

**The  
American  
Legion**



*For God and Country*

★ MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE ★ P.O. BOX 1055 ★ INDIANAPOLIS, IN 46206  
★ (317) 630-1253 ★ Fax (317) 630-1368

# **VETERANS DAY SPEECH 2015**

The American Legion  
M&C DIVISION  
October 2015

The great novelist C.S. Lewis once said, “All that we fear from all kinds of adversity...is collected together in the life of the soldier on active service. Like sickness, it threatens pain and death. Like poverty, it threatens ill lodging, cold, heat, thirst and hunger. Like slavery, it threatens toil, humiliation, injustice, and arbitrary rule. Like exile, it separates you from all you love.”

Most veterans, whether they experienced a field training exercise or intense combat, have distinct memories of ill lodging, discomfort, arbitrary rule and separation. It goes part and parcel with military life and it is why we hold veterans in such high esteem.

But then there are those who face pain and death so others can be spared. Such was the case of two American veterans and their longtime friend when they bravely stopped a terrorist attack aboard a train bound for Paris this summer.

Airman First Class Spencer Stone, Army Specialist Alek Skarlatos and Anthony Sadler could have run from the danger when a heavily armed gunman boarded the train.

Instead, Specialist Skarlatos said, “Let’s go” as the men ran *toward* a future that could have easily meant instant death or maiming for them and all of the other innocent people within range.

Fortunately, this story is mostly remembered not for the horrific tragedy that *nearly* happened but for the heroism that did.

Even after enduring serious stab wounds that were inflicted as he disarmed the gunman, Airman Stone administered life-saving first aid to a passenger that was shot.

The terrorist was carrying 270 rounds of ammunition. But because of the actions of these three young Americans, the death toll aboard the train was zero.

President Obama praised the men as the “very best of America.” Defense Secretary Ashton Carter called the incident, “an amazing story, right out of a movie.”

The American Legion believes it is not surprising. While we take nothing away from the heroic actions of Spencer, Alek and Anthony, America’s military men and women risk life and limb every day so that we can be free.

From Bunker Hill to Baghdad, there has always been a select group of Americans willing to fight and possibly die for a cause greater than their self-preservation.

And while we set aside November 11th as a special day to honor and remember our veterans, we should continuously endeavor to serve our veterans as well as they have served their nation.

We must honor all of their 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.

The American Legion shows its support through numerous programs such as the Family Support Network, Temporary Financial Assistance, the National Emergency Fund and Operation Comfort Warriors, just to name a few.

Sometimes all that is needed is a simple 'thank you' directed at the veteran or the family member for his or her sacrifice.

Part of that sacrifice too often includes unemployment or underemployment when the veteran's military service is over.

Companies should understand that it's smart business to hire veterans, and when members of the Guard and Reserves deploy, it is America's business to ensure that their civilian careers do not suffer.

We must not forget the unique needs of women veterans. There are more than 1.8 million women in America today who have worn the uniform.

Women are major contributors to our military readiness and many have given their lives in the Global War on Terrorism. VA must adequately treat breast and cervical cancer as well as trauma that may have resulted from domestic violence, sexual harassment and assault.

It is tragic that the men and women who allow us to be safe in our homes are often without homes themselves when they shed their uniforms.

One-in-four of America's homeless population are veterans.

Nine-out-of-ten were honorably discharged and nearly half served during the Vietnam War.

Too often today's tattered citizen of the street was yesterday's toast-of-the-town in a crisp uniform with rows of shining medals. This is hardly the "thanks of a grateful nation."

While fewer than 10 percent of Americans can claim the honorable title "U.S. military veteran," this special group often provides the vital services that enable our communities to function.

Chances are that if you surveyed your local police or fire department, you would find that a disproportionately high percentage of its members are veterans. When an emergency hits, there is a good chance that it is a veteran that is first to respond.

Whether it's a school teacher, construction worker or first responder, military veterans take their missions seriously. They vote in higher percentages than nonveterans, they are more likely to volunteer in their communities and they are less likely to live in poverty.

In short, veterans make our communities better.

Born of their extraordinary accomplishments comes our extraordinary debt. And for those accomplishments and for their dedication, we must always be grateful.

In this spirit, American Legion National Commander Dale Barnett has been leading Veterans Awareness Walks in communities across the country.

“We walk not for ourselves,” Commander Barnett says. “But those who have marched for us.”

Whether it’s a physical walk or another gesture of appreciation, we must almost always remember that each veteran represents an oath taken that included a willingness to die for this country if called upon.

It is what President Lincoln characterized as “the last full measure of devotion.”

Whenever we hear a politician rail about the high cost of veterans’ benefits, it is up to us to remind the critic about the high cost of being a veteran.

It is a cost – blood, sweat, and sacrifice – that has produced and protected the greatest nation on earth.

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

###