

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2025

Remarks at a Memorial Day Ceremony in Arlington, Virginia
May 26, 2025

Vice President James D. "J.D." Vance. Well, thank you, everyone. Thank you to that incredible choir and band. And thanks to General Caine and Secretary Hegseth for your powerful words. Thank you, most importantly, for everything that you do for our Nation's war fighters.

And for those who have given their lives to this country, we remember you today. And certainly, to our Gold Star families, we're so thrilled and so grateful to have you with us in attendance.

This is a sacred place, an eternal resting spot for our Nation's sons and daughters. We gather in solemn commemoration of their sacrifice and the sacrifice made by all those who gave up their lives in service to our beloved country.

In 1915, President Woodrow Wilson laid the cornerstone of the Memorial Amphitheater we gather in today. Now, buried within it was a copper box which contained mementos of profound significance to the amphitheater's designers and to our entire country. There were four things: an American flag, a Bible, a copy of our Declaration of Independence, and a copy of the U.S. Constitution. And the objects they chose to dedicate to posterity, those Americans remind us of the values we hold timeless and dear as a nation and as a people.

But those values didn't spring from any stone work or time capsule. They were lived out, day after day, by the people buried in this hallowed cemetery.

Each life honored here in Arlington was once full of the ordinary moments and quiet dreams, of early sunrises, of good days and bad days, of celebrations and disappointments. They stood not apart from us but among us, ordinary men and women who chose to shoulder an impossible burden.

And when we consider what they gave to us, it's common, of course, to focus on their deaths, on the courage to give, in that moment, what very few are willing or able to sacrifice. But the real tragedy of the loss is not in a single moment of suffering, as our Gold Star families know well, but in all the future moments they and their families lost, every moment between their sacrifice on the battlefield and what would have been a natural death.

Because we know they sacrifice not just their physical life. They sacrifice the moments that make that life worthwhile. They sacrificed a child's embrace. They sacrificed walking their daughter down the aisle, of seeing their husband or wife after a big promotion, of sharing a meal with the family at Thanksgiving.

For my fellow Americans, especially those watching on television, consider the sum of all the moments that make a good life, and now appreciate that countless strangers, people most of you never met, they gave up those moments in their own life so that we could enjoy them in ours. And that is what Memorial Day is all about.

I once heard a Marine Corps colonel that I served with—he said this in 2005, not long after a very tough deployment to Iraq. He said this about his fallen men, that they were the best looking, they were the kindest, they were the smartest, they were the most devoted. They were the very best of us. To them, we owe everything. And today, in the peace they bequeathed us, we honor them.

As the Book of Wisdom tells us, "But the righteous one, though he die early, shall be at rest, for the age that is honorable comes not with the passing of time, nor can it be measured in terms of years." They laid down their lives for Americans they would never meet, for generations yet unborn, for a nation that would not exist absent their incredible courage.

Now, we know their families, in particular, have given so much. And in particular, I want to speak to the Gold Star families; to the families who have lost a son, a daughter, a husband, or a wife; to every child here who misses your dad or your mom. Know that your loved one, to us, is a hero. And though we cannot know your pain, please know that I speak for the entire nation when I say that we are grateful to them and to you for a debt none of us can possibly repay.

Now, all of us will honor the fallen and their families in our own way, but allow me to suggest two ways of honoring their sacrifice, two ways that I try to honor their sacrifice every day.

First, we ought to commit ourselves and expect from our leaders to treat the lives of our troops as the most precious resource. The very best way—[*applause*]. The very best way to honor the fallen is to only ask the next generation to make the ultimate sacrifice when they absolutely must. We must be cautious in sending our people to war.

The second that I—second way that I try to honor the fallen is to commit ourselves to being worthy of their sacrifice. If you're a husband, be the best husband you can be. If you're a mom, be the best mom that you can be. If you're a citizen, be the very best citizen that you can be. Because together, let us build a better country, a more perfect union, and strive to be the kind of nation worthy of the sacrifice of the people that we honor today.

