

Thank you for that kind introduction.

I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to speak to you on this most important day. It is a privilege to be here.

We are here today to honor our heroes, to remember their achievements, their courage, their dedication, and to say thank you for their sacrifices. We stand in the midst of patriots, with the family and friends of those who have so nobly served.

I'd like to ask the service members and veterans who are here to stand, if they are able or raise their hands.

Thank you for answering the call of duty. You have made our armed forces, regardless of when you served, the best in the world.

Now, I would like to ask the family members of our service members and veterans to stand or raise your hands.

We thank you for your unwavering support. You have lived through difficult times with pressures unknown to many. Thank you for what you have done to help our service members.

The History of Veterans Day is important to know, as spelled out in your program. Since 1978, it is always celebrated on November 11<sup>th</sup>—in recognition of the end of WWI (the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month).

If you are ever in Washington D.C.—please visit the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier— it is the focal point of today's Veteran's Day ceremonies at the Nation's Capital and a very moving tribute to the American Soldier.

Here in San Diego, I urge you visit Mt. Soledad Veteran's Memorial – at top of Mt. Soledad. Besides being a beautiful view, there are hundreds of plaques honoring veterans from this area. Any visiting veterans should be taken there—as they will be impressed.

As an Army Ranger, I would be remiss if I did not mention James Rudder—one of the most famous Rangers and one of my heroes.

- Commissioned a 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant Infantry- 1941
- By D.Day – 6/6/44 was a Lt.Col. and CO. of Army's 2<sup>nd</sup> Ranger BN. His mission on D.Day – To command 250 Rangers who were to take Pointe-du-Hoc— which involved scaling 200 foot steep cliffs under enemy fire, to destroy German gun batteries and control the strategic high ground that had commanding views of all the landing beaches (Fields of Fire).
- Landed at 0400 in the dark.
- BN suffered 50% casualties and Lt.Col. Rudder was wounded twice. But his troops were successful in the taking of the Pointe and fighting off 2 counter attacks.
- 7 months later he commanded the 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment – fought in Battle of Bulge.
- For his service he was awarded: The Distinguished Service Cross; Silver Star, 2 Bronze Stars; 2 Purple Hearts and various foreign awards.
- He was a Full Col. In 1945 – war ended
- 1954 promoted to B.G. (as Reservist)
- 1957 promoted to M.G. (as Reservist)
- In 1959 he became President TX, A&M Un, until his death in 1970 (at age 59)
- In 1967 President Lyndon Johnson presented him with the distinguished Service Medal.
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> Phase of Ranger training occurs at Eglin AFB at Camp Rudder – named in his honor.

- The history of D-Day must always include the mention of Rudder's Rangers—a group of courageous soldiers who accomplished an almost impossible mission.

As a Viet Nam Veteran, I want to speak for a few minutes about that war. It's a war many want to forget – for many reasons—and one reason is the way we were treated when we returned home. Obviously, it was an unpopular war and many books written about it depicting political leaders who were inept in how they conducted the war and in a failure to be honest in what they told the American people about the war. And because of a perceived lack of honest leadership many Americans took their frustrations out on us – the returning soldiers who fought in terrible conditions against a determined enemy.

It is important to know some sobering facts about the Viet Nam War as reflected on the Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C.

1. There are 58,282 names on the Viet Nam Memorial Wall, arranged chronologically in the order of the day of death.
2. The first known casualty was Richard B. Fitzgibbon, Jr. of North Weymouth, Massachusetts – killed on 6/8/56. His son Marine Cpl. Richard B. Fitzgibbon, III, is also on the wall – killed on 9/7/65 (9 years).
3. They are one of three sets of fathers and sons on the Wall.
4. 39,996 on the Wall were 22 or younger. 33,103– the largest group- were only 18 years old.
5. 12 soldiers were 17 years old.
6. 997 soldiers were killed on their first day in Vietnam.
7. 1,448 soldiers were killed on their last day in Vietnam.

8. There are 31 sets of brothers on the Wall. That means 31 sets of parents lost two sons.
9. 244 soldiers were awarded the Medal of Honor during the Vietnam War; 153 of their names are on the Wall. 1 of them, Sgt. Robert J. Pruden, of Minneapolis, was my Ranger buddy.
10. 8 female nurses are on the Wall—killed while aiding wounded soldiers.
11. The worst single day for casualty deaths was January 31, 1968—245 killed in action.
12. The most casualty deaths for a single month was May 1968—2,415 killed in action.

It has been 40 years since Saigon fell on April 30, 1975.

I will never forget what happened on my Braniff Airline jet as it landed at Travis AFB, outside of San Francisco, on June 5, 1971. At the gate, an Army Master Sergeant E-8 came on to the plane. He welcomed us home, there was great elation and applause—and then he got very serious and pointed at us with stern look—he said “If you are flying out of San Francisco International Airport to go home—you must change into civilian clothes here—do not walk into that airport in uniform—because you do not deserve what may be said to you”. We just sat there and thought about what he said. We had just put everything on the line for a year and were just told not to wear our uniform home.

But times have changed and so much to the better. Just last month I flew home from Washington and listened to the gate agent ask all those in military uniform to board with those in first class. And it has been like that since the Middle East wars started in 1991. And even though many Americans were against our involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq—they have never taken out their anger on the troops—like they did during the Vietnam War. And as a Vietnam veteran, I am very happy to see how the country has

changed. You see many soldiers traveling in uniform and receiving thanks and handshakes. That is the way it should be.

And that is the way it is on Veterans Day 2015. Today, people across the country will gather together to remember, to honor, and to pay gratitude to those who have served our country. Our gathering here today is one small spark in the flame of pride that burns across the nation today and thankfully, every day.

Millions of Americans have served on active duty and thousands have fought and died in battles far from home to defend our freedom and way of life. Today, our brave troops continue to serve in dangerous places and make the ultimate sacrifice. We honor all of them on this Veteran's Day and wish they could be here in person to receive our respect and thanks.

Thank you all for being here today and again it is an honor to participate.