

MEMORIAL DAY 2018
REMEMBERING OUR WWII HEROES

Thank you so much for the kind introduction. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to all of you on this Memorial Day.

I am especially grateful to be in the presence of fellow Daughters of the American Revolution, an organization founded in 1890 to preserve the history of the Patriots who sacrificed their lives and fortunes to create this great nation, and members of The Girl Scouts, who since 1912 have been building young women of courage, confidence, and character to make the world a better place. These groups of women (young and older!) understand service and are wonderful representatives participating in this ceremony honoring those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our nation.

Also here are some Rosie the Riveters, American women who entered the workforce in unprecedented numbers during World War II, as widespread male enlistment left gaping holes in America's industrial labor force. More than 310,000 women worked in the aircraft industry during the war. I have to say I was thrilled to learn that one of those Rosies who is here today, Ms Elinor Otto, built C-17s, the aircraft that I

had the opportunity to fly in support of Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom! [And, about 15 years ago, I visited the plant at Long Beach to deliver a C-17 to my base in Washington State and had the opportunity to drill a rivet...just one! You have done so much more--drilling countless rivets in support of our military.]

Thank you to the “Keep the Spirit of '45 Alive” organization for your efforts to honor the legacy of the men and women who served in World War II, especially as we have few of those heroes left. Members of the Spirit of '45 coalition are raising public awareness about activities that are being organized by various groups to commemorate the 75th anniversary of important events that took place during World War II.

The Greatest Generation sent 16 million to defend our nation and our allies during WWII. In 1939, total aircraft production for the US military was less than 3,000 planes. By the end of the war, America produced 300,000 planes. Over 18,000 aircraft were lost in combat over Germany and against Japan it was 4,500. Our Nation’s soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines ensured an Allied victory in WWII. Today we honor the over 400,000 made the ultimate sacrifice.

And, here we are at the Air Force Memorial, a fitting place to honor our fellow Airmen and the Women Air Force Service Pilots, WASPs, who have served and those who have died defending our nation.

I am standing here today, because of the WASPs. These are women who challenged the norms, who chose to voluntarily leave their homes to serve our nation when we needed them the most. They paved the way for the women who fly today, and for that I am grateful.

From 1942 to 1944, 25,000 women applied to the WASPs. Only 1,830 were accepted and of those, 1,074 graduated. The WASPs flew light trainers, heavy four-engine bombers, transport aircraft and fighters. They ferried planes from factories to bases, transported cargo, and participated in simulated strafing and target missions, accumulating more than 60 million miles in flight distances and freeing thousands of male U.S. pilots for active duty in World War II.

It wasn't until 1977 that the WASPs received full military status, as President Carter signed legislation granting veteran status with limited benefits. Coincidentally, this was in the same year that the Air Force graduated its first female pilots in the modern era.

In 1984, the WASPs were awarded World War II Victory Medals and those who had one year's service, American Theater Campaign Medals. And in 2009, the WASPs were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal.

Today, we remember those who have died supporting our nation, including the WASPs who died in the line of duty. Memorial Day is a day when Americans, regardless of race, religion, or political affiliation join together to remember those who answered their nation's call. In fact, it is our sacred duty to do so. They fought and died to preserve our freedoms, to keep alive the values of sacrifice and service to a cause bigger than themselves.

It is fitting to remember the true meaning of Memorial Day, since over time, the last Monday in May has become a celebration of the beginning of summer, with a passing nod to our fallen Servicemen. Memorial Day was borne out of the Civil War as we chose to honor the over 700,000 Americans who died. On the first Decoration Day, as it was originally called, General James Garfield made a speech at Arlington National Cemetery, where 5,000 participants decorated the graves of the 20,000 Union and Confederate soldiers buried there.

Today, Americans visit cemeteries where white granite stones stand to honor those that have fallen, where military service members and citizens alike place American flags next to those stones, where soldiers march around the clock at the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington Cemetery, as they have since 1937, and in towns around the country, where we hold parades to honor the over 1.8 million service men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice since our nation's beginning.

A former President of the United States has said: "...we are forever indebted to those who have given their lives that we might be free. I don't have to tell you how fragile this precious gift of freedom is. Every time we hear, watch, or read the news, we are reminded that liberty is a rare commodity in this world. On this Memorial Day, we honor those brave Americans who died in the service of their country... As a tribute to their sacrifice, let us renew our resolve to remain strong enough to deter aggression, wise enough to preserve and protect our freedom, and thoughtful enough to promote lasting peace throughout the world." Those words were spoken on Memorial Day in 1983 by President Ronald Reagan. His words still ring true today.

So, as we remember our fallen comrades, as we remember their selfless service, as we show our gratitude on this day, let us honor them by rededicating ourselves to our country and to our living veterans and their families for the sacrifices they have made. Let us always seek to treat our veterans with the dignity and respect they so richly deserve.

I hope you had the opportunity to witness the arrival of “Rolling Thunder” this weekend. The rumble of so many motorcycles felt like the millions of our fallen heroes were returning home to greet each other. And, it is so amazing to walk among throngs of living veterans, as complete strangers greet each other like old friends. Where the youngest soldier will go up to a veteran wearing “I’m a Veteran” baseball cap and say thank you for your service.

I will tell you from first-hand experience, that today’s soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and members of the coast guard, are up to the task of defending our nation. This is a generation that has voluntarily signed up while our nation has been in constant conflict for their entire lives, and still they join, knowing they will go into harm’s way. We owe it to them to give them the resources and support they need, and to take care of the Wounded Warriors when they return. We must honor

their comrades who did not return and pledge to support the Gold Star families who grieve.

Using the words of poet, CW Johnson, I would like to give a final salute this Memorial Day to our fallen heroes.

We walked among the crosses
Where our fallen soldiers lay.
And listened to the bugle
As TAPS began to play.

The Chaplain led a prayer
We stood with heads bowed low.
And I thought of fallen comrades
I had known so long ago.

They came from every city
Across this fertile land.
That we might live in freedom.
They lie here 'neath the sand.

I felt a little guilty
My sacrifice was small.

I only lost a little time
But these men lost their all.

Now the services are over
For this Memorial Day.
To the names upon these crosses
I just want to say,

Thanks for what you've given
No one could ask for more.
May you rest with God in heaven
From now through evermore.

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you all for being here today to honor our heroes. May God Bless you, our Veterans, those who have made the ultimate sacrifice and their families, and may God Bless the United States of America.