



DONNA MILES, OSD PUBLIC AFFAIRS

LCpl Travor Smith and other Marines from Company A, Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C., place flags at the graves of the fallen in Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Va. "I am further honoring those who have gone before," said LCpl Smith.

# REMEMBERING Those Who Have Gone Before

*Editor's note: General John F. Kelly, USMC gave the following speech at the Semper Fidelis Society of Boston luncheon in celebration of the Marine Corps Birthday, Nov. 10, 2014.*

I have had the privilege of walking with heroes my entire life. It began in the 1950s and '60s when I was growing up in a working-class section of Boston. Nearly everyone in my life was a veteran. By the time I knew them, they'd put up their uniforms and were making lives and raising families as postal workers, freight men for the railroad, or cops, firefighters and maintenance men in the city. Others were tradesmen: construction workers, brick masons, plumbers and linemen for the phone company.

There were a few teachers and others who worked administrative jobs for the city, but most were barely high school graduates, so those kinds of occupations were closed to them. "Besides," they'd say, "I like working with my hands, or outside, or serving and protecting. I wouldn't want to be cooped up inside."

Veteran or not, there was something special about their generation. They worked so hard and had so little, but they loved this country in a way that is, in many ways, almost lost.

The ones who really caught my attention were the ones who called themselves "jarheads," "leathernecks," or just, "Marines." I will never forget listening to them at family gatherings or at neighborhood block parties or sitting on the stoop in the heat of



An Afghanistan army officer and U.S. Marines pay their respects to fallen Marines and sailors during Camp Leatherneck's Memorial Day ceremony May 31, 2010. Pictured from second to left are BGen Joseph Osterman, CG, First Marine Division; Col Robert Castellvi, Chief of Staff, 1stMarDiv; and SgtMaj Phillip Fasciotti.

the summer as they drank their Ballantine Ale and Schlitz. They would absolutely mesmerize us kids—these former soldiers, sailors, Coast Guardsmen and Marines—about the places they'd served and the things they'd seen and done. The older men, those in their late 30s then, would talk of places with alluringly foreign names like Coral Sea, where the Japanese onslaught was stopped; of Midway, where the Pacific tide was turned; or the Atlantic, where the battle against the U-boat made victory in Europe possible. And the former GIs spoke of Kasserine, Salerno, Monte Cassino, Normandy, Bastogne where a million GIs from every city, town and village in America liberated a continent, helping to crush Hitler.

But the Marines were different. When they spoke, they most often looked into the distance with reverence, often welling up yet seldom mentioning the names of the terrible battles they'd fought, but always of their Corps ... and of their pals ... particularly those who they left behind for eternity. They had names like Joe Pedalino, Al Hernest, Joe McCarthy and Brud Rogers. All names most of you have never heard, but they represent the Marines who have always been there for America. And when the task was done, they went home, dealt with their nightmares—and never forgot. It was their sense of esprit de corps and the devotion they had to each other and to the Navy corpsmen who served with them that made me want to be one of them.

Then there were the younger men of the neighborhood. Many only in their late 20s, the little brothers who spoke of Korea, of the North Korean communists and Chinese hordes they fought and defeated all the way to the Yalu River. Names like Dunford come to mind here, but although the names are different, the DNA is the same.

Like their World War II brethren, they seldom spoke, but when the others did, their eyes would search out brothers in the crowd who once wore the eagle, globe and anchor. They would nod to each other as they silently recalled the last-ditch defense on the perimeter, fighting their way across the beach in an impossible landing at Inchon, vicious house-to-house combat in Seoul, and, most terribly, of the Reservoir, and a cold so unimaginable that to this day when they depart each other's company their only farewell is what it was then ... "Stay warm." When they spoke, it was of Joe, or Bobby, or Jose, and of the silly things veterans think of so they



SGT HEDII AGOSTINI, USMC

won't have to focus on the reality of what they'd done to their fellow man, what they'd seen and suffered, of the loss of friends so young ... so precious ... so dead.

