

November 11, 2021

Celebrating our Veterans
The Freedom Week
at Michigan Technological University
Organized by the Young Americans for Freedom

Concluding remarks to the participants

I was asked to come speak tonight on a single, simple question. A question that was straight forward and should elicit a simple answer. This question was, “What does Veterans Day mean to you”? As a combat veteran and patriotic American -this is my answer:

Every Veterans Day, I look at November 11th with a multitude of real, raw emotions. Today serves as a reflection pool; an opportunity to take a moment out of an ever seeming hectic schedule to look back at the **Past**, the **Present** and forward to what the **Future** may hold.

The **PAST** reminds me as to where and how I fit in. I'm humbled to be considered part of the same military family that's come before me; especially those that have endured far worse, sacrificed more and remained strong, steadfast throughout their trials and tribulations. I'm humbled by the sacrifice and courage that came before me. I'm privileged to wear the same uniform, proud to stand strong under the same flag and be able to connect to them on a level only another combat veteran can understand. I'm humbled by their leadership, their support and their console. I'm proud to have had the opportunity to pick up where they left off, to carry on their torch, their mission. I'm proud to have served-to have stood steadfast and protect this great Nation and all the freedom and opportunity afforded to us all.

I think of the **PRESENT**. The immense pride to have served with so many incredible people is still astonishing to me. To love and be loved so strongly by your military Brothers and Sisters in Arms. To have the chance to know them so well and support them, as they support you in both the best and worst of times. I'm proud and humbled that they valued my life and well being above their own -as I held theirs. They continue to support me as I'm committed in supporting them. I'm proud to be of service to my Country. I take great pride in volunteering to act on what is right, to help protect those that you love and that which you cherish. Society is faced with those opportunities everyday. Americans continuously perform their selfless duties for others whether police, EMS, firefighters, teachers, doctors, nurses, military -or those that that serve their neighborhood, their community and their Country in otherways -despite race, sex, or creed.

I think of the strength and resiliency that all of us possess, but specifically how the military and my fellow veterans (past and present) teach me how strong we actually are. The strength of knowing that we can and will survive anything that life has in store for us provides great comfort and encouragement.

This day provides love and appreciation of things big and small. From a quiet peaceful setting, a relaxing couch to sit, a comfortable bed to lay on, food, clean water, homes to protect us from the elements; the natural beauty of the world around us, the innocent laughter and play of happy, young children, the secure embrace of a family member or loved one -it's all means so much more.

I reflect on the overwhelming patriotism and show of support this Country has for its soldiers; and how this always validates a servicemember's service and commitment. The love, dedication and support of our spouses and family that all too often go unmentioned, but are noticed and help us realize how undeserving and lucky we are; that spouses and family members will quietly assume the servicemember's role and responsibilities around the house and with the children -all while maintaining their normal, everyday duties. They are the true unsung heroes. It's hard to believe -but they do it all the time, without being asked, without recognition and without any fanfare. **THEY** are the true heroes.

It's astonishing -the freedoms we have to express ourselves, be who and what we want to be to have the opportunities to achieve any type of life or goals we aspire for.

I am reminded of the harsh living conditions that others endure around this world. The dedication of fellow veterans' and their family's sacrifices -sometimes the ultimate sacrifice.....and how often we forget all of this and take it for granted on a daily basis -lost in ourselves and caught up in indescriminate things.

I think about the **FUTURE**. I think about hope and that all who serve fully understand and carry on what so many others before them have fought and sacrificed for. That the freedom and lifestyle we're accustomed to is afforded to all of our future generations. I hope that future generations will be as strong and tenacious in protecting and providing all we have for those to come after them just like those that have done so selflessly before us. I'm relieved for all of those that are to come, serve and protect for when those of us are no longer able to. I'm encouraged by all of those protect, cherish and appreciate life's amenities afforded them; those that have the courage and strength to change the world one smile, one sincere act of kindness, at a time. I'm hopeful, that is you.

In summary, all of these reflections stare back at me every Veterans Day, only shared, when someone asks the simple question, "What does Veterans Day mean to you?"

It truly is an honor to have had the opportunity to serve, as well as being afforded your time and attention tonight.

Thank you All!

Jonathan French
Retired US Army Sergeant First Class