**MEMORIAL SPEECH**

**FOR**

**JOHN BATKINS**

Good Morning Commander Floyd, honored guests, friends and family. Thank you for that kind review of this Marine‘s life. It’s a privilege for this grunt sergeant to honor our fallen heroes who, through the **ULTIMATE SACRIFICE**, consistently made and continually make it possible for us to gather near this storied Town Square and respectfully share a little bit of their lives. Through that action, they remain with us.... and although I wish I would be able to do **MORE**, on this 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 (**Do you prefer magnificent?**). Now, I ask all of you who know that **freedom** is **not free**.. 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 and deep within our collective conscience, we find ourselves challenged by their legacy. It’s one of sacrifice and courage to continue defending and celebrating Liberty, Justice 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-RAY**! Let it be so!

Thank you for that tribute and as you settle back or remain standing 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 country and it’s inhabitants. One need only to look on the front corner lawn of Newton Bank here in Covington to see the neatly arranged Crosses representing some of the fallen extracted from Covington’s own...or go to our Square and look up at the names on the monuments behind me to see the honored inscribed in stone...or visit DC and stand before the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, polished to a mirrored effect upon which 58,318 names are etched in the grave-like black granite, the length of which is stunning... it had to be in order to accommodate all of those remembered... infinite strokes forming countless letters are all that we can touch of the solders we lost...polished so intensely in order for each visitor to find their own image reflected in each name... or you can visit the pastoral, solemn and seemingly endless rolling hills of the Arlington National Cemetery to get just a glimpse of the cost of our Nation’s Freedom. Over **FOUR HUNDRED THOUSAND** people are buried at Arlington.... that’s just about the current population of the **entire city** of Miami! Yes... we’ve got **a lot** of loss to memorialize.

My images and recollections of our fallen heroes came from the gruesome crucible of combat, mainly against a more experienced, more numerous, and just as determined North Vietnamese Regular Army, **WHO**, as we also know, were on their “**home turf**.” The names of the men we lost are not only etched in granite, but their faces and bodies and last moments are embedded in my **OWN** memories....let’s just say, fifty years have passed and the “legacy” remains with me. I will spare you too many details.... but I remember, as I was on a second tour, a well respected, very funny young marine with a Mickey Mouse tattoo on his ankle... I was helping him onto a Medivac copter after he was cut nearly in half during the assault on a well placed machine gun position. We found out later that he did not make it, but neither did the enemy machine gunner. Sometimes “an eye for an eye” becomes very real... and I can **STILL** see that tattoo...

A second memory that stays with me was the enemy’s accuracy... they perfected that aim so that head shots would avoid 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 and less messy (**too much?**) . AK-47’s were not as clean; two of my brother Marines lost their lives “on point,” searching for the well hidden spider hole or tree tied positions while looking out for the rest of us. God rest their souls. Finally at Ke Sanh and nearby Con Thien, the North Vietnamese Army had flame throwers. Our unit relieved 1/9’s walking dead who were caught in a very well constructed killing zone of artillery, mortars, machine guns, rockets and flame throwers...only a few survived. My brothers’ bodies, burnt beyond recognition will forever be with me, but most importantly their sacrifice will continue to inspire me to keep the light of Liberty shining. 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 Cambodia 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.... he is also 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. (**If he sister is there, do you want to acknowledge her?**) He is remembered on the wall, in our hearts and minds, but he also left an indelible impression on someone else.... a man named Jacques Maraist shared the following memory of Lt Phillips:

“I landed on LZ Phillips in Cambodia the day after he was taken from us. I did not know him, but his death had a tremendous impact on my life and others, especially on a 16 year old Vietnamese-American girl named Ngan.”

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Maraist goes on to explain 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 he tributes were thank you cards, flowers, stuffed animals and objects that they held dear to their hearts. Ngan brought a single rose and placed her token 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 read shared her story that began, “To my adopted soldier.... ” thousands of people heard his name and her words expressed her gratitude to the fallen soldier...”Liberty is the most valuable gift that you inherit from your forefathers. .... It just so happens that the part of the world that you were fighting for was Vietnam, my homeland. You shared the courage of your forefathers when they fought for your liberty and 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 girl of 16, but then he realized, “she left more at that wall than a rose.” Something in that reflection 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 for 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 that met to express concern about plans to dam the river. The National Geographic Channel produced an hour long special on returning to Vietnam and when they asked Ngan what motivated her toward her activism, she replied, ”Well, you see, it was a soldier in Vietnam…” That memory sparked a **flame**....