Finally, it was the turn of the sons and nephews of these men. The Marines I knew in the 1960s just back from Vietnam seldom spoke of the battles. Of Khe Sanh, Pleiku, Hue City, the DMZ and A Shau Valley, the Rockpile. But they spoke always of their brothers—Marines and Navy "docs"—who shared their dangerous lives and saved their lives. Names like Tony Zinni, Mike Myatt, Terry Ebbert and Van Riper, Tom Dowd, Dave Wright, Phil Downey, Bob Mueller, Barney Barnum and Tommy Lyons were all there and have remained "Always Faithful" all these many years. They seldom speak of the bad times, but always of a cold beer and the grab-ass when in from the bush. It was a brutal war, no less so, than the ones their dads and uncles fought, but we always heard about their fellow Marines whom they would never forget. It was also the longest war ... at least until today.

All I ever wanted to do since meeting those men was to be a Marine. I got my wish, and in all the years I've served, I've only had one truly bad day since I raised my right hand and shipped off to Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island [S.C.]. My life changed forever the day I enlisted, and since the day three months later that I strapped on the title, I've never been the same. It is a common story and applies to almost every man or woman who ever stood on the yellow footprints.

The Marine Corps is unique among all the services, among all of America's fighting men and women. We have been accused by some of being a cult, because of the way we treasure our hallowed history, sport our impeccable uniforms, be-



USMC

Gen John F. Kelly, USMC

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lieve in our fighting prowess, revere those who came before us, and because of our almost irrational dedication to each other and our families. I'll take that accusation as a compliment. We are certainly not a job, or an occupation, or a career—we are a vocation. We are not fair in how we train, organize and equip because war is not fair.

It is the most brutal and unforgiving human endeavor that exists, and we need to have the best of American society trained as Marines to dominate it, and we will accept nothing less than perfection on the battlefield. It is our sacred duty to do so, for the fate of the nation depends on her Marines.

The Marine Corps starts with a unique self-selection because only 1 percent of American society today even considers stepping forward to serve in the first place. Of the 1 percent who step forward, a very small fraction centers himself or herself on the Marine recruiter's door and says, "I want to be a Marine."

But "want" isn't good enough. The young recruit or officer candidate will have to pass through a furnace, a crucible, that will effect a change on them that will last a lifetime because they will and forever be a Marine. More than anything else they will have our motto—Semper Fidelis—seared into their souls. Always faithful: on the battlefield, at home, for the wounded and fallen, or for a Marine and his family who might need help.

Why do they join today when a brutal war is in their immediate future? To fight an enemy that is as vicious as any we have fought in our history. In a war that will continue for decades into the future.

I don't give a damn why he hates us; I just know our enemy

has an illogical hatred for who we are, for how we live our lives, for the tolerance we have for our fellow human beings to live their own lives in the way they see fit, to believe and worship any God, to raise our children in the privacy of our homes in safety and without fear. These cruel and heartless Islamic extremists despise us because we believe all men and women are created equal in the eyes of God and the law, and that no man has a right to tell another how to live. It is not about oil, or our support for our staunchest of allies, Israel, or of our friends in Europe and Asia, or around the world. It is about us as a people. He is totally unwilling to compromise. He will not negotiate. Men like him must be sent to hell, and America's Corps of Marines know how to grant him his wish.

Again, the question, Why in the hell would any young kid today step forward to be a Marine? Why would they not stay at home in the safety of America? You could ask the same question of America's veterans—who have served the American colors since the birth of our nation and of the million who

have died doing so. Most of them served proudly and, like their fathers and grandfathers, returned to their hometowns and built a life for themselves and their families. But they never forgot the pride, the camaraderie, the sense of contribution and commitment that serving the nation delivers to the heart.

And in spite of the fact that they are superb on the battlefield, there is comfort in the fact that Marines are not born killers, but are good and decent young men and women who throughout our history, but most recently in Iraq and Afghanistan, have performed extraordinary acts of bravery and selflessness to a cause they have decided is bigger and more important than themselves. And that like Marines who went before them in

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As a reminder of sacrifice and valor, photos of fallen coalition servicemembers line the halls of the Regional Command (Southwest) Headquarters, Camp Leatherneck, Helmand province, Afghanistan.



uniform, America owes them a debt that can never be repaid for protecting everything we hold dear. That any one of them could have done something more self-serving with their lives, but no, they chose to serve. To them it was more important to fulfill the most basic responsibility of a citizen—the defense of country—than to see to their own immediate well-being.