On this Memorial Day, let us remember that we have been given a great gift, often by people none of us ever met. Let us cherish that gift and make ourselves worthy of it. May God bless those who gave that gift, and may He bless the country they sacrificed for. Thank you.

And now, without further ado, let me please introduce your President, the people's President, the President who knows what these men and women—what they sacrificed for and who honors them every single day in the job that he does, President Trump.

The President. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you very much. Very special place and a very special day.

Thank you to Vice President Vance, doing a terrific job.

Thanks also to a man who has devoted his life to servicemembers and veterans, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, who's doing really well. He went through a lot, didn't he? But he's doing really well. He's a tough cookie. That's what we want. He's a tough cookie.

And we're grateful to be joined as well by Chairman Caine—terrific military person—members of the Cabinet, Members of Congress, members of the United States Armed Forces, veterans, and many other distinguished guests. We gather today to honor the incredible servicemembers who rest in glory in this cemetery and burial grounds around the world and in a thousand lonely places known only to God.

In every hour of peril, in every moment of crisis, American warriors have left behind the blessings of home and family to answer their Nation's call. They've offered all that they had within them and given their last breaths to each and every one of us that we might live safe and breathe free.

This morning we pay tribute to their immortal deeds. We share in the sorrow of their beloved families, and as one Nation, we give thanks for the ultimate gift they have so selflessly given to all of us.

These warriors—and that's what they are, is great, great warriors—picked up their mantle of duty and service, knowing that to live for others meant always that they might die for others. They knew that. They asked nothing for it. They gave everything, and we owe them everything and much, much more.

Each of the servicemembers who have made the supreme sacrifice for our Nation has also left an unfillable void and an unbreakable silence in the lives of all who love them. For the families of the fallen, you feel the absence of your heroes every day in the family—these are great families; these are wonderful families—in the familiar laugh no longer heard, the empty space at Sunday dinner, or the want of a hug or a pat on the back that will never come again.

Every Gold Star family fights a battle long after the victory is won. And today we lift you up, and we hold you high.

Thank you, thank you, thank you for giving America the brightest light in your lives. It's what you've done. We will never, ever forget our fallen heroes, and we will never forget our debt to you.

This Memorial Day is especially significant as we commemorate 250 years since the first American patriots fell on the field of battle. Two and a half centuries ago, at Lexington Green, Concord Bridge, Bunker Hill, brave minutemen and humble farm boys became the first to give their lives for a nation that did not yet have a name. With their deaths, men like John Brown, 23; Samuel Hadley, 28; and Abno Hosd [Abner Hosmer; White House correction], 21, ignited the flame of liberty that now lights the [and; White House correction] inspires everybody and the entire world.

Those young men could never have known what their sacrifice would mean to us, but we certainly know what we owe to them. Their valor gave us the freest, greatest, and most noble republic ever to exist on the face of the earth. A republic that I am fixing after a long and hard 4 years. That was a hard 4 years we went through.

Who would let that happen? People pouring through our borders unchecked, people doing things that are indescribable and not for today to discuss.

But the Republic that is now doing so very well—we're doing so very well right now, considering the circumstances, and we'll do record-setting better with time. We will do better than we've ever done as a nation, better than ever before. I promise you that.

In every generation since, at Trenton and Yorktown, at Vicksburg and Shiloh, and in faraway places with names like Château-Thierry, Anzio, Iwo Jima, Khe Sanh, Kandahar, a chew—really, just a few chosen names. And these are names that have become so important on the altar of freedom. They plunged into the crucible of battle, stormed into the fires of hell, charged into the valley of death, and rose into the arms of angels.

