WW II VETERANS MEMORIAL SPEECH

FOR

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Hello everyone and thank you all for attending today’s gathering. It is a privilege to be here with all of you. We all express our appreciation and gratitude for the selfless contributions each one of you has made as you dedicated your lives to insure the safety and well being of “the Greatest Generation” and its legacy. To all of the family members who were there to support our veterans when they needed it most, thank you for your devotion to these fine people, and to the generations of sons and daughters who have been fortunate to inherit the legacy of this fine generation, congratulations! You have the privilege to have been formed by people of the finest caliber. Although subsequent generations have had our share of challenges and triumphs, literally **NONE** of us would be here without the love, support, guidance and wisdom of our parents and grandparents who endured life through World War II.

The author, Ken Follett has said, “World War II is the greatest drama in human history, the biggest war ever and a true battle of good and evil. I imagine writers will continue to get stories from it, and readers will continue to love them, for many more years.” To each of the veterans here today, I am sure there are many stories to be told, many of them literally unimaginable to us, the civilian population. You were young when you joined the armed forces, and you devoted your lives to the security of this nation because it was the right thing to do. It’s been said that back in the late 30’s and early 40’s, just about everyone knew someone in uniform, dedicated to the fight. It is estimated that over 16 million Americans served during World War II, or approximately 11% of the country’s population. Roughly 72 million people were killed worldwide during World War II. To give a little perspective to those of us who weren’t alive at the time, that’s just about 23% of The United States’ estimated population in 2012. Younger generations have had to endure tragedies, but I doubt any of us can really appreciate the pervasiveness of the damages and casualties of World War II.

In his book, **The Greatest Generation**, Tom Brokaw eloquently gives us a glimpse of what life was like for you, our young and, at the time, unlikely heroes, on the brink of the most massive and life altering experience anyone might imagine. He writes, “"At a time in their lives when their days and nights should have been filled with innocent adventure, love, and the lessons of the workaday world, they were fighting in the most primitive conditions possible across the bloodied landscape of France, Belgium, Italy, Austria, and the coral islands of the Pacific. They answered the call to save the world from the two most powerful and ruthless military machines ever assembled, instruments of conquest in the hands of fascist maniacs. They faced great odds and a late start, but they did not protest. They succeeded on every front. They won the war; they saved the world. They came home to joyous and short-lived celebrations and immediately began the task of rebuilding their lives and the world they wanted. They married in record numbers and gave birth to another distinctive generation, the Baby Boomers. A grateful nation made it possible for more of them to attend college than any society had ever educated, anywhere. They gave the world new science, literature, art, industry, and economic strength unparalleled in the long curve of history. As they now reach the twilight of their adventurous and productive lives, they remain, for the most part, exceptionally modest. They have so many stories to tell, stories that in many cases they have never told before, because in a deep sense they didn't think that what they were doing was that special, because everyone else was doing it too.”

We build monuments to acknowledge heroes and events and we build memorials to remind us of times in life that must not be forgotten. Monuments are made of stone and mortar, but each veteran is a living testimony to the strength and resilience of the American spirit. Each one of YOU sacrificed more than we even have the capacity to comprehend, and, as Tom Brokaw said, you did it at a time when your days and nights should have been filled with innocent adventure. Instead you fought so that your families and neighbors might be guaranteed **their** adventures and freedom. Have words been invented to express the gratitude of the generations that followed? The lessons to be learned from your service are immeasurable. I am quite clear that **YOU**, our honored Vets, and your fallen comrades, were and are the **backbone** and the **heart** of the American people. You served us with moxie and determination, or, in the words of General George Patton’s favorite expression, “Audacity, Audacity, Audacity.” (**If you want to inject a little humor you can say**) Of course, General Patton had quite a few more colorful things to say, but I’ll leave those quotes to your imagination! (**Wait for the laugh**).

You fought in the “Big One” so that future generations would be free of such strife. Of course, history has shown that as long as there are at least two people on this earth, there is the potential for contentiousness. Our world has not known peaceful times, but your service has inspired our soldiers to carry on in the name of freedom. Although we have seen “modern” wars waged before our eyes in the most remote corners of the world, the basic character and resilience of the American soldier does not change. This generation of military personnel follows in your footsteps, even though they may be fighting a seemingly unending battle in the most god-forsaken places, and whether they are in Afghanistan or Iraq, your service and valor continue to inspire them to fight because, as Tom Brokaw said, it is the right thing to do.

We are here to dedicate (rededicate?) this memorial and acknowledgement to you, our true heroes. It is meant in gratitude and recognition that each one of you has lived a full and rich life and your actions allowed us to do the same. Remember your service with pride and humility. Your contribution to this country will **never** be forgotten. We thank you.