



THE AMERICAN LEGION

Veterans Strengthening America

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

PO BOX 1055, INDIANAPOLIS, IN, 46206-1055 • WWW.LEGION.ORG • P: (317) 630-1350 • F: (317) 630-1223

Suggested Speech for the 25th Anniversary of the 9/11 Attacks Patriots Day

The American Legion National Headquarters
Media & Communications
P.O. Box 1055
Indianapolis, IN 46206
(317) 630-1298
magazine@legion.org

Ladies and gentlemen, fellow Legionnaires and Americans,

Nine-eleven began like any other Tuesday morning. Until it became a Tuesday like never before.

Twenty-five years have passed since the worst attack on American soil. As we remember the nearly 3,000 innocent lives that were lost that day, we continue to be inspired by the acts of courage during the chaos.

We remember first responders running toward the danger when every survival instinct said go the other way. We remember stories about heroes like the “man in the red bandanna,” who was later identified as 24-year-old equities trader Welles Crowther. Welles saved as many people as he could by making three trips down from upper floors to the World Trade Center lobby, where he guided others to safety. After the buildings collapsed, he was never seen again.

We remember the final known words of Flight 93 passenger Todd Beamer, who said “Let’s Roll” before joining a group that fought the hijackers until their very end. The struggle would bring the plane down in a Pennsylvania field rather than a populated landmark. Todd’s youngest child, Morgan, would be born four months later.

We also remember the more than 7,000 U.S. servicemembers who made the ultimate sacrifice in the Global War on Terrorism.

For Generation X and Millennials, the attacks on New York, Washington and Pennsylvania were a rallying call not unlike Pearl Harbor was for the Greatest Generation.

The number of innocents killed on 9/11 surpassed even those who died on what President Franklin D. Roosevelt called a “Day of Infamy.” More than 2,600 killed at the World Trade Center. Another 125 died at the Pentagon and 256 people murdered on the four planes. The Center for Disease Control estimates that more than 7,000 people have died from 9/11-related illnesses since the fires were extinguished and ash cleaned at the crash sites.

During the 12 months following the attacks, more than 182,000 Americans enlisted in the active military and an additional 73,000 would join the Reserves. All branches exceeded their goals.

The term “rally around the Flag” has been used so much that it has become almost a cliché. But the experience of Americans feeling closer and more attached to their flag in times of crisis is genuine and proven time and again. Nine-eleven was a prime example.

In just the few remaining months of 2001, The American Legion doubled its sales of the American Flag over the previous year. By the end of 2002, sales were triple of the pre-9/11 level.

The flag was just everywhere after 9/11. Who could forget the Pulitzer-prize winning photograph of three New York firefighters standing in the rubble that was the World Trade Center and hoisting our banner of hope and patriotism?

Just a few weeks later, a giant flag draped the side of the Pentagon – the outer walls still scorched from where the hijacked airliner penetrated the nucleus of America's military might.

Richard Santos was the national commander of The American Legion on September 11th, 2001. He was in the U.S. Capitol preparing to testify before a congressional committee when the attacks occurred.

A couple of weeks later, Commander Santos would write a message for The American Legion Magazine.

Quote: “America continues to heal and it is our responsibility as veterans to tend to the wounds. Some will panic about the future; we must reassure them. Some will weep over a lost family member or friend; we must hold their hands. Some will be angry; we must temper their rage.” – unquote.

The American Legion showed its support for those fighting the Global War on Terrorism by creating scholarship funds, revitalizing its Family Support Network, creating Operation Comfort Warriors for disabled veterans and supporting military unit homecoming events.

As veterans, we understand that a military is most effective when it knows it has the support of a grateful nation.

Following the 9/11 attacks, America was on edge. Air traffic was grounded for two days and new agencies

were created. Security was increased at public events and the world was largely unified. Buckingham Palace played the “Star-Spangled Banner” and French newspaper “Le Monde” editorialized that “We are all Americans.”

America is not a vengeful nation but we are a determined one. Osama bin Laden and other plotters of the attacks were killed or captured. Terrorist attacks against our country would follow, but none that would match the depth, coordination or casualties. The United States military and patriots within the intelligence community continued the legacy passed by the firefighters, police and rescuers in keeping America safe.

“Flight 93, You Fought Back. It’s Our Turn Now,” a sign at a 9/11 memorial service said.

Bob Beckwith was a 69-year-old who had been retired from the New York Fire Department for seven years when he went to Manhattan to assist with World Trade Center clean-up efforts on September 14, 2001. He

stood on top of a mangled firetruck when he saw President George W. Bush approaching him with his arm raised. He helped President Bush to the top of the fire engine.

“We can’t hear you,” someone yelled from the crowd below.

The president’s response was clear and emphatic. Quote- “I can hear you. The rest of the world hears you. And the people who knocked down these buildings will hear all of us soon,” he said into a bullhorn.

Noting terrorism plots that had targeted Americans for decades, the official 9/11 Commission Report stated that the attacks that we remember today were “a shock but they should not have come as a surprise.”

Prior to that Tuesday morning in September, buildings such as the World Trade Center and the Pentagon seemed impenetrable. Attacks against both had previously occurred but the structures held.

However, the bipartisan 9/11 Commission would later conclude that the most important failure of that day was one of imagination.

Never again should America underestimate the depravity or capabilities of our enemies.

Our reluctance to engage in what are often called “forever wars,” should not compromise our commitment to “forever vigilance.”

The founders of The American Legion believed in a strong national defense. For more than 107 years this has been a principle upon which our organization has not wavered.

Nor has our commitment to Americanism. The men, women and children who were murdered twenty-five years ago were not attacked for any reason other than being American or simply visiting the United States. They were attacked because they were us.

God Bless them all. We shall never forget them. And
God Bless the United States of America.