**MEMORIAL Day SPEECH 28 May, 2018**

**Covington, Ga.**

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Good Morning Commander Floyd, honored guests, friends and family. Don, thank you for that kind introduction. It’s a privilege for this Marine Grunt to honor our fallen heroes who made it possible for us today to gather near our storied Town Square and speak candidly in this sacred place. On Memorial Day, Americans everywhere are called to Remember and to Honor those who gave their lives, blood, sweat, and tears so that we might continue to be inspired to hold tight to the precious freedoms that define our Nation as unique.

Now, I ask all of you who know that **freedom** is **not free**. Please stand up. **Stand up**, if you are able and willing, for all of our warfighters who taught us the truth in this wisdom: “Greater love hath no man than this. to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” John 15:13.

So, **my friends**, as we stand in honor of our protectors, in our hearts, we find ourselves challenged by their legacy of courage and sacrifice to continue defending and celebrating Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. And if we are brave and wise enough to stand on the shoulders and unrealized dreams of our heroes, we may find ourselves living out these words of the great Billy Graham: “When a brave man takes a stand the spine of others is stiffened. “All I can say to that is **HOO-RAH**! Let it be so!

Thanks for that tribute to our heroes. As you settle back into your pews, I want to tell you a bit about those who have served our Nation. Since `1775 to the present, only about one percent of us protect this land of ours. To see the cost of that freedom one need only to go to the front corner of Emory Street and 278 here in Covington to see the neatly arranged Crosses representing some of the fallen extracted from us...or you can go to our Town Square and look up at the names on the monuments to see the honored inscribed in stone...or visit DC and stand before the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, polished to a mirrored sheen upon which 58,318 names are etched in the grave-like black granite, the length of which is stunning. Infinite strokes forming countless letters are what we can touch of the warriors we lost. This polished stone is there so that each visitor may find their own image reflected in every hero’s name ... or if you prefer you can visit the pastoral, solemn and seemingly endless rolling hills of Arlington Cemetery where the white markers honor our warriors. At Arlington National Cemetery we get just a glimpse of the cost of our Nation’s Freedom because it’s there, where over **FOUR HUNDRED THOUSAND** veterans are buried. ***For perspective***, that’s approximately the current population of Miami.

My distant memories of our fallen heroes came from the crucible of combat, mainly against a more experienced, more numerous, and determined North Vietnamese Regular Army (NVA). I will spare you the details of a muddled memory.... but I vividly remember a well-respected, very funny young marine on his second tour in Vietnam who had a Mickey Mouse tattoo on his ankle...after he was wounded I helped him on to a Medivac chopper...he was cut nearly in half during our assault on a machine gun position. We found out later that he paid the ultimate price for us, but so did that enemy machine gunner. Sometimes “an eye for an eye” becomes a reality... I, STILL**, can** see that tattoo on days like this.Another series of images I recall were the NVA’s ability to make head shots avoiding our body armor. Often there was no significant blood from the head wound... a **true** sniper seemed to aim for the middle of the forehead, and death was swift. AK-47’s were not as clean; two of my brother Marines lost their lives “on point,” searching for that well -hidden enemy while looking out for the rest of us… God rest their souls… As General Douglas MacArthur said, “The soldier, above all others, prays for peace, for it is the soldier who must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war.”

A more recent memory of one of Newton County’s heroes who gave his all is Captain Robert Littleton Phillips, who fell in the Cambodian Invasion that was outlined in the book **12 Days in May.** He was to be known on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall

by his name carved in stone on Panel 11W, Line 116. To some people here today, of course, he is so much more than that... he was a son, a brother, and a friend. Mrs .June Moore, Bob’s sister, and his brother, Mr. Charles Phillips if you are here and willing, please stand to be recognized..

(This is a Gold Star Family, folks, let them know how much we appreciate their sacrifice, please…..)

Robert is remembered on the wall, in our hearts and in our prayers as one of Newton County’s best and brightest. Captain Phillips left an indelible impression on someone else.... a man named Jacques Maraist who shared the following memory of that time.

“I arrived in Cambodia, on Landing Zone Phillips, the day after he was taken from us. The LZ was renamed by his men to honor Phillips after his death. I didn’t know him, but his passing had a tremendous impact on my life and others, especially a 16-year-old

Vietnamese-American girl named Ngan.”

Maraist explains that after the war, he taught high school for the Vietnamese community outside of New Orleans. In 1986 he brought 52 Vietnamese students to the traveling Vietnam Memorial Wall exhibit. Each student had a name of a soldier from their community to memorialize. Most of the tributes were thank you cards, flowers, and objects that they held dear to their hearts. Ngan brought a single rose and placed it near Capt. Phillips’ inscription. The local news was there and as she stood at the wall, image shifting from his name to the red rose in her hand, she shared her poem that began, “To my adopted soldier.... ” thousands of people heard his name and her words expressing gratitude to the fallen soldier...” Liberty is the most valuable gift you inherit from your forefathers. .... It just so happens that the part of the world you were fighting for was Vietnam, my homeland. You shared the courage of your forefathers when they fought for your liberty and you used that courage to fight for my liberty. ... I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart, for someday I might be out there fighting for some little girl’s liberty.”