The sacrifice that they made was not merely for a single battle, a long-ago victory, or a fleeting triumph decades or centuries past. Their sacrifice was for today, tomorrow, and every morning thereafter. Every child that lives in peace, every home that is filled with joy and love, every day the Republic stands is only possible because of those who did what had to be done when duty called. And the cost was everything to them and to their families.

Our debt to them is eternal, and it does not diminish with time. It only grows and grows and grows with each passing year. The greatest monument to their courage is not carved in marble or cast in bronze. It's all around us—an American nation, 325 million strong, which will soon be greater than it has ever been before. It will be.

And so today we uphold the memory of our heroes, as people have done since ancient times, by telling their stories and exalting their names.

Senior Master Sergeant Elroy Harworth was a young, beautiful man from Erhard, Minnesota, when he enlisted in the Air Force and was sent to Vietnam. Fifty-nine years ago this very week, Elroy and his crewmates climbed into the dark skies over Da Nang on a classified mission known as Operation Carolina Moon. Their aim was to blow up a key enemy bridge. And while other crews had tried and failed, they were determined to try and get it done in face of extreme danger. And they knew how bad it was.

As their C-130 closed in on its target and Elroy jockeyed his 5,000 pounds of explosives into position, the aircraft came under unbelievably intense fire. They had never seen anything like it. Try as they might, they were hit as the plane swung low, and they went down deep in enemy territory.

Elroy was just 24 years old when he gave his life for America, leaving behind a beautiful young wife who was 7 months pregnant. That meant Elroy would never know the joy of meeting his son Troy or seeing him grow. And he would never have the pride to watch his son follow in his father's footsteps and serve two decades in the U.S. Army.

Sergeant First Class Troy Harworth is with us today, joined by his wife Sonia, and their son John, the grandson Elroy never got to hold. Thank you, Troy, and thank you, John. And above all, thank you, Elroy. Thank you very much.

Please stand up. Thank you, wherever you may be. Thank you very much. Great family.

Corporal Ryan McGhee of Fredericksburg, Virginia, knew from the time he saw the towers fall on 9/11 that he wanted to be an Army Ranger. He was an American guy—all-American. He was a tough guy, was the top of everything. In high school, he was captain of the football team and was voted friendliest and most charming by his peers.

Ryan joined the Army soon after graduation, and after three tours in Afghanistan, he deployed to Iraq. He and his unit were tasked with hunting down a weapon facilitator and a suicide bomber cell near Baghdad. A vicious, vicious cell killing many, many people.

Sixteen years ago this month, they engaged the enemy in a firefight, and Ryan was mortally wounded. He gave his life at 21 years old, and today he rests until the end of time in the famed section 60 here at Arlington, where we have buried our honored dead from the war on terror.

We are joined today by Ryan's mom Sherrie. Sherrie, all of America shares in your grief, and more importantly, we share in your pride in your wonderful son. And thank you so much for being here, Sherrie. Where is Sherrie?

Thank you, Sherrie. Thank you very much, on behalf of everyone. This crowd is so big, she's hard to find. Once I saw her, she really stands out. *[Laughter]* Thank you, Sherrie, very much.

Senior Chief Petty Officer Shannon Kent grew up in Pine Plains, New York, before enlisting in the Navy in 2003, and she quickly became one of the rising stars. She was an absolute winner. As a linguist, translator, and cryptologic [cryptologic; White House correction] technician, Shannon worked alongside elite special force units, like Delta Force and Navy SEALs, to help them capture and kill terrorists. She was among the first women ever to do it, and she did it better than anyone.

In January 2019, Shannon was on her fifth combat deployment, embedded with a team hunting ISIS terrorists through the streets of Syria, when a suicide bomber detonated his weapon, killing Senior Chief Kent and three other wonderful, beautiful Americans.

She left behind her husband Joe and their two sons—3-year-old Colt and 18-month-old baby Josh. Today, Shannon rests in peace on these grounds alongside her comrades.

To her boys, Colt and Josh, who are here this morning, now aged 9 and 7, let me say your mom was a hero. And her love, her strength, and her spirit are always with us and always be with you. She loved her boys.

