

It has been my privilege to support these Memorial Day Observances from time to time, and an honor to be here today. Thanks to each of our Veteran heroes here among us today, and a salute to your family members who have supported you during days of active service. Thank you to the leadership and staff of the Missouri Veterans Commission for the care of these beautiful cemeteries and the Veterans Homes across our State. They work under challenging circumstances to demonstrate an unchanging commitment to your care and to honor service to our Nation. Many Veteran Service Organizations support this work as well... thank you!

I am sure you are familiar with the sentiment at Christmas that says, "We need to have the spirit of Christmas every day, all year long!" In that same vein, I think we need to live with the consciousness of the sacrifices made for our freedom all year long. In short, Memorial Day should be every day! For those who have lost loved ones... IT IS!!

And so I have tried to be aware of the reminders of sacrifice that touch me throughout the year. For the main part of this conversation, I would like to share 5 "Memorial Day Moments" that have touched me within the past year. And intermingled with those brief remembrances, I will also share a couple comments about Memorial Day and its meaning to us.

### **1. The USS Arizona in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii**

Susan and I had a chance to go to Hawaii in February of 2022... AND WE TOOK IT! It is very odd to be wearing your winter coats to the Airport to go to Hawaii, but it was ten degrees above zero when we left. But the coats came off upon landing... and we put them right back on again when we got home to Missouri!

We took the shuttle craft out to the wreckage of the USS Arizona... the white structure straddling the shell of a great vessel. There is a room with the names of 1177 sailors engraved upon a tribute wall. Many of those sailors never knew what happened as a Japanese bomb happened to go right down a smokestack into the ship's magazine, with an instant catastrophic explosion. And others survived severe wounds and trauma from that fateful Sunday morning.

The ship's crew is almost intact again, albeit in death. You may know that the Navy has offered to place the ashes of deceased crew members back within the ship. And as of the day we were there, only two members of the crew remained alive... both of whom had said that they preferred to be buried close to family and community. Both of these veterans are 100 years old! Only one remains alive today.

This trip was a "bucket-list" opportunity for Susan and me... but looking over the railing down into the sunken remains of this ship, synonymous with America's entry into World War II and to be where so many men died for our freedom... ***it was a Memorial Day Moment for me.***

### **2. SGT Lloyd Alumbaugh- Reeds, MO <https://www.honorstates.org/index.php?id=234175>**

The second Memorial Day Moment that comes to mind happened in June of 2021 just up I-44 from us at the small town cemetery of Reeds, Missouri.

When President Trump visited Kim Jon Un of North Korea in 2018, some 55 boxes of American MIA's returned home with him. One set of those remains was identified as Sergeant Lloyd Alumbaugh from Jasper County.

SGT Alumbaugh was a medic and ambulance driver with the 7th Medical Battalion of the 7th Infantry Division. As best as we know, SGT Alumbaugh was caring for wounded comrades when his position at the Chosin Reservoir was overrun by the North Koreans. He was likely killed in action performing his mission, and his remains were not able to be recovered... until now.

Members of my VFW Post, Post 4541 here in Mount Vernon, joined other patriot groups from Southwest Missouri to form an Honor Flag line as his remains were brought home to the small cemetery 4 miles distant from I-44. We joined his extended family in placing him beside his mother and father who never knew what really happened to their son. ***It was a Memorial Day Moment for me.***

### **3. Private James J. Cansler, Bolivar, MO**

<https://www.honorstates.org/index.php?id=69800>

Less than a month later I officiated a graveside service for a World War II hero, Private James J. Cansler, who hailed from Bolivar, Missouri. James and his brother joined the Army together in May of 1944, and he died far from home before Christmas of that same year.

A member of the 28th Infantry Regiment of the 8th Infantry Division, Private Cansler was lost in the battle of the Hurtgen Forest. This was where the Americans were at the German border and in this longest battle to date, the terrain and tenacity of the Germans protecting their homeland exacted a terrible cost. I like to say that this is the Forest where so many children's tales (like Hansel and Gretel) are set... a scary forest you should stay out of on ANY day!

We don't hear much about this battle of World War II simply because just a few days after Private Cansler was killed in action Hitler launched the Battle of the Bulge that disrupted the current fight and had such dramatic tension like the fight for Bastogne at Christmas. But this hero from Bolivar was also identified far after the fact, and his remains were brought home to Springfield to rest among his peers.

I told his story; the rifles fired and taps was played. A folded flag was presented to his nephew... just like we honor ALL who love and serve their nation. ***It was a Memorial Day Moment for me.***

### **4. SGT Robert Wayne Crow**

The fourth moment for me occurred on April 2nd, 2022 in Joplin, Missouri, as our National Guard Armory was renamed and rededicated as the SGT Robert Wayne Crow Jr. Armory. This armory served as a hub of operations during the Joplin tornado cleanup.

I deployed to Iraq with Wayne. He served as a member of the Personal Security Detail (PSD) and provided force protection throughout Baghdad. It was on a second deployment to Afghanistan that Wayne, who had grown into a leader, took the responsibility to drive the lead vehicle that discovered and moved Improvised Explosive Devices (IED's) out of the way. But on July 10 of 2010, Wayne was himself killed by an IED.

