

**The  
American  
Legion**



*For God and country*

## ***Suggested Speech***

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# **Memorial Day 2014**

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Myles Eckert was excited when he found a \$20 bill in the parking lot of an Ohio Cracker Barrel recently. The 8-year-old boy planned to buy a Lego video game with his unexpected windfall. But fate took him in a different direction.

While dining in the restaurant with his family, he noticed a uniformed member of the Air National Guard at a different table. Myles wrote a message on a post-it note and presented the \$20 to the man, who was dining with his own family.

“Dear Soldier,” the note started.

“My dad was a soldier. He’s in heaven now.

I found this \$20 in the parking lot when we got here.

We like to pay it forward in my family. Today is your lucky day! Thank you for your service.

Myles Eckert, a Gold Star kid.”

The recipient of the note, Lieutenant Colonel Frank Dailey was moved. “It’s incredible being recognized in such a manner. I look at it every day,” Dailey later said.

Myles was only four-weeks-old when a roadside bomb in Iraq took the life of his father, Army Sergeant Andy Eckert in 2005. While Andy was denied the opportunity to raise this outstanding young man, we can all imagine who how proud he would be of his son’s commitment to ‘pay it forward.’

It is a commitment that The American Legion shares by advocating for veterans and supporting military families through our programs. We remember those who are no longer with us because they sacrificed their lives in defense of our freedom. These sacrifices have occurred throughout our nation’s history.

It was a sacrifice that was eloquently recalled by President Ronald Reagan, when he stood at an outdoor lectern in Normandy, France, on June 6, 1984. “Behind me is a memorial that symbolizes the Ranger daggers that were thrust into the top of these cliffs. And before me are the men who put them there,” Reagan said.

“These are the boys of Pointe du Hoc. These are the champions who helped free a continent. These are the heroes who helped end a war.”

Many of the men lay beneath the thousands of crosses at Normandy American Cemetery. Others found peace at Arlington or in their hometown burial places. And many, many more survived the war and raised their families under the peace and freedom that they and their fallen comrades fought so hard to achieve.

In the days that followed the D-Day landing of 70 years ago, thousands more Americans and our brave allies would make the supreme sacrifice. Pvt. Joe Gandara of Santa Monica, Calif., voluntarily advanced alone and destroyed three hostile machine guns before he was fatally wounded on June 9, 1944 in Amreville, France.

Just 20 years old, the soldier from the 507<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment was denied the opportunity to raise a family of his own. Instead, his 69-year-old niece received the Medal of Honor from President Obama on his behalf during a ceremony on March 18th. It was a ceremony that American Legion National Commander Dan Dellinger attended and will never forget.

Gandara and 23 other U.S. Army veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam were at long last recognized for heroic actions that cost many of them their lives, but will forever earn their place in history as recipients of the nation's highest military award. Most Medal of Honor recipients are very humble about their actions and prefer to talk about the heroes that they served with. They often speak about friends who were lost in battle.

We continue to lose American heroes everyday in Afghanistan and in military training accidents and missions around the world. The loss to their families, friends, fellow servicemembers and country is permanent.

Some were only teenagers and most of those killed in action were under age 25. In the eyes of their loved ones, they are forever young.

This is why Memorial Day is so important. We don't just honor those with the highest medals or even those who participated in the most hellacious firefights. We honor the more than one million men and women who lost their lives defending America in wars from the Revolution to the Global War on Terrorism.

It is fitting to have days like this to remember heroes like Private First Class Jesse A. Givens. Before going to Iraq, PFC Givens wrote a letter that he hoped his family would never open. Like many servicemembers, he wrote the letter to be given "just in case..." Well, "just in case" happened in May 2003. To his 6-year-old daughter, Dakota, he wrote, "Never be afraid to be yourself. I will always be there in our park, when you dream so we can play. I love you, and hope someday you will understand why I didn't come home. Please be proud of me."

The American Legion is proud of Jesse and his brothers and sisters-in-arms that loved America enough to die for it.

We are also proud of their families, who have sacrificed so much. Long after the battlefield guns have been silenced and the bombs stop exploding, the children of our fallen warriors will still be missing a parent. Spouses will be without their life partners. Parents will continue to grieve for their heroic sons and daughters that died way too early.

We need to be there for them – not just as members of The American Legion family – but as American citizens. Nobody can replace these fallen heroes – especially in the eyes of their families – but we can offer shoulders to cry on, assistance with educational expenses and assurance that their loved one's sacrifice will not be forgotten.

As Legionnaires we are pledged through the Preamble of our organization's constitution to "preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in the Great Wars..." This solemn promise is on the back of each Legion membership card. Yet, we do not remember our fallen brothers- and sisters- in-arms because of an edict or obligatory ritual. We do so because we want to.

Americans must remember that freedom isn't free. In fact, it's only possible because our fallen heroes have paid its high price.

As the unofficial beginning of summer, let us never lose focus of what Memorial Day means. It is not about beaches, picnics or auto races. It is a day to remember.

And that's why we're here.

Let us remember. And let us pay it forward.

Thank you, God Bless America and God Bless our Fallen Heroes.

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