

“We are taught to honor and celebrate those great men who wrote and voted for the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia. But none of what they committed themselves to—their lives, their fortunes, their sacred honor—none of those noble words about life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, about all men being created equal, none of that would have been worth any more than the paper it was written on had it not been for those who were fighting to make it happen.”

Veteran's Day is a reminder of just that. Today we remember that the less than 1% of society that chose to serve in the military to support and defend our nation, the Constitution, and our way of life.

I'm curious, how many gathered here today are active-duty military personnel? (*Please keep you hand up*) How many are Guard and Reserves? How many are veterans? And how many are direct family members of service men and women, that is parents, spouses, siblings, and children?

Look around you. These are the people who have bore directly the cost of service to our nation. Some bare this great obligation willingly, but other have not. There are those around you who were drafted, sent to war (whether you agreed with the war or not) and bore great wounds, some physical, others morally and spiritually. There are also those who chose not to bear this obligation, but they bonded to via familial connection. Our children, our spouses (in many cases), our brothers and sisters, our parents. They chose not to bear such obligations, but they have.

Too often, in our daily lives we forgot that our generally peaceful and safe existence is fruit of the service bore the men and women in the military. It is their service, and the service of their families that allows our great nation for have the wonderful things we have, to be able to debate the hard issues of society, to hold a free and fair election, and to worship without persecution.

I challenge you today, as we honor those who have and those are currently serving, to remember the sacrifice they made and, in many cases, continue to make. This population is a small population, a minority people with our borders.

Those who serve, have served, and their families are a unique group of people, who though they look like you, speak like you, and hold many of the same beliefs as you are also a minority population. Although they speak the same language, they also speak in acronyms, and often are depicted in the movies as prefacing normal speech with colorful, and sometimes, quite vulgar adjectives.

They are challenged with an itinerant life, living at a distance from their extended family, away from their home communities, and some cases even separated from one another. And, specifically those here in Moore county often carry this burden quietly because of the uniqueness of their mission and the unit's they serve within

2024 MOAA of the Sandhills, Veterans' Day Service Speech, Chaplain (MAJ) Schafer

As we honor the military today, specifically those who have chosen to serve, ask yourself, who are they? They are not distant people in far away lands. They are not imaginary figures living only in combat zones. They are Americans, our neighbors, our friends, sons and daughters, husbands and wives, like you and I, who have chosen to proudly serve.

Who are they? They are the ones' who continue a legacy of selfless service for a cause greater than themselves. David McCullough, an award-winning historian and biographer, to whom I quoted in my opening remarks, writes in his book *1776* of interesting encounter in the waning days of 1776 immediately following Washington's crossing of the Delaware River.

McCullough writes that "the next morning a unit from Pennsylvania rode in. Among the militiamen, was a young officer named Charles Willson Peale, the now famous painter. He walked among these ragged troops of Washington's who had made the escape across from New Jersey and wrote about it in his diary. He said he'd never seen such miserable human beings in all his life—starving, exhausted, filthy. One man, he thought, was just the most wretched human being he had ever laid eyes on. He described how the man's hair was all matted and how it hung down over his shoulders. The man was naked except for what they called a blanket coat. His feet were wrapped in rags, his face all covered with sores from sickness. Peale was studying him when, all of a sudden, he realized that the man was his own brother."ⁱⁱⁱ

I want you to hear today... all those past and present who have chosen to serve are our brothers and sisters.

On Veterans' Day I want you to remember, as citizens of this great nation, that you are called to be our brother's keeper. This concept made known in the New Testament scriptures of the Bible stresses the importance of how we treat, care for, and respond to others. Veterans' Day is more than a patriotic day of 10% discounts, free meals for the military, and an annual reminder to say "thank you for your service." It's a day to re-affirm your call to be your brother's keeper.