I believe they are the very best this country produces. Every American owes them a debt that can never be repaid, but Marines don't expect payment because it's reward enough to have worn the eagle, globe and anchor. There are some who criticize today's generation of young people as materialistic and self-absorbed. I don't because they are simply living the lives they were raised to live, a life most often held up by the current opinion makers and cultural icons as fulfilling and necessary in the modern America. What I do know, however, is that regardless of the rest, those who serve today in the Armed Forces in general, and the Marine Corps in particular, have broken the mold and stepped out as men and women of character who are already making their own way in life while protecting yours.

And while serving and fighting, and, yes, sometimes dying for us, they have learned what America used to hold as a common truth to its core. That the real strength of any group—of a platoon, a battalion, a people, a country—is not based on worshiping at the altar of diversity or separateness. No, on the contrary, they've learned by experiencing firsthand what our immigrant ancestors understood as they left their homelands and forged a nation that is full of hope.

They've learned that we are best when we are stitched together by a shared sense of history, values, customs, hopes and dreams that united us, as opposed to a selfish gaggle of "hyphenated" or "multicultural" individuals. They've learned the fundamental truths upon which this country was made great—that it's not about the color of skin, but about the character within. That it's not about where in the world you came from, but all about why you came and that you are eager to embrace America's customs, traditions and way of life because you chose to come here to live, to thrive, to integrate and to assimilate—to be an American. America welcomes you, and the price of happiness here is that you become an American. You do not have to stop being proud of who you were, but be prouder of what you have become ... an American.

If anyone needs a lesson, take one from our military men and women—particularly the 876 from this war who rest in Section 60 of Arlington National Cemetery. Rich and poor, native-born and immigrant, black, white and Asian, all of whom died for America. And what of their families who raised and nurtured them? These families are special and are often confused about the young man or woman they raised who walked into the house one day and informed everyone, "I just joined the Marines" or "I am going to be a Navy corpsman." For the rest of their loved one's time in the ranks, they worry. If their kid goes off to war, they drive themselves crazy with worry, but they try to never betray the terrible anxiety they feel. It wouldn't be right, they think. I would never want him or her to think they'd burdened us with this fear. They have to stay focused on where they are and what they are doing. Oftentimes they will hang a yellow ribbon on the front door, or a blue star in the window, and they wait.

These families are proud of their Marines. Proud they stepped forward when so many others never even considered it. Proud that by this one very personal decision—to serve a cause higher than themselves regardless of the outcome to them personally—they gave meaning to two questions that have over the centuries defined the dedication of free and righteous men and women in the fight against wickedness: "If not me, Dad, who? If not now, Mom, when?"

If we did not have citizens willing to serve, we would have lost in our struggle against the oppression of the British Empire. Slavery might never have been eradicated from our shores, and the rights of all Americans under the law might still be just a dream. The Nazis would have triumphed. The death camps never liberated and eliminated. Communism would never have been



**Veterans from the Marine Corps League pay tribute to the fallen during the annual Veterans Memorial Day Committee Memorial Service and Day of Remembrance Ceremony at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery, San Diego.**

thrown onto the dustbin of history. And today the high tide of Islamic extremism—an empire of hate that Osama bin Laden proclaimed would last forever—was counted in only days after 9/11 once our country woke up and took the fight to them on their home turf. That is the kind of young person who volunteers. Their families are as proud that they stepped forward as they are crushed if, God forbid, they lose them.

What their family and friends never saw is how without hesitation their Marines climbed into trucks or helicopters, or departed the wire on patrol. The Marines learned early that fear is always with you. They also soon learned how random combat is ... how you have absolutely no control over whether you live or die ... what can happen to you—or just as importantly to your best friend or one of your men—in an instant.

They go, not because they are courageous beyond imagination—which they are. They go, not because of their country, or their flag, or their national anthem—all of which they love and carry in their hearts. No, they go because of the love they have for each other, for their fellow Marines, and they go because of the legends who wore the eagle, globe and anchor long before they were born and upon whose shoulders they stand. They go because of each other. They go because they are Marines.

