

## MEMORIAL DAY SPEECH FRANKFORT KS 2011

Thank you for the warm welcome and introduction. It is an honor and pleasure to be here in Frankfort, Kansas, land of the free and home of the brave, as your speaker for this Memorial Day Program. I appreciate all of you here for taking time during this national holiday to pay your respects to your departed family, friends, and neighbors and offer a special tribute to our deceased service personnel and veterans who answered our nation's call to arms to preserve our freedoms.

I won't promise that I will have a short speech. However, Bob asked me to keep it fairly short since he has been having trouble with his vehicle's alternator not putting out enough voltage to keep his battery charged up. So he had to jump start his vehicle this morning and has left it idling and with the high price of gasoline, he'd like me to keep it short.

A few years ago I read George J. Lisicki's comments in the Veterans of Foreign Wars Magazine when he was Commander in Chief of the VFW. Mr. Lisicki's article struck a chord with me and I wrote down his remarks. He said that Memorial Day is a sacred day to all war veterans who do not need to be reminded the reason for commemorating Memorial Day nor the cost of freedom. But what about the general public, and more importantly, future generations? Do most non-veterans really recognize the importance of this national holiday honoring their fellow Americans killed in war?

Judging from what Memorial Day in this country has become for many—simply another day off from work, a cookout or camping trip—the answer would seem to be a resounding no. However, those of us here today obviously understand. Mr. Lisicki said that sacrifice without remembrance is meaningless and that America's collective consciousness demands that all citizens recall and be aware of the deaths of their fellow countrymen and women during wartime. Too often, our nation as a whole takes for granted the freedoms we Americans enjoy. Those freedoms were paid for with lives of others.

Not a day goes by that I don't think of the six Soldiers and two Airmen killed in convoy operations during my year of command of the 143<sup>rd</sup> Transportation Command in Kuwait and Iraq in 2005 and 2006. I carry their names on this cluster of their dog tags in my pocket as a

reminder of their deaths. All eight men were killed by, or as a result of, Improvised Explosive Devices, what I call road bombs, encountered on the dangerous roads of Iraq.

The Frankfort, Kansas area certainly knows about the cost of freedom and the sacrifices made to preserve our freedoms. Some of us here today knew some of our men and women killed while serving in uniform. Many of them we don't know but do know the stories of their deaths in the service. We collectively remember them on this Memorial Day.

I have had the privilege of speaking at many Memorial Day programs in Nebraska and Kansas and while I was deployed overseas in 2006. One of the things I like to do when I speak in a community is find out about that community's men and women who died in the military service of our country. When Bob Roeder asked me to speak here, I told him I would like to know the names of the service men and women from the Frankfort area who died while serving our nation. Mike Simmons, Post Adjutant for the Leo McMinimy American Legion Post 181, sent me the information I requested. The envelope was thick with the Xeroxed copies of newspaper articles detailing the deaths and missing in action reports from World War Two. It took me a couple of hours to read these sad stories of your Frankfort and surrounding community heroes.

I had always heard that Frankfort, Kansas and the surrounding area had paid a heavy price in the lives of its young citizens during World War Two. However, I did not realize that it suffered the highest number of service men and women killed in action or during training, on a per capita basis, than any other community in the nation. Specifically, Kansas Senator Pat Roberts addressed the United States Senate on November 16, 2006, to formally pay tribute to Frankfort for their World War Two sacrifices. Quoting Senator Roberts's: "What makes this town, then home to approximately 1800 people, notable is the solemn fact that 32 brave men from Frankfort and the surrounding farmland gave their lives in World War Two. Based on records from local county newspapers of the time, it is concluded that the Frankfort community lost more men in World War Two than any other town of similar size. This fact imparts both a deep sense of pride for the bravery and commitment of these young Kansans and also sadness for the great loss of life that is inherent in times of war."

Many of you know that it was Mr. Frank Benteman, himself a World War Two Veteran, who brought this information to the attention of Senator Roberts. It was Frank Benteman who spearheaded the remembering of his friends and fellow comrades in arms and worked with Senator Roberts's staff to honor the heroes of Frankfort, Kansas by entering their names into the Congressional Record in recognition of their ultimate sacrifice to a grateful nation. I believe it was also Frank Benteman who was the driving force behind the efforts to memorialize these men with a permanent monument.

This community also remembers its six World War One servicemen who died in training or on the battlefield during America's War to end all wars, or so it was called. One of these men is memorialized in the Frankfort American Legion's Post Home. This community also lost sons in the Korean and Vietnam wars.

I will not dispute the huge sacrifice that Frankfort and the surrounding area paid in our nation's wars. My town, Liberty, Nebraska lost nearly as many men on a per capita basis during World Wars One and Two as Frankfort. Three Liberty men were killed in World War One and nine in World War Two. These from a town that was only around 375 people during those years. Do the math and it works out about the same per capita. I mention this only to put emphasis on the fact that our nation lost a lot of good young men and women in the preservation of our freedoms and our way of life. Nearly every community lost someone.

Today we have an all-volunteer military force. There is no draft and that is a good thing. Our military services include around three million personnel from a nation whose population is just over 311 million people. Those three million service personnel include our active, reserve and National Guard troops. By the way, there is no such thing as a weekend warrior anymore. This term, often used years ago for National Guard and Reserve troops, is a slap in the face to the National Guard and Reserve forces that have been part of the operational rotation of forces to Iraq and Afghanistan since September 11, 2001. Many Guard and Reserve troops have multiple mobilizations and deployments under their belts. I know some preparing to go again.

I will tell you that the men and women serving in our military today are great Americans and willing to go into harms way to defend our freedoms. I was 53 years old when I was mobilized in

2005 to command the 143<sup>rd</sup> Transportation Command. I was proud to go do my part and to serve with and lead nearly 4400 Soldiers Sailors, Airmen and Coast Guardsmen who were part of our transportation command. No, I didn't have any Marines, God love 'em. I learned much from these young troops going into harm's way on convoys every day. They did not hesitate to cross that border into Iraq, knowing it was not a question of if they would encounter dangerous road bombs, but rather when the explosions would happen. In fact, most were eager to go on those convoys. So rest assured that our military forces are well served by our young warriors and that there are more where they come from.

Do you remember when I mentioned in my introduction about Frankfort, Kansas being the land of the free and home of the brave? I conclude with this: Do you realize that the last stanza of our National Anthem ends with a question?

“Oh say, does that Star-Spangled Banner yet wave,  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?”

The answer is a resounding “YES” because of the wartime sacrifices of our servicemen and women, our Veterans and our citizens who continue to answer the call to military service. Let us never forget them.

God bless you. God bless our military personnel. God bless America. Thank you.

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