THE AMERICAN LEGION
Veterans Strengthening America
NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
PO BOX 1055, INDIANAPOLIS, IN, 46206-1055 • WWW.LEGION.ORG • P: (317) 630-1350 • F: (317) 630-1223

Suggested Speech For Memorial Day 2021

The American Legion National Headquarters
Media & Communications
P.O. Box 1055
Indianapolis, IN 46206
(317) 630-1298
pr@legion.org

Thirty years ago, America engaged in a new war in a volatile region. Iraq had invaded the sovereign nation of Kuwait.

It was an act of aggression that could not stand. The United States led a coalition of 35 nations with a bold and clear mission to liberate an occupied country.

Among the half million U.S. troops deployed to the middle east was Army Specialist Cindy Beaudoin (pronounced *bode win*). A freshman at the University of Connecticut, Specialist Beaudoin enlisted in the National Guard and served as a medic with the 142nd Medical Company.

The Hartford Courant reported that the young specialist had a chronic back condition that could have kept her home during the deployment.

The daughter of a Vietnam veteran, Cindy would hear none of it. “Of course, I’m going, silly. I couldn’t let my best buddy go off alone,” she told a friend and fellow servicemember.

On February 28, 1991, just hours after President George H.W. Bush declared a cease-fire to end the Gulf War, Specialist Cindy Beaudoin was killed in action after her convoy struck a landmine. She was only 19.

Like many soldiers going to war, Specialist Beaudoin wrote a letter to be delivered to her parents in the event that she didn’t return.

“I did not come here to be a hero,” she wrote. “I came here because my country needed me to be here. As much as I hate being so far away from home, I am here with thousands of other soldiers helping to bring down a very deranged tyrant…If I should die while helping to achieve this, then I did not die in vain…” unquote.

Cindy Beaudoin did NOT die in vain. Neither did any other American who we honor on Memorial Day.
Nonetheless, wars are often unpopular. There is a good reason for this.

It was Union General William T. Sherman who said, “It is only those who have neither fired a shot nor heard the shrieks and groans of the wounded who cry aloud for blood, more vengeance, more desolation. War is **hell**.” – Unquote.

But we should always remember that the decisions leading to war are those of policymakers- not the veterans themselves. Sometimes the mission is clear-cut. In World War II, millions were liberated and truly evil regimes were toppled.

The price can still be unbelievably painful as Emma and Willy Lebrecht (pronounced *Lāy bresht)* experienced. The Jewish couple fled Nazi Germany for New York City with their two young sons in 1938.

Seven years later, Ferdi and Alfred Lebrecht made the Supreme Sacrifice for their new country while fighting the Germans in Europe.

In his book, “Brothers In Arms,” author Kevin Callahan noted, “the memory of those two brave brothers, who escaped Nazi Germany, only to perish in its destruction, lives on.”

And that’s why we are here today – to recall not just the memories of Cindy Beaudoin and the Lebrecht brothers, but to honor the sacrifices made by the one million heroes who died while defending this country since the American Revolution.

And that sacrifice is painfully shared by the Gold Star families and close friends of these heroes. Most of us will not truly understand the depths of their despair unless we have experienced it.

But we can always offer our support. We can wear the poppy. We can place flags and wreaths at their graves. We can donate to charities that provide for their families. And we can look at their surviving brothers and sisters-in-arms and say, “Thank you for your service.”

Our organization – The American Legion – recognizes that when rounds are coming your way, there is no such thing as – quote- “a small war.”

More than 1,600 Americans have lost their lives fighting in covert operations and cold war battles that occurred between the designated war periods since the attack on Pearl Harbor.

We honor their sacrifice as much as we honor those lost on Iwo Jima or at the Frozen Chosin.

For one hundred years the Preamble of the Constitution of The American Legion stated our commitment to “preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in the Great War,” and later the “Great Wars.” This wording was a natural outcome for an organization that was founded by World War I veterans and succeeded by equally committed World War II veterans.

In 2019, we changed our Preamble and expanded our publicly stated commitment. We now promise to “preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in ALL wars.”

We are here today to honor ALL of our fallen heroes. Fallujah and the Philippines. Khe Sanh and Kandahar. Beirut and Grenada. We honor American heroes from the American Revolution through the Global War on Terrorism, and every battle in-between. The location is unimportant. It is the hearts of these men and women that truly matters. It is the devotion within that led them to sacrifice their lives for the country that we all love.

It is hard for us –the living – to equate ourselves with those who made such a sacrifice. The surviving loved ones do not have to look very far to find their heroes.
As Specialist Beaudoin (bode win) wrote to her parents, “when you start to miss me, look inside your heart and you will find me.”

We should all look in our hearts. We may not only find our heroes, but we can examine what type of country that we live in. No matter what critics can say about America, can a nation that produces such remarkable men and women be anything but a force for good?

Can we do more to create a country that is worthy of such sacrifice? Can we insist that our policymakers always consider the true cost of their decisions and only send men and women to war when all other options have been fully considered?

War is often not the best policy. But the heroes that wars produce are the best of America.

Thank you for being here. God Bless you and God Bless America!

# # #