To Joe, the boys, Shannon's parents Mary and Stephen, and her sister Mariah, Shannon's name will live forever in the chronicles of true American patriots. I just want to thank you and thank you so much for being here in honor of your magnificent family member.

Stories like Shannon's, Ryan's, and Elroy's remind us of the real meaning of the day. And I want to just say, please stand up wherever you may be. The boys—I want to see those boys. Where are you?

They're good-looking guys. Thank you very much for being here. All of you, thank you so much. We should never forget, even for a moment, that freedom is a gift of the highest cost, and peace is won at the most precious price. These extraordinary American heroes and their immense and ultimate sacrifices—they offer only the faintest glimpse at the infinite grace we have received from all who laid down their lives for America over the past 250 years.

We're going to have a big, big celebration, as you know—250 years. In some ways, I'm glad I missed that second term where it was because—*[laughter]*—I wouldn't be your President for that most important of all. In addition, we have the World Cup, and we have the Olympics. Can you imagine? I missed that 4 years, and now look what I have. I have everything. Amazing the way things work out.

God did that. I believe that too. *[Applause]* God did it.

You know, I got the World Cup, and I got the Olympics. The 250 years was not mine. I'd like to take credit, but I got the Olympics, I got the World Cup when I was President. And I said, "Boy, it's too bad I won't be President then." And look what happened. I went—I turned out, and we're going to have a great time. We're going to have a great celebration.

But most important of all is the 250th anniversary. That blows everything away, including the World Cup and including the Olympics, as far as I'm concerned.

In any corner of this cemetery, at any resting place for our war dead, anywhere on Earth, you'll find untold stories of equal heroism and heartbreak, unmatched patriotism and devotion, and acts of selflessness and courage so enormous they defy comprehension. Most people can't even imagine it.

Great poets have written that it's love which moves the sun and the stars, but here on the sacred soil, right where we are, we're reminded that it's love which moves the course of history and moves it always toward freedom. Always.

From Bunker Hill to Bastogne to Cantigny to Coral Sea, from Gettysburg to Guadalcanal and Concord to Kabul, America's best and America's bravest have fought, bled, and died so that we could pick up the torch of liberty; raise it high, high, high; and carry it onward to places they could never have dreamed of before.

Today we honor their memory. We remember their gallantry. We revere—just revere—in the highest sense, we just revere their incredible legacy. We salute them in their eternal and everlasting glory, and we continue our relentless pursuit of America's destiny as we make our nation stronger, prouder, freer, and greater than ever before.

May God bless our fallen heroes. May God bless our Gold Star families. And may God bless the United States of America.

Thank you very much, everybody. Great honor. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you.

Thank you very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 12:10 p.m. in the Memorial Amphitheater at the Arlington National Cemetery. In his remarks, he referred to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. J. Daniel Caine, USAF; Sherrie Battle-McGhee, mother of Cpl. Ryan C. McGhee, USA; Jonathan Farmer, a Green Beret, Scott Wirtz, a civilian intelligence officer, and Ghadir Taher, a Syrian-born contractor, who were also killed in the explosion that killed SCPO Shannon M. Kent, USN, in Manbij, Syria, on January 16, 2019; and Stephen and Mary Plover-Smith, parents, and Mariah Smith, sister, of SCPO Kent. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization. The transcript was released by the Office of Communications on May 28.

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Locations: Arlington, VA.

Names: Caine, J. Daniel; Farmer, Jonathan; Hegseth, Peter B.; Horworth, John; Horworth, Sonia; Horworth, Troy; Kent, Colten; Kent, Joseph; Kent, Joshua; McGhee, Battle-Sherrie; Plover-Smith, Mary; Smith, Mariah; Smith, Stephen; Taher, Ghadir; Vance, James D. "J.D."; Wirtz, Scott.

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