and the loved ones left behind to make sure that their sacrifices are remembered and that their service to this nation always be honored.

Sergeant Stacey believed his sacrifice was worth it. It is up to all of us to prove him right.

May God bless them all.

Thank you.

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