

**The
American
Legion**



For God and country

Suggested Speech

★ MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS ★ P.O. BOX 1055 ★ INDIANAPOLIS, IN 46206-1055
★ (317) 630-1253 ★ Fax (317) 630-1368

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The American Legion National Headquarters
Media & Communications
P.O. Box 1055
Indianapolis, IN 46206
(317) 630-1253
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A mother's pain. One of the most painful scars of war is inflicted not on the veteran but on the people who love that veteran. John Hunter Wickersham was a 28-year-old doughboy who understood the anguish that his mother felt.

The final stanza of his poem, "The Raindrops on Your Old Tin Hat," reads:

"And, fellows, she's the hero of this great, big
ugly war,
And her prayer is on the wind across the flat,
And don't you reckon maybe it's her tears, and
not the rain,
That's keeping up the patter on your old tin hat?"

The day after he wrote the poem, Second Lieutenant Wickersham was severely wounded in four places by a high explosive shell while he was serving with the Army's 353rd Infantry Regiment near Limey, France. Before receiving aid for himself, he addressed the wounds of his orderly. Despite a severe loss of blood, Lieutenant Wickersham then continued to advance upon the enemy and fired his revolver with his left hand due to the wounds on his right. Finally, on September 12, 1918, John Hunter Wickersham, exhausted and bloodied, fell on the field of battle. For his gallantry, he was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

Wickersham's poem was about mothers, but it could just as easily have described the heart ache of a wife, daughter or sister. It could easily have described the anguish of a father, son, brother or husband who have felt the loss of the one million American heroes who have died for their country while serving in wars from the American Revolution to the current War on Terrorism.

It is for these heroes that we gather here today.

Lieutenant Wickersham made the Supreme Sacrifice in a war that America entered one century ago. It was supposed to be "the war to end all wars." Tragically, it wasn't.

Just last month, on April 8th, our nation lost Staff Sergeant Mark De Alencar (Dee Alan kar) of the 7th Special Forces Group. Five children lost their father. Mark's uncle remembered the determination Mark had when training to be a Green Beret.

“They told him he had to lose some weight. So Mark would put on a backpack, put bricks and books in it, and you'd see him running up and down the road there getting in shape to reenlist,” Jansen Robinson recalled.

De Alencar wasn't just training to wear a uniform. The Edgewood, Maryland, native was training to protect our freedom. And that's exactly what he was doing when he gave his life while fighting ISIS in Eastern Afghanistan.

Unlike past wars, the end of the War on Terrorism will be less obvious. There will be no surrender treaty signed aboard a battleship or in a diplomatic conference room. While wars today may be less defined, one fact is crystal clear: Our enemies want us dead.

Fortunately, we have the men and women of the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard doing all that they can to protect us. But it is up to us to remember their sacrifice.

Long after the battlefield guns have been silenced and the bombs stop exploding, the children of our fallen warriors will still be missing a parent. Spouses will be without their life partners. Parents will continue to grieve for their heroic sons and daughters that died way too early.

We need to be there for them – not just as members of The American Legion family – but as American citizens. Nobody can replace these fallen heroes – especially in the eyes of their families – but we can offer shoulders to cry on, assistance with educational expenses and assurance that their loved one’s sacrifice will not be forgotten.

And that sacrifice is often made as servicemembers perform humanitarian missions that benefit innocent civilians in far off lands. Captain Mary Therese Klinker was a flight nurse assigned to Clark Air Base in the Philippines when her C-5A Galaxy crashed outside of Saigon. She was evacuating Vietnamese orphans. The mission was called Operation Babylift and Captain Klinker died for her country at age 27.

As our servicemembers protect other people's orphans, they sometimes must leave their own grieving children.

"Little things that I took for granted when you were here seem priceless now," 14 year-old Jessica wrote to her father Command Sergeant Major James Blankenbecler (Blank in becler) two days after he was killed in Iraq. "I will miss you, daddy, with all my heart. I will always be your little girl and I will never forget that...I love you daddy. I will miss you!"

Most of those who die in war are young. Whether teenaged troops or middle-aged commanders, we do know that they left us too early. But can any of us who are living say that we accomplished more in our fuller life spans than those who we honor today?

For what they lacked in time, they made up for in valor. Selfless bravery is not gained with experience but an innate quality that is instilled into character – a process that usually involves strong parents or siblings. It is these special families that produce the outstanding men and women who have given everything for our freedom. These families are the fabric of our nation.

Our fallen have given what Lincoln called their “last full measure of devotion.” They did it to serve America. They did it to serve us.

As scripture tells us, “Well done, my good and faithful servant.”

Well done.

Let us live up to their sacrifice.

May God bless them and may God bless you for remembering them here today.

Thank you.

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