Another hero who eventually died from probable exposure to agent orange was Curry T. Haynes... the recipient of the most purple hearts in American military history for a total of **TEN**... **Talk about going back for more!! Cats may have nine lives, but Curry had at least ten... (wait for the laugh)** The general rule of thumb **(Do you want to say)** if any are left.... is that three separate injuries gets you three Purple Hearts... and a ticket home to CONUS on the “**freedom bird**...” Curry received **NINE** of his Purple Hearts in **one** particularly grizzly encounter... news articles written about Curry T Haynes tell us that he grew up in Newton County, he attended Newton County High School and Gordon Military College. He then went to Middle Georgia College. People said he had many interests and passions which led to diverse and interesting careers, and as writer Pete Mecca tells it, Curry was a crop duster, he organized and operated jump schools, taught flying in Lugoff South Carolina, was a professional EMT worker for an ambulance service. When he came back to Covington he again started a flying and parachuting business and if **ALL THAT** wasn’t enough, he even worked part time as a counselor for the VA.

Having dealt with addiction, Curry was one of the founding organizers 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 and it affected all of us deeply... mentally, physically... some more than others. The men and women who survived that time were **SURVIVORS** and Curry T. Haynes was one of those survivors. Haynes was a sky soldier in the 173rd airborne brigade Charlie company when he arrived in Vietnam in August 1967... it was truly a **HOT** time to land “in country” and the Georgia heat was nothing compared to the conditions he discovered. You know the expression, “It’s not the heat, it’s the **HUMIDITY**??” Well, in Vietnam, it was **BOTH**. He successfully avoided injury for a few months but eventually his company walked into an ambush and Curry received two wounds to his arm serious enough to be that could be sent back to Japan to surgery. After a rest and recuperation Curry was returned combat only to come down with malaria. He recovered from malaria and was able to go back to his unit with One Purple Heart to his credit. Haynes earned another nine more purple hearts in one monster of an encounter with the enemy. That episode was described like this, “On May 8, 1968 he was in a new position with a brother from California. It was raining that night and as he was cleaning his weapon, he had taken off his shirt and parts of his weapon were laying on it. A shoulder mounted B-40 rocket hit two positions down and then another one, and Curry knew he was next.... even though they took cover, shrapnel hit him in the chest and left arm, and still he continued reassemble his weapon. the enemy started running down the hill towards him. At this time he was hit in the right ankle ... a bullet went through his right side and a third round pierced his left thigh. The witness said 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. And when he was done making a good defense...another round went through his arm and cut a nerve... they noticed he was losing a lot of blood especially from his thighs. At that point, another North Vietnamese soldier (**handout attached ? please? What’s this??** ) was approaching with a B-40 rocket but **OOPS**... he was wasn’t too “well versed in the ways of war,” and 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 noticed his left hand and Curry’s left index finger was shot as well as 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 firing at them, pulling the trigger with his little finger with the intent of neutralizing the enemy. Then they start throwing grenades... he sought protection behind sand bags and a grenade landed right next to him...thank goodness **THAT** one was a dud but another one 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.... (**Do you want to say**) ... needless to say, they didn’t clean up after themselves... they left the wounded and dead behind..... (**Do you want to add**) ... and **YOU** thought **YOUR** lives were exciting??? (**And wait for the laugh**).