I performed his funeral in Kansas City, I stayed in touch with his wife, Beverly, and I officiated at a wedding for his daughter, and I stood by the family as they interred his cremains in one of the few spaces left in the National Cemetery on Fort Leavenworth. (One row away from a member of Truman's own Battery D of the 129th Artillery)

It was fitting that retired **COL Paul Kirchoff**, our current Director of the Missouri Veterans Commission that runs this very facility, spoke at that dedication ceremony. He cited Wayne's courageous leadership, his desire to protect others from danger, and the spirit of service and dedication he personified that characterizes those who serve today. ***It was a Memorial Day Moment for me.***

**Before I share my final Memorial Day Moment**, let me comment briefly about why Memorial Day matters so much. Yes, there is the grief that every military person experiences when they lose a brother or a sister. It is a tough day— a day we carry forward all the rest of our days. I do not take lightly that many of you in this room today carry the memory of a battle-buddy, a wingman, a fellow marine or sailor, or a coastie near to your heart. Maybe more than one. But Memorial Day matters to everyone for at least two reasons:

**First, war changes history.**

In his book called the Ripples of Battle, historian Victor David Hanson reminds us that every cemetery in America has either a white headstone or a brass foot-marker within its borders. Boy Scouts and Veterans groups across the land have hazarded ticks, snakes and mosquitoes this week to place small American Flags near those graves.

And each of those stones represents a life...a family member that served our nation and may not have had the opportunity to live in the freedoms they died for. That is an impact on our community... a ripple that has so stirred the waters of America's story that *we could not have become the America we are without them!* But we wonder what our America might be today if we had had them. War has shaped and changed our history. It's about people— not politics.

**Second, It's not "what happens," but "what happens to what happens" that matters most.**

The truth is that we do not always get to decide or choose "what happens." Sometimes other, often selfish if not outright evil, men put in motion the circumstances and oppression that lead nations to war. And those wars or other crimes have taken away the men and women we love.

But it is also the truth that we DO decide “what happens to what happened!” We DO get to choose a response! We DO have a voice in history’s final say! Do we make war upon war, or do we work for peace? Do we mourn the dead or do we live in their honor? Do we bemoan what we cannot change or work for the change that will matter and last! Do we care only about our own skin, or are we willing to lay down our lives that others might live?

I wish I could say that this was some profound original thought, but the truth is that Abraham Lincoln sensed this so long ago at Gettysburg in his famous address. Hear again his concluding paragraph:

*It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.*

—Abraham Lincoln

He could not change “what happened”... but he could influence “what happened to what happened.” **And so can we today**, ladies and gentlemen!

It was a four year old boy who heard that Lincoln had been elected president and that war would fall upon our land. His father’s church soon became a field hospital for Confederate troops, and he became an ardent proponent of peace. And yet, even he recognized the unique contribution that Service-members make to our world. During a speech at Arlington Cemetery he said,

I can never speak in praise of war, ladies and gentlemen, but there is this peculiar distinction belonging to the soldier... He is giving everything he has, even his life, in order that others may live, not in order that he himself may obtain gain and prosperity. And just so soon as the tasks of peace are performed in the same spirit of self-sacrifice and devotion, peace societies will not be necessary. We can stand here and praise the example of self-sacrifice, which if followed in peace will make it unnecessary that men should follow war any more. (On Hallowed Ground. p.135)

While these noble sentiments are true, (we ought to work at peace as diligently as we work at war!) President Woodrow Wilson soon found it necessary to send our nation into the conflict of the Great War to End all Wars- World War I.

##### **5. The USS Missouri- the spot where the Surrender Documents were Signed.**

You have all seen the pictures of my 5th and Final Memorial Day Moment. After seeing the USS Arizona Memorial, Susan and I got on a bus to drive around the harbor to where the USS

Missouri... the MIGHTY MO... is now anchored. I wore Susan out climbing up and down and in and out of those hatches from the front to the rear of that vessel!

But the place that stands out to me the most is the round emblem embedded in the deck that marks the spot where the table was placed and the representatives of The Allies and Japan signed the Documents of Surrender that ended World War II. It was at that spot that Douglas MacArthur spoke for us all about the solemn duty to rise above conflict and war and work for the good of all.

In part, General MacArthur said,

*It is my earnest hope and indeed the hope and indeed the hope of all mankind that from this solemn occasion a better world shall emerge out of the blood and carnage of the past—a world founded upon faith and understanding—a world dedicated to the dignity of man and the fulfillment of his most cherished wish—for freedom, tolerance and justice.*

**And so...We cannot undo what has been done... “but rather,” let us make a better world!**

**Today, it is for us, the living, to make the choices that make the difference going forward.**

- We remember them... by name and by deed
- We honor their service and sacrifice
- We support their loved ones in tangible and intangible ways “I trust you with his reputation!”
- We grieve their loss— what we know and what might have been
- We build our lives in such a way as to live in the freedoms they died for... and in some small way fill the void they left behind.
- We rebuild our nation by a deliberate choosing of what is good, right, honorable, and just.

**My heart joins with your heart** as you remember SOMEONE fallen in active service or taken from you in daily life and honored in your memory.

**Thank you for allowing my voice to be the voice of the community that says, “Thank YOU for YOUR service!” I hope you will experience, cherish, and share your “Memorial Day Moments” with others!**

Thank you for listening today!

### References

- Hanson, Victor D. 2004. *Ripples of Battle: How Wars of the Past Still Determine How We Fight, How We Live, and How We Think*. N.p.: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.
- Poole, Robert M. 2010. *On Hallowed Ground: The Story of Arlington National Cemetery*. N.p.: Bloomsbury USA.