

**The
American
Legion**



For God and country

Suggested Speech

★ MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS ★ P.O. BOX 1055 ★ INDIANAPOLIS, IN 46206-1055
★ (317) 630-1253 ★ Fax (317) 630-1368

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The American Legion National Headquarters
Media & Communications
P.O. Box 1055
Indianapolis, IN 46206
(317) 630-1253

They still speak to us.

If you listen quietly you can hear them. You remember their voices from conversations you've had before they gave their last measure of devotion to this nation. And even if you are not a Gold Star family member, a battle buddy, friend or relative of a Fallen hero, all you have to do is look around and you will see their legacy.

It is us. Americans gathered in a free society, unified with the common purpose of honoring uncommon bravery.

We are their legacy.

Regardless of the place or the war fought, the purity of their sacrifice is without question. Young men and women lost their lives in order to make the freedom of others possible.

More than a million U.S. heroes had their lives cut short while fighting in wars since the American Revolution.

Time only permits to tell just a few of their remarkable stories today – but they are representative of many.

A century ago, America was engaged in the “War to End all Wars,” World War One. It was there that a brash aviator from Arizona earned a reputation for recklessness. Though he exasperated many of his superior officers, the 21-year-old pilot claimed a remarkable 18 aerial victories over German pilots in just 18 days.

Frank Luke's missions usually involved busting observation balloons, which the Germans used to sight artillery. On September 29, 1918, Second Lieutenant Luke shot down three balloons as he was being relentlessly pursued by eight enemy aircraft. Under heavy fire, his own plane went down near the town of Murvaux (murr Vō), France. Surrounded by the enemy on the ground, he drew his automatic pistol and defended himself gallantly until he fell dead from a wound in the chest.

Frank Luke was the first pilot to receive the Medal of Honor.

Fast forward fifty years to another continent with yet another determined group of young American heroes. Sharon Lane was committed to caring for these heroes and entered the Army Nurse Corps in 1968. A year later, the 25-year-old from North Industry, Ohio, was working hard at the 312th Evacuation Hospital in Chu Lai (chew LIE), South Vietnam.

Women were exempted from the draft. First Lieutenant Lane was a volunteer and she was where she wanted to be. And that happened to be with wounded soldiers.

This was not surprising to her mother, who once told a reporter that, as a child, “she was always caring for someone or something. She always had a cat or dog or some animal that she was taking care of.”

As our nation observed Vietnam War Veterans Day on March 29, there was no Wikipedia page for Lieutenant Lane. She did not have the medals of Audie Murphy or the fame of Sgt. Alvin York. Yet she was just as much of a hero.

Rocket and mortar attacks were common at her base in Chu Lai. In a letter home, she wrote of one attack, “We got all of the patients under the beds that we could and put mattresses over the ones in traction...Very interesting place but hardly anyone here is scared. It is just like part of the job.”

On June 8, 1969, First Lieutenant Sharon Lane made the ultimate sacrifice after a 122 millimeter rocket blasted through her ward killing her and a 12-year-old Vietnamese girl.

Sharon Lane was the only female nurse to be killed by enemy fire during the Vietnam War.

The heroes that we remember today are not exclusive to any gender, race or religion. They are a diverse group wedded to the common principle that America is a nation worth dying for.

Not all of these heroes died because of enemy gunfire. Military service sometimes requires dangerous risk – even when its members are far from a combat zone.

Certainly the four Marines who entered a CH-53E Super Stallion last month during a training exercise in Southern California did not expect it to be their final mission.

Yet it was.

On April 3, 2018, four young men – all in their twenties and thirties – died for the country as the result of a helicopter crash.

The youngest, 24-year-old Lance Corporal Taylor Conrad of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, became a first-time father in October. The longest-serving Marine of the group, Gunnery Sergeant Richard Holley, had completed two tours in Iraq.

Captain Samuel Schultz previously deployed with the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit. His fellow pilot, First Lieutenant Samuel Phillips was from Pinehurst, North Carolina and joined the Marine Corps in August 2013.

“The hardest part of being a Marine is the tragic loss of life of a fellow brother-in-arms,” said their commanding officer, Colonel Craig Leflore. “These ‘Warhorse’ Marines brought joy and laughter to so many around them. They each served honorably, wore the uniform proudly and were a perfect example of what makes our Marine Corps great – its people! They will forever be in our hearts and minds.”

And they will forever be in our hearts and minds as well. Not just these Marines. But all soldiers, sailors, airmen, Coast Guardsman and Marines who have made the ultimate sacrifice for this nation.

We also extend our gratitude and support for a group that nobody WANTS to join – but has already given their country so much – the Gold Star Families.

As we observe Memorial Day every year, these families remember their Fallen loved ones EVERY DAY. Children without parents, Gold Star mothers and fathers, spouses and siblings – they can still hear the voices of those that they lost.

And it is up to us to hear the voices of these families, offer our support and express our highest gratitude.

Whether the people we remember served in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the War on Terrorism or any place or time in-between, we say thank you for the freedom that you have given us. We are here because of you.

God bless you all, God bless America and God Bless our Fallen heroes.

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