**THE WOUNDS OF WAR**

**VETERANS DAY KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

**CITY OF CENTERVILLE, OHIO**

20141111

Mayor Kingseed, Members of the Centerville City Council, Pastor Miltenberger, Cub Scouts, Students, Musicians, Citizens of the Magnificent Community of Centerville, Ohio, and Honored Veterans of all wars,

*thank you for the tremendous honor or being selected as your keynote speaker this year. As a veteran of 34 years of military service and 4 wartime deployments, this has touched my heart in 1000 ways.*

“In the desperate search to find meaning in the devastation and human wreckage that define war, it is an unmistakable feat that the human spirit remains triumphant in the face of unequalled adversity. It is in this milieu that we are exposed to unforeseen epiphanies that bestow value in the seemingly inconsequential and in places where one would least expect to derive meaning and purpose. There are multiple lessons to be gleaned from the battlefield, but the most astounding instruction may very well be what we discover within one another” (Platoni, 2008). “What we find in the depths of one’s soul gives rise to the most extraordinary and vigorous education in regard to the bonds among brothers and sisters Soldiers that enable survivorship and the very resolve to endure, toflourish. Though the human toll of the battlefield can hardly be quantified, there is remarkable knowledge to be unearthed from the catastrophic; those very life events that defy the confines of the human experience. It is the Warrior Ethos that takes on profound meaning in the wartime theater of operations, becoming an all-consuming force that supersedes race, gender, ethnicity, and even military rank structure. There are few comparable driving forces” (Platoni, 2008).

“There is an unanticipated human element to be retrieved from the most inhumane of human enterprises. Stated simply, it is about what you would sacrifice and surrender for your uniformed brothers and sisters, a unity and camaraderie to which one would gladly adhere, generating bonds forged for a lifetime. There is nothing so momentous, so significant as becoming part of that company of unsung heroes; those willing to lay down their lives for brother and sister Soldier, Airman, Marine, Sailor, or Coastguardsman, without reconsideration, and in the face of total madness. At some point, accountability for the lives outside of one’s own becomes the all-encompassing reason for being. This is the pure and unadulterated antithesis of man’s inhumanity to man. Their lives in your hands become significantly more vital, far more consequential than your own. It is why there is no humanly force strong enough to stop an infantryman from rounding the corner in the most treacherous neighborhoods of sectarian violence, knee deep in floating raw sewage, M-16 A-2 engaged, knowing that the next millisecond may be his very last on earth, to clutch the collar of his dying comrade in order to drag him to safety” (Platoni, 2008).

“Plainly, what you would do is ingrained in the soul, as you would forsake all else to accomplish the most unselfish of deeds. In the face of mortal danger, nothing else matters but who has become your next of kin. It is in the heat of battle, where the frontlines are indistinguishable from the rear echelon, where there is no embarrassment for the breadth and depth of bonding among boots on the ground and the unshakable expressions of love for one another, which almost always surpasses race, ethnicity, age, and oftentimes, gender that this is born (Platoni, 2008).

“When under heavy fire and engaging enemy combatants, without regard to one’s own safety and survivability, advancing towards the enemy in the noble act of saving the lives of fellow man and woman alike, that genuine heroism is often displayed. These are not necessarily extraordinary human beings that perform such feats under the most dreadful of circumstances, never spoken, but nevertheless pressed upon the soul (Personal Communication, 1LT Ryan Quinn; 8 April 2006). “This is the tacit pledge to commit to deeds that exceed the boundaries of the self, the overwhelming sense of the community of humankind that cries out and permits us to bear witness to the magnitude of true greatness to which humankind can aspire. Perhaps there are few more magnificent or superior gifts than the willingness to suspend life for one’s fellow warriors. What then becomes critical is the unrestrained willingness to do what one will in order to defend the lives of those whose names and faces are even unknown to us, yet they wear the same uniform; to carry an extra 300 rounds of ammunition as a promise to shield those who strive to trust that you would do so. It is in the midst of such urgency that one’s own life may very well cease to have meaning unless willing to surrender it in service of humanity. This is pure sustenance; a testament to what is still today, right and virtuous and decent

