

RE-DEDICATION OF FALLEN HEROES MEMORIAL

6/12/10

Thank you, Mary Lou and thank you, everybody.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have been your president for almost three years.

In that time, I have experienced many emotions.

I have had moments of joy and moments of sorrow.

I have had moments of concern and moments of celebration.

Still, in those three years, I have experienced one emotion most and I have experienced one emotion best.

What emotion is that?

That emotion is pride.

Yes, as your president, I have been proud early, and I have been proud often.

I have been proud much and I have been proud most.

Yes, as your president, many moments have made me proud.

Still, Ladies and Gentlemen, no moment has made me more proud than this moment.

One year ago, we dedicated this beautiful memorial to the graduates of our school who have given their lives in service to our country.

That day was special.

Today, we re-dedicate this beautiful memorial to each of those graduates and to one more graduate.

That makes this day even more special.

Last year we honored six graduates whose courage, commitment, sacrifice, and strength made them our Fallen Heroes.

This year, we remember seven graduates whose courage, commitment, sacrifice, and strength did the same.

To honor six last year made me proud. To remember seven this year makes me prouder still.

It has been said that life's most meaningful test is the test of time.

That is true.

To do something that matters once is nice.

To do something that matters again, and again, and again is more than nice.

It is powerful.

It is meaningful.

Today, we are doing something meaningful.

Today, we are putting fresh flowers on old graves.

Today, we are giving new life to old love.

Today we are getting good grades on the test of time.

One year ago, we promised there would be fresh flowers.

One year ago we promised there would be new life.

This day proves that promise.
This day continues that promise.
Yes, this is a special day.

Today, we remember our seven Fallen Heroes for their gift and for their glory. Because they had a gift and that gift was glorious.

What gift did they have? I will tell you with a story; and like all my stories, this one is... true.

Once upon a time a monk was walking down a dirt road. After a while, he came upon a traveler walking on the same road in the opposite direction. The traveler was a young man, and he looked tired, worried, hungry, and sad.

“Can I help you, my son?” asked the monk to the traveler.

“Yes Padre, you can,” replied the man. “I have no money and need food for myself and my young family. Anything you could give would mean the world to us!”

With that, the monk opened his nap sack and reached for a loaf of bread and a block of cheese. As he did, the traveler could not help but notice a beautiful diamond that sat in the monk’s nap sack next to his food.

As the monk took the food from his nap sack, the young traveler couldn't take his eyes off that stone. Finally, he said, "Padre, I am ashamed to ask you, but if you could find it in your heart to give me that diamond, I could trade it for silver and use that silver to care for me and my family for the rest of our lives."

Without hesitation, the monk gave that traveler his diamond. The traveler thanked the monk and went on his way.

Three days later, the monk was walking along the same dirt road and came upon the same traveler in exactly the same place.

"My son," said the monk "I can't believe we meet again."

"I have been waiting for you brother," said the traveler.

"Why?" asked the monk.

"I must give you back the precious stone you gave me," explained the traveler.

"Why?" asked the monk again.

"In the hope that you will give me something much more valuable in return" said the traveler.

"My son" persisted the monk "what could I possibly give you that would be more valuable than that stone?"

"Brother" said the young man, "what I want is whatever is inside you that let you give me that stone in the first place."

Ladies and Gentlemen,

That monk had a gift. He had the gift of giving.
Our Fallen Heroes lived with that gift.
They died for that gift.
They did not give a diamond to keep a family fed.
Instead, they gave their lives to keep our nation free.

Yes, Our Fallen Heroes gave up their lives – and they
gave up more.
They gave up their futures.
They gave up their laughter.
And they gave up their tears.

What do I mean? Think about it.

This time of year is graduation time.
I have been to many. So have many of you.

Each graduation brings smiles. It also brings tears.
It's true. Parents cry at graduations. Grandparents cry
at graduations too. Sometimes they hide before they cry
– but they always cry. They cry and they cry and they
cry.

Yes, they cry tears of joy for what they and their children
have done; together.