The next day, in class , she told Maraist how she felt bonded to Capt. Phillips and that she made a decision to work for the United Nations, go to Southeast Asia and in some way, ’fight for little girls’ liberty.’ ” it seemed like rather ambitious goals for a girl of 16, but then he realized, “she left more at that wall than a rose.” Something in that moment of reflection must have touched her deeply.

Ngan kept her word. She went on to get a degree in international relations from Harvard and received a grant from the federal government to study in Southeast Asia. She worked both for Oxfam and the United Nations Children’s Foundation. During a presidential tour of the Mekong Delta in 2000, Ngan was part of the delegation chosen to speak to the press. Specifically, the National Geographic Channel produced a special on returning to Vietnam and when they asked Ngan what motivated her toward activism, she replied , ”Well, you see, it was a soldier in Viet Nam..”

Another home town hero who eventually died from probable Agent Orange exposure in Viet Nam, years after returning home was Curry T. Haynes... one of our own... the recipient of the **most** purple hearts in American military history for a total of **TEN**... **Cats may have nine lives but Curry had at least ten... (wait for the laugh)**.... Traditionally, three separate wounds gets you three Purple Hearts... and a ticket home .” Curry received **NINE** of his Purple Hearts in **one** particularly grizzly encounter. News articles written about Curry T Haynes tell the story. Haynes’ sister, Mrs. Sarah Standard, confirmed them and gave more details. Her brother grew up and received his education in Newton County as well as greater Georgia. Many interests and passions led to diverse and exciting careers, and as writer Pete Mecca stated, “Curry was a crop duster, jump school operator, Flight school teacher, ***and*** professional EMT worker for an ambulance service.” And if **ALL THAT** wasn’t enough, he worked part time as a counselor for the VA.

Having dealt with addiction, Curry was a founding organizer of Celebrate Recovery Grace Fellowship. He devoted his life to serving God and helping those in need. As a Vietnam veteran one thing is certain... we **lived** the war in Southeast Asia. It affected all of us **deeply**... mentally, physically... some more than others. The men and women who made it through were **SURVIVORS** and Curry T. Haynes was one of them. Haynes was a sky soldier in the 173rd airborne brigade when he arrived in Vietnam in August 1967. He successfully avoided injury for a few months but eventually his company walked into an ambush. Curry received two wounds to his arm serious enough to send him back to Japan for surgery. After a brief rest, He was returned to combat only to come down with malaria. He recovered and was able to go back to his unit with One Purple Heart.

Haynes earned **nine more** purple hearts in one **epic** encounter with the enemy, described like this, “On May 8, 1968 he was in a new position with a warrior brother. It was raining that night …as he was cleaning his weapon, an NVA fired a B-40 rocket hitting two positions down from him and was rapidly approaching so Curry knew he was next …even though they took cover, shrapnel hit him in the chest and left arm, but Haynes carried on reassembling his weapon. The enemy ran down the hill towards him. He was hit in the right ankle ... a bullet went through his right side and a third round pierced his left thigh. One witness recalled he was hit in both feet, both hands, and other parts of the body but **SOMEHOW** got his weapon back together and started firing at the enemy. ... As he was done making a good defense...another round went through his arm and cut a nerve... he was losing a lot of blood especially from his thighs. At that point, another North Vietnamese soldier approached with **another** B-40 rocket but **OOPS**... Apparently not too “well versed in the ways of war,” he “forgot” to load his weapon. While this “fellow” tried to save his own hide, Curry eliminated that threat. After shooting the rocket carrier and his support person, another NVA soldier shot Curry’s left hand. His left index finger was shot along with the handguard of his M-16... in the next round of fire, the finger was gone. It didn’t stop there.... Nonetheless Haynes didn’t give up... he was furiously pulling the trigger with his little finger intending to neutralize the enemy. The NVA started throwing grenades... he sought protection behind sand bags. A grenade landed right next to him...thankfully **THAT** one was a dud but another landed, exploding through the sandbag material hitting him in the right eye. He put his head down and when he looked back up, they were retreating, leaving the wounded and dead behind... (**Say this** **with ANIMATION)** and **YOU** thought **YOU have rough days?????** (**And wait for the laugh**).

Pete Mecca is a journalist and veteran who has interviewed many warriors. He’s described Curry’s account as “one of the best depictions of actual combat” for someone who endured such extreme battle conditions. His testimony is as “profound and honest as a survivor’s story can be...a raw account of ‘kill or be killed’...” It’s the chronicle of somebody who fought for freedom. Curry T Haynes received permanent scars on his body ... and was awarded a purple heart for each of those wounds for a total of 10 during his tours in Vietnam ..In his final remarks upon receipt of the **most** purple hearts by any American warrior, he said, “My father, an Oxford biology professor, came to get me and I was presented with **NINE** Purple Hearts (Remember he already had one). I went home for two weeks and then back to the hospital for seven surgeries over the next 11 months.” The “**secret** of how he survived the brutal combat...” He said, “I don’t believe in luck. I owe it all to Jesus Christ, every bit of it”

So folks, one of my reasons for being here today is to remind you that fighting for freedom is **everybody’s** business including family, friends and those we hold dear. All the freedoms we battle for.. all are important in keeping us safe and in protecting the brick, mortar and fragile ideals of our Grand Experiment called America. So if you are not on the front lines, some might ask the question: What difference will my effort make? A story from WW II answers that question but first in Zechariah 4:10 we are cautioned to respect all efforts for good. “Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin”

What seems small to you may be gigantic to another.... The supply clerk who goes the extra mile to airlift food and provisions to a besieged unit, the entertainer who boosts the spirits of those fortunate enough to see or hear about him or her. These can be huge to the hungry warfighter who is running out of ammo.