in a world drowning in self-righteous entitlement and moral degradation. This is where self-orientation and involvement give way to altruism, to confront the thornier issue of stepping up to the plate for a cause greater than seeking personal pleasure and reward. It all too simple to be ‘blinded and overindulged in this world of excesses’ (Brookfield, 2005). There are those genuinely destined to strive in the face of adversity, who are adept at spinning gold out of rags. True survivorship is borne of the struggle, the toil and labor of adapting to and overcoming the most and tortuous that life circumstances have to offer. From utter despondency, comes the resilience to overcome the insurmountable, to gain strength in the face of tremendous sorrow and unceasing despair. For those of us who have defied pain of immeasurable proportions to endure unspeakable torment and where there is no chance of locating the off switch to misery, we are obliged to unearth the message that enormous good may be cultivated from the unbearable. Out of this struggle from the darkness and desolation that threaten to consume us with stagnation, there are riches and enlightenment to be found, where a transformed spirit is permitted to flourish. The most adverse of life circumstances can be the most exceptional teachers (Brookfield, 2005). The unmistakable lesson here is that becoming keeper for brother and sister Service Member, friend or colleague, for the community of humanity itself, may exceed all other life experiences” (Platoni, 2008).

Let us vow, one and all. never to forsake those who have had the courage to wear the uniform, to answer the call to duty, to face our enemies, both foreign and domestic and who have so fearlessly given to a purpose far greater and more noble than themselves. We range from the World War II generation to the millennials, from 18 to 90 plus years. We are all the Greatest Generation. We carry the signature attributes of all veterans that are to be revered: the strength of Charles Atlas, the heart of a Warrior, the love of country far more than ourselves. Each of us has a war story to tell, from the 1.7 million veterans of World War II still alive today, though in rapidly dwindling numbers, the 2,275,000 living Korean War veterans, and the 7,391,000 Vietnam veterans whose voices still wait to be heard.

We have not only witnessed history, we have made it. Remember that the freedoms with which we are blessed and too often take for granted, those that are not always protected by the Constitution, that fall to the military when our nation is threatened by enemy forces, both within and outside our borders. It is those who don the uniform and step up to bear arms that assume the job that only one percent of our nation’s population is willing to undertake. Do not allow many decades to pass before paying tribute to those who return to kiss the ground on American soil, only to be met with protests and pelted with vile substances, as we did with our veterans of the War in Vietnam. Pay attention to the plight of our veterans, the too many now homeless and helpless masses that have been cast aside by the multitudes. Do not just throw money at veterans’ causes, but give with your time and your heart, as we have too often given our very lives for the cause of freedom by the blank check we wrote to America when we raised our right hands with that solemn pledge, the Oath of Office. In the words of President John F. Kennedy, “A nation reveals itself not only by the citizens it produces,

but also by the citizens it honors, the citizens it remembers”. Do not allow our legacy to be remembered only once a year, our destiny to become the neglected, the disregarded, the forgotten, as there is no greater casualty of war than this. The highest office or position in this nation should be that of the veteran, as they will always pay the greatest cost and bear the ultimate price. We answered the call. Ask yourselves what you are willing to do to reciprocate?

EPILOGUE

“We don’t go to war for our country and the cause of freedom nearly as much as we go to safeguard the lives of our friends and our families. It is these ties that unite us in times of unparalleled suffering and catastrophe which forge relationships that will endure for our lifetimes and that often exceed the closeness of family. Departing this and attempting to replace it on the home front becomes the new struggle, as those willing to lay down their lives are among life’s most treasured keepsakes, unlikely to be replaced elsewhere. Leaving this behind is easily an immense loss. If nothing else, it is ours to seize the knowledge of all that can be gathered in regard to survivorship in the face of human tragedy and that the interconnectedness of those flung together under the most cataclysmic of life circumstances, make life more worthwhile than one might ever envision. It is in one another that the will and determination to survive the unfathomable is fueled and from which resilience thrives. And so it is in the aftermath of these events that we

must hang together so that our souls do not perish in the pangs of an emotionally amputated life. What we must prevent at all costs is the disintegration of these imperatives on the home front. We must seek every opportunity to perpetuate the lessons that remain pure sustenance, to celebrate the invincibility of the human spirit. Admittedly, there are more than a few of us who would not seek to repeat these death-defying experiences, to do this wartime thing all over again, to render ourselves vulnerable to an early demise just for the opportunity to re-experience the camaraderie, the closeness of kinship that once sustained us and that is pivotal to our emotional survival in war’s aftermath. In this endeavor, we might surely die for the opportunity” (Platoni, 2008).

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