

**Remarks by LTG William S. Wallace
Commander, Combined Arms Center and Fort Leavenworth
Vietnam Veterans Memorial Service
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Parkville, MO**

Earn This

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, fellow veterans of the War in Vietnam, and especially to the Gold Star Mothers present...

It is a tremendous privilege for me to join you, as we remember the fallen servicemen and women of the War in Vietnam.

We are in the company of heroes today, as we welcome the Traveling Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall to Parkville.

Even at half size, it mirrors its namesake in Washington D.C. in significance.

Its black granite walls, standing stoically beneath a glorious 50-starred flag...

A simple monument etched with the names of 58,249 killed or missing in action... many from the Kansas City Area.

They paid the ultimate sacrifice to defend our Nation... our freedom, and provide opportunity to others.

As Americans, we try to comprehend the sacrifices of our service members.

Without the first hand experience of combat, many Americans rely on loved ones, memorials, and sometimes the entertainment industry for comfort and insight.

In his famous movie, *Saving Private Ryan*, Steven Spielberg provided a glimpse of their sacrifice when a mortally wounded Captain John Miller, played by Tom Hanks, says to Private Ryan "Earn this"...

Decades later, Ryan, now an old man stands tearfully over the grave of Captain Miller on the blustery heights over Normandy.

Ryan represents all of us – struggling to understand the abstract American ideal of Service to the Nation.

"Earn this"... Miller says to Ryan -- meaning, *earn the life we've died to protect.*

"Earn this"... by doing justice to our memory by living your life to the fullest, in service to your nation, your family, your beliefs.

Most who returned did earn it...

Some became the 100-plus current or former members of congress like John McCain and Dr. Vic Snyder of the Veterans Affairs Committee.

Some rose to the heights of civil service including Former Secretary of State Colin Powell, former Navy Secretary, and author James Webb, and the current FBI Director Robert Mueller

Some founded business that you may have heard of like Frederick Smith of Federal Express, and James Kimsey of America Online.

Some entertained us like Dennis Franz, the tough cop actor on NYPD Blue Actor, and the even tougher four-super bowl football player Rocky Bleier.

Some advanced our scientific horizons, like Dr. J. Craig Venter who helped crack the genetic code, and is on point in the fight against cancer.

And some are present with us today. I am humbled to be among you.

We each have a promise to keep to those whose names are on the wall.

But this wall transcends the Vietnam War.

It helps our great nation renew relationships with veterans of all wars, past and present.

Today's battlefields are in Iraq, and Afghanistan but the essence of our service members' sacrifice is the same.

They are giving of themselves and of their lives to defend our nation, our freedom, and to stop aggression overseas while giving the hope and the opportunity of freedom to those less fortunate.

While we bask in its symbolism, we are mindful that this is not our memorial... we are simply its caretakers.

It belongs to all who serve in the defense of our nation, those who bravely and honorably answer the call to duty.

Our freedom is sustained by the will of a Nation – we are reminded of this heavy burden through the somber reality of Iraq and Afghanistan, but encouraged in the hope of their people.

Your very famous neighbor [Harry Truman] who lived down the road in Independence, once said...

"America was not built on fear. America was built on courage, on imagination and unbeatable determination to do the job at hand."

We must keep faith with this statement, even as our servicemen and women are dutifully, unselfishly, and honorably doing the job at hand.

Today's service members are standing watch around the world, just as those of the Vietnam era.

Connected by a bond of duty, a call to service, and an understanding that some things are more important than personal safety.

God Bless Them, and all our service members past, present and future.

God Bless America

Thank you.