Pete Mecca is a journalist and veteran who has interviewed many comrades. You can find out more at his website, [aveteransstory.us](http://aveteransstory.us). He’s described Curry’s account as “one of the best depictions of actual combat as overheard from a soldier” who actually endured such extreme combat. His testimony is as “profound and honest as a survivor’s story can be... it’s a vivid account of a “kill or be killed”... it is the account of somebody who fought for freedom. Curry T Haynes received permanent scars on his body ... that is, what was **left** of it... and was awarded a purple heart for each of those for a total of 10 during his tours in Vietnam .... he worked **HARD** for those medals.. the kind that no one **INTENDS** to receive. In his final remarks upon receipt of the honors, he said, “My father, an Oxford college biology professor, came to get me and they presented me with **NINE** Purple Hearts. I went home for two weeks and then back to the hospital for seven surgeries over the next 11 months.” He tells his “secret.” “... and how I survived the brutal combat... I don’t believe in luck. I owe it all to Jesus Christ, every bit of it”

In memory of Curry T. Haynes, keep this in mind from Mecca, “... Of the 2.7 million men and women who served in Vietnam, 304,000 were wounded.**”** Also take note that an inordinately high percentage of amputations and crippling wounds were prevalent.

I am here to remind you that fighting for freedom is everybody’s business..from family to friends to those we hold dear to the **stiffened.”** All the freedoms we battle for.. all are important in keeping us safe and 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. We are cautioned in Zechariah 4:10 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...and there’s the assumed enemy that still possesses a shred of humanity... in 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 explode or go down in flames.

The next morning Fawkes asked the 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 11 shells were found in the gas tanks .... and **NONE** of them exploded. And oddly enough, all were empty except that inside of one was a carefully rolled note. On the paper was a 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 might 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 supply lines and support 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 championship and went on to Japan.

Upon returning home, he planned to go into coaching at major colleges, perfect his photography as a hobby, and earn his PhD. He went on to teach at Georgia State as a professor.. After his retirement from Georgia State he successfully captured the world’s beauty with his camera. Thank you, Joe, for your service... and especially for bringing the beauty and peace he witnessed, home to us all. Even with all he endured in the war, he **STILL** wanted to search for and share beauty in this world.

The last unsung hero was-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 elements needed for mission success in Vietnam. He also worked in Intelligence. After returning home he consulted with local government to draw up disaster plans, and In retirement from the Army, Jack became an underwriter for an insurance company, an avid supporter of the military, a loving father and husband who uses his can-do spirit and multiple skill sets 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 dropped ordinance on enemy positions I say thank you for your service.

If there were just one thought I might leave you with, it’s this... whether it be the seemingly small thing or the dramatic “Statement maker,” our protectors need all the support and loyalty we can give them as they fight for our fragile freedoms. Whether it be the pen or the sword, I implore you to have the strength to stand behind those who protect and cherish our hard won rights. If you want to know why it’s crucial, ask the Chinese students who gathered in Tiananmen Square to just promote some much needed change. Their peaceful assembly was tolerated for a brief period but in a totalitarian government where the collective is more important the the individual’s rights, that wasn’t tolerated. They were first refused food and herded into a group surrounded by the military including tanks and in one maneuver, the students were slaughtered while the survivors were jailed or “re-educated.”

 In our country we have the first amendment to keep our freedom of speech, our freedom of 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 can not just decide to murder citizens who are “out of line.”. And the 4th amendment places restrictions on putting warfighters in our personal homes without our permission during peacetime . 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 the freedoms we take for granted that help make us unique in the world. Once in a while, take a moment out of your day and check out even just the preamble of our Constitution to see for yourself who we are as a people. Also heed the words of John F. Kennedy and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. 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 stated his appreciation of a Nation’s defenders when he penned the piercing brilliance of these words which can warm even the coldest of hearts: “ They are dead but live in each Patriot’s Breast, and their names are engraved on honor’s bright crest.”

Every year we commemorate Memorial Day, and each year, as I get older, and further distanced from my youth, I think back and I still wonder, “Did I **REALLY** live through **THAT**?” How was I so lucky to live... to dodge the tyranny of that shrapnel... to maintain my focus on doing my job and getting the **HELL** home, hopefully victorious? 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 of what we endured? Have the young people even heard of the places and 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 I have dedicated my time in remembrance of the life and blood and potential that was lost in battlefields all over the world... and here at home too... not so far away. It’s easy to pretend that life is fun and carefree, especially on a day like today, that we have been using as our traditional symbol of 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...** 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 deserve it.** Thank you for listening to an old Marine and honoring our fallen! God bless the USA and all who fight for her whether

it be with the pen or the sword. And God Bless each and every one of You!