Our Fallen Heroes gave up those tears.
Yes, Our Fallen Heroes gave away their chance to cry at
their children's graduation. They gave away their
chance to cry at their grandchildren's graduations, too.

Why? So that we could be free.

Yes, Our Fallen Heroes lived with the gift of giving.
And they died for the gift of giving.
Many times, however, that gift did not get the glory it
deserved.

What do I mean? I will tell you with one last true story.

It comes from a book titled “This I Believe” and is written
by a man named Miles Goodwin. In his words, Mr.
Goodwin’s true story goes like this.

In June of 1970, I had just been mustered out of the
Army after completing my one-year tour of duty in
Vietnam. I was twenty-three years old at the time, and
on a plane from Oakland, California, to Dallas, Texas.
There were no cheers or parades for me as I returned
home from that unpopular war. I knew there wouldn’t
be, and I was just trying to get home without being
embarrassed, sworn at, spit on, or worse.

I sat, in uniform, in a window seat.
I smoked many cigarettes and I avoided eye contact with
my fellow passengers, as much as I could.
No one was sitting in the seat next to me, which added to
my isolation. As I sat in shame, a young girl, not more
than ten years old, suddenly appeared in the aisle.
She smiled, and without a word, timidly handed me a
magazine. I accepted her offering, and said “thank
you.”

In response, she smiled and said “you are welcome and welcome home.”

All I could say,” Mr. Goodwin continued was thank you again!” “I do not know,” Mr. Goodwin went on “where that little girl sat down or who she was with; because right after accepting the magazine from her, I turned to the window and wept. Her small gesture of compassion was the first I had experienced in a long time.

That young girl undoubtedly has no memory of what happened that day – and I will never know why she did what she did. She might have been told to give me the “gift” by her mother. Her father might still have been in Vietnam at that time or maybe he had not survived the war. It doesn’t matter why she gave me the magazine. The important thing is, she did.

Her offer and her wonderful words, “welcome home” to a tired, scared, and lonely soldier have echoed throughout my life.

And to that little girl, now a woman, I would like to take this opportunity to say once again, thank you.”

This ends Mr. Goodwin’s true story.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to end my words today by echoing that little girl’s words – and Mr. Goodwin’s words.

To Our Fallen Heroes, to their families, and to every veteran in this audience, I say “thank you” and “welcome home.”

Yes, whether you came home today, yesterday, or many years ago, I say thank you and I say welcome home today.

In the words of our memorial's inscription, "Freedom is not free." You and they have paid its price for us all.

Veterans, please stand, so we can say thank you – and welcome home – to you Thank you and welcome home to you all.

And now with words much more beautiful than mine will come a woman who is herself a veteran and a graduate of our school.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Lt. Colonel Mary Lou Buckawicki Nichols; USAF retired and – AWHS class of 1966.

Next, to offer reflections on the service of our seventh Fallen Hero comes a man who has himself served our country – and our school - with honor and with strength. He is our Dean of Students and retired Lt. Colonel in the U.S. Marine Corps, Mr. Daniel Tarpey.

Thank you Dan, for painting that perfect picture of Robert. With that picture – and with the picture of each of our Fallen Heroes in our hearts, let us celebrate and let us commemorate their presence in our midst forever.

Our Fallen Heroes have come home and they will be welcome home forever.

This stone will be their home and this stone will bear their welcome – forever so please stand and help me welcome home.

Lt. Paul M. Grafton – Class of 1955

Capt. William E. Hingston, Jr. – Class of 1958

1st LT. Paul J. Pedranti – Class of 1959

1st Lt. Robert E. Ryan – Class of 1965

Sgt. J. Michael Barry – Class of 1968

Sgt. Daniel J. Londono – Class of 2000

1st Lt. Robert “Stephen” Carley – Class of 1966

UNVEILING

TAPS

Now, to close our ceremony, we will have a few more of our wonderful chorus. Then, Mr. John Donoghue will offer Benediction, which will be followed by the Retiring of the Colors.

After the chorus, please feel free to file by the stone and join us for refreshments in the gym lobby.

Ladies and Gentlemen, our chorus.