The authors of the book, *Down Range to Iraq and Back*, say that war's greatest casualty is "cruelty to the souls of Soldiers who fight." They explain further "the soul takes a full broadside when the mind is triggered and the impulse surfaces to kill another human. It cuts across the grain of everything we have been taught and know about goodness...[it is] so unnatural to the mind and spirit."ⁱⁱⁱ

As a nation, the harsh reality is we that send (and expect) our military to persevere and defend freedom; and the cost of this service is that the men and women of the military may "engage in the ugly things of war."

Therefore, you are called to be our brothers' (and sisters') keeper. This means then, you are called live out your faith and values not with mere words, but in deed, and in action. In honoring our military, in displaying gratitude, it must not simply be lip service.

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I'm going to be honest, for many, it's awkward to walk up to a stranger and "thank you for your service."

Did you know, that while the gesture is appreciated, it's awkward for a service member too.

Over the last several years ago, I spent some time asking my Soldiers what they thought when someone comes up to them and says thank you... what that means to them.

For most, they value the sentiment of one's gesture of saying thank you, but nearly all also felt that such an act merely brushes the surface of genuine gratitude. What I heard from them is a desire to receive more than just lip service. They want you to "show" them your gratitude... to bear fruit of a grateful nation.

I asked this question of my friends on Facebook, "What does it mean, when you say 'we support the troops.' The responses were varied. Many said that they make sure Soldiers and their families are recognized, i.e. Personally thank them; yet others said sharing words of encouragement, and others mentioned prayers.

I asked of one pastor, and like wise to you, what does it look like to provide prayers, words of encouragement, gifts, and assistance to veterans in community?

Moore county is unique because of its relationship to the Fort Liberty (formerly Fort Bragg) and specialized units that are located here.

Do you know about our local Veteran organizations and business? If you have the ability to do so, do you hire military spouse and veterans? What about your support to the Veteran non-profits locally? Do you do nothing, do you give financially, do you volunteer your time and service?

What do you say when training occurs? When rounds rattle the earth or helicopters interrupt? What do you do when you know your neighbor suddenly is gone for several weeks and his or her spouse is at home managing quietly the chaos at home? Do help mow the lawn, put garbage can back, or make a meal?

Ultimately, I'm asking you do you make yourself known, being present and among them?

When called to be our brothers' (and sisters') keepers, some will simply pass by, others may simply say "thank you for your service," and yet others will engage. Which will you choose?

There is an amazing scene in history, that is real, not some notion of a screenwriter, on the very last day of 1776. All the enlistments for the entire army were up. Every soldier, because of the system at the time, was free to go home as of the first day of January 1777. Washington called a large part of the troops out into formation. He appeared in front of these ragged men on his horse, and he urged them to reenlist. He said that if they would sign up for another six months, he'd give them a bonus of 10 dollars. It was an enormous amount then because that's about what they were being paid for a month. The drums began to roll, and he asked those who would stay on to step forward.

The drums kept rolling, and nobody stepped forward.

Washington turned and rode away from them. Then he stopped, and he turned back and rode up to them again. This is what we know he said:

My brave fellows, you have done all I asked you to do, and more than could be reasonably expected, but your country is at stake, your wives, your houses, and all that you hold dear. You have worn yourselves out with fatigues and hardships, but we know not how to spare you. If you will consent to stay one month longer, you will render that service to the cause of liberty, and to your country, which you can probably never do under any other circumstance.^{iv}

The drums again rolled. This time the men began stepping forward.

General Nathanael Greene later wrote, "God Almighty inclined their hearts to listen to the proposal and they engaged anew."^v

It's because of those veterans we have a nation called the United States, and it is all the veterans who have followed them in service that have preserved our great union.

It is this legacy of selfless service we remember and honor on this Veterans' Day.

ⁱ McCullough, David. *The Glorious Cause of America*. September 27, 2005. <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/david-mccullough/glorious-cause-america/>

ⁱⁱ McCullough, David. *1776*. Simon & Schuster. 2006.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cantrell, Bridget and Chuck Dean. *Down Range to Iraq and Back*. Hearts Toward Home International. 2005.

^{iv} McCullough, David. *1776*. Simon & Schuster. 2006.

^v McCullough, David. *1776*. Simon & Schuster. 2006.