The fear "out there," or "over there," or "overseas," or "in the fight" is routinely all-consuming and constant, but they push through it and do their duty regardless of the danger, because

that is what the Marines who came before them did—and they know it. Their families likely did not know them as one of the bravest, most courageous and committed young people our society produces, but their fellow Marines can attest to it.

As terrifying as combat is, when the explosions and tracers are everywhere and no man or woman would call them coward or think less of them if they dropped down and saved themselves, none of them do. They saddle up and move to the sound of the guns and are drawn forward by the presence and the power of their fellow Marines.

When there is no rational reason for a man or a woman to do anything but run away in horror or find a hole to hide in—they don't. When no one would call them chicken for cowering behind a wall or shivering in panic in a bunker, slave to the most basic of all instincts—survival—none of them do. When the calls for the corpsman are shouted from the mouths of young kids who know they will soon be with their God—when seconds seem like hours and it all becomes slow motion and fast-forward at the same time—and the only sensible act is stop, get down, save yourself—they never do. It doesn't matter who the enemy is, what kind of ideology they follow, or where on earth they've been sent to fight; they are simply magnificent.

And of the Marines and docs who will never come home and be forever young in the hearts of all who knew and loved them, there is comfort in the fact that when they fell, they were not alone. When they went, they were surrounded by the finest men and women on this earth—their fellow Marines and Navy

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of Marines they proudly joined brought them home to the country they served ... to rest in the good earth of the America they loved ... forever.

As our country is today locked in mortal combat with an enemy whose only dream is our complete destruction, and other potential enemies are increasingly stepping forward in Europe, Africa, Latin America and Asia, I am confident that there are young kids today gathered in small towns and city neighborhoods just as mesmerized as I was so many years ago. That as they sit just outside the circle of veterans drinking their beer and talking of the battles and the buddies they served with in this war, that just enough of these youngsters will appreciate the importance of service to the nation. That they will realize that there are matters in our dangerous world much bigger than themselves, and that there are dangerous men and ideologies just over our horizon that must be defeated. That as a wise man once said: “People sleep peaceably in their beds at night only because rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf.”

And I have no doubt that the best of them will recognize the same thing I did: the reverence in which the Marines speak not of their own bravery, and not of the battles they fought in, but of their friends—living and dead—with names like Todd Desgrosselliers, James Clement, Dan Dowd, Pat Murray, Mike Dorsey, Tom Shuman, Cam West and Jake Fox who, thank God, are still with us, and Chance Phelps, Jonathan Yale, Jordan Heurter, Danny McGuire, Jennifer Harris, Rob Richards, Travis Manion, “Otis” Riable, Greg Buckley and the boys from “Dark Horse”: Ian Tawney, Derek Wyatt, Wil Donnelly, Farrell Gilliam and Robert Michael Kelly, who are now part of the legend—for eternity.

*“They went with songs to the battle,  
they were young,  
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady  
and aglow.  
They were staunch to the end against  
odds uncounted,  
They fell with their faces to the foe.*

*“They shall grow not old, as we that  
are left grow old:  
Age shall not weary them, nor the  
years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun and in  
the morning  
We will remember them.”*

(An excerpt from “For the Fallen”  
by Robert Laurence Binyon)

Semper Fidelis.

*Author's bio: Gen John F. Kelly is currently serving as the Commander, U.S. Southern Command. He has served for more than 40 years in a variety of billets including Commanding General, I Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) during Operation Iraqi Freedom and as the Senior Military Assistant to the Secretary of Defense. Gen Kelly considers his time as an enlisted infantryman, however, as the best job he has ever had and sergeant as the best grade in which he has served.*



**Cpl John J. Granville makes a rubbing of his father's name on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Washington, D.C. His father, LCpl John E. Granville, served as a machine-gunner with Seventh Marine Regiment in Vietnam and died in 2007 from a heart condition that stemmed from a land mine that severed his legs in Vietnam. His name was added to “The Wall” on May 4, 2010.**

docs—who desperately tried to save their lives while holding their hands and staring into their eyes, praying with them, listening to all the little stories about their families and their homes until they were gone. They were not alone.

And when the spirit left them, their Marine family lovingly wrapped them in whatever passed for a shroud and sent them home. In this, their last journey, they were never alone. At every stop along the way, they were treated with the greatest reverence and deepest respect due a fallen hero until members of the Corps