MILITARY SPEECH

FOR

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In the words of the author Tom Clancy, “The U.S. Military is **us**. There is no truer representation of a country than the people that it sends into the field to fight for it. The people who wear our uniform and carry our rifles into combat are our kids, and our job is to support them, because they’re protecting us.”

Ladies and gentlemen, the history and legacy of a country… **OUR** country… can be told in its military narrative. This country was built on the courage and might and willingness of our forefathers to die for their beliefs, and while some of the story is conveyed as a spoken narrative, much has been illustrated in blood and blasts forged on the battlefields. From the inception of our history as a country to the present time, our armed forces have valiantly defined our nation’s legacy. “One of the best ways to keep peace is to be prepared for war.” George Washington was inspired by his forebears to say that and every generation since has heeded that same call.

Whether spoken as a prophecy or in hindsight, apparently Washington got to realize the authenticity of his statement when, in June of 1775, he was ordered by Congress to take command of the Continental Army waging its rebellion against the British forces in Boston. Although history and legend teaches us that Washington was not too “experienced” for battle, having lost more than he won, he was respected for his strategy that brought victories at critical junctures like the Battle of Trenton in 1776 and the Battle of Yorktown in 1781. Remembered throughout history as a powerful member of the group that formed our country, we don’t always mention that some believe his greatest wartime legacy was his decision to surrender his commission to Congress. On December 23, 1783, he said, “Happy in the confirmation of our independence and sovereignty, and pleased with the opportunity afforded the United States of becoming a respectable nation, I resign with satisfaction the appointment I accepted with diffidence…” While some political factions would have been content to appoint Washington the king, his dual perspective as statesman and soldier supported the formation of the revolutionary new nation. It has been this foundation that built the legacy and heritage we all share.

Throughout American history, in every generation- in fact in just about every decade, our forebears have had to prepare to engage in combat. With each act of aggression, the call to response shored up our military foundations. From the end of the eighteenth century after the resolution of the Revolutionary War throughout the nineteenth century and on to the present day, as much as we as individuals and as a nation crave peace, conflict has been in our path. With every act of rebellion and aggression there was a reaction of response inspired by those who served before.

The nineteenth century began with the First Barbary War and that was a series of naval battles in the Mediterranean Sea. There was military action in Spanish Mexico as well as Spanish Florida. Wars were fought in the Caribbean in places like Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo. Through it all, American military might cemented its commitment to the preservation of our newly formed nation. As you can see, war was fought at home and abroad, establishing America’s involvement in combat internationally, a point that is brought to life in comedian Paul Rodriguez’ statement, “Sometimes I think war is God’s way of teaching us Geography.” (**Wait for the laugh**)

Throughout our history there have been countless examples of people that put their civilian lives on hold to serve their country. In doing so, legacies and inspiration of service, commitment and leadership have been passed down through generations to guide us as we continue to defend and support our American way of life.

Deborah Sampson Gannett was technically the first woman to enlist as a soldier when, in 1782, she signed up for the 4th Massachusetts Regiment in the Revolutionary War… How did she do it? She used an assumed male name! As Robert Shirtliffe she enlisted and served for almost three years. The sword cut to the side of her head didn’t stop her but apparently the gunshot wound in her shoulder earned her an honorable discharge and a military pension.

Ralph Waldo Emerson had this to say about bravery. “A hero is no braver than an ordinary man, but he is braver five minutes longer.” … And in many instances, for even longer than that. But heroes teach us and guide us and demonstrate resourcefulness, resilience, and determination. Thomas Ewing was a military officer, Free-State advocate, and the first Chief Justice of the state of Kansas. He was just nineteen years old when he was appointed as Secretary of the commission to determine the border between Ohio and Virginia. He became a colonel in the Civil War in 1862 and was commissioned Brigadier General by President Lincoln for his “gallant and meritorious services.” After the Civil War he resumed his law practice and continued to live a life of service, influence and inspiration.

Ulysses S. Grant is probably one of the most famous military figures of the Civil War. As a graduate of West Point he went on to serve in the Mexican American War and was noted for his bravery. Although he had already resigned from the Army when Fort Sumter was attacked by the Confederates, he knew his calling and knew what he had to do. He said to a friend, “The government educated me for the army. What I am I owe to my country. I have served through one war and, live or die, I will serve her through this.” He recruited a company of volunteers and offered his services to the Governor of Illinois. The rest, as you know, is history. We hear of the legend but rarely about the man. By accounts General Grant was a plain, common sense and straightforward person worthy of respect and the inspiration and legacy he generated.

General Norman Schwarzkopf has said, “Leadership is a potent combination of strategy and character. But if you must be without one, be without strategy.” Every one here has what it takes to be a leader…. as long as you’re breathing… (**Wait for the laugh**). Leadership comes from having character as General Schwarzkopf said. It also comes from having a conscience and a sense of commitment and accountability. It stems from clarity of purpose and a willingness to be responsible for the outcome. There are many examples of leaders that inspire us every day in today’s military and in our lives. There is an expression that reminds me of who I am, from where I have come, and where I might be going. “I am part of all that I have met.” Throughout my life and my tenure here, I have been inspired, encouraged and motivated- not only by our heritage and legacy and history that acts as a map to guide us, but by all of you. It’s no secret that life seems to be getting tougher. Threats seem to be coming closer to our front doors and they seem to be getting more malicious and pervasive. Now is the time for us to remember the definition of a leader and to heed the examples of those who led the way for us to take the reins. There are still too many opportunities at hand that need our dedicated strategies to plan and protect personal freedoms throughout the world and at home. Let us listen to our collective conscience, study those who walked the path, and declare the leadership within us to inspire, protect and defend those who in the future will look to us to continue to blaze the paths of heritage and legacy. Thank you all!