In these situations of less obvious bravery,.. as World War II bomber pilot Bohn Fawkes recalled, after one of his missions over Nazi held territory, his plane sustained multiple flak damage but even though his gas tanks were hit, the plane didn’t go down in flames.

The next morning Fawkes asked his crew chief for the German shell so he could keep it as a souvenir of this incredibly “good fortune.” The Crew chief explained that not just one but **ELEVEN** shells were found in the gas tanks …and **NONE** of them exploded. Oddly enough, all were empty except inside one was a carefully rolled note. On the paper was scrawled a message in the Czech language. When translated it read: ”This is all we can do for you now.”

Small deeds often have big, unseen and unsung results .... the brave munitions worker probably thought his actions would not end the war but he just might save a plane or two. So, too, is the courage of these next two men who left their families and comfortable homes to support our front lines... But make no mistake... anyone serving is potentially in harm’s way as the enemy is **always** trying to disrupt or destroy supply lines and aid for the troops.

Joe Willis is a gifted photographer, communications expert and citizen of Newton County who served in Korea near the DMZ where he kept communication and supplies flowing to the Troops. His work also included boosting morale. Joe was given the task of helping to form a football team and to play other encampments across Korea. With his guidance and support, they won the Korean championship. Upon returning home, he planned to go into coaching at major colleges, perfect his photography, and earn his PhD. He accomplished all he set out to do. After his retirement from Georgia State as a professor, he successfully captured the world’s beauty with his camera. Thank you, Joe, for your service... and especially for bringing home to all of us, the beauty and peace you witnessed through your lens.

The last hero is Lt. Col Jack Coyle, a career Army officer who earned a Bronze Star. Jack was a Platoon leader of a fixed wing aircraft unit who ensured the planes were fully operational and the crew supplied with the resources needed for mission success in Vietnam. He also worked in Intelligence. After retirement from service, Jack became an insurance underwriter, an avid supporter of the military, and a loving father and husband who uses his can-do spirit and talents to improve just about everything he touches. Thank you, Jack, for being a wonderful example of the military’s gift to society. As a Marine who more than witnessed those beautiful birds drop critical supplies to us or by creating a shield of hellfire to protect us , I say thank you for your service.

Let’s remember that in our country the Constitution is the written declaration of our freedoms where in particular we have the first amendment to keep our freedoms of speech, peaceable assembly, press and religion and petitioning our government for redress of grievances. We also have the right to keep and bear arms in the second amendment so that the government cannot just decide to murder citizens who are “out of line.” Our 19th amendment prohibits the denial to vote based on sex and the 15th prohibits the denial of the right to vote based on race or color. These are just some of our precious rights we take for granted that help make us a beacon of Liberty for the world.

In these words of John F. Kennedy and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, we are reminded of what it is to be an American. Kennedy said: “Let every nation know whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of Liberty”. And it was Longfellow who expressed the piercing brilliance of these words about a hero’s sacrifice: “They are dead but live in each Patriot’s Breast, and their names are engraved on honor’s bright crest.”

Finally, every year we commemorate Memorial Day, and each year, as I get older, and further distanced from my youth, I think back and wonder, “Did *we* **REALLY** live through **THAT**?” How was I so fortunate to **survive**?... to dodge the tyranny of that shrapnel and the efficiency of those AK’s. How was I able to maintain my focus enough to fulfill my duties and return home? And every year I think of you... my neighbors, friends, community, colleagues, and I ask myself... “Do **THEY** know what it was like? Do they have any **IDEA** of the brutality we endured? Have our young people even heard of the places, towns and sights that took our sisters and brothers and fathers and futures?”

Tolstoy said, “The two most powerful warriors are patience and time.” I’ve been blessed with both and have dedicated my time in remembrance of the life and blood and potential that was lost in battlefields all over the world.

It’s easy to pretend that life is fun and carefree, especially on a day like today, a day serving two masters one rememberance and one celebrating the “first day of summer,” but to those who forfeited their well-being and future in battle, I urge you to think of them. Think of the Vets that come back... some irreparably wounded... **ALL** irrevocably **CHANGED... most for the better and others not.** Give them some of your time... some patience... some honor. Keep them in your thoughts and prayers... Do what you can to support them and keep the memories close to you, because that’s how they live on. **They earned it.** Thank you for listening to an old Marine honoring our fallen and all who love and support them!

God bless the USA and those who fight for her, whether it be with the pen or the sword.... And God Bless each and every one of You! Thank you.