

Jon 'OC' O'Connor

Commander of the Anthony Hunt Hamilton American Legion Post

Good Morning -

In full disclosure, and credit, this speech was derived from an article published by the American Legion Media & Communications office.

The great novelist C.S. Lewis once said:

“All that we fear, from ALL kinds of adversity - - - is collected in the [experiences] of a soldier on active [duty].....

Like sickness, it threatens pain and death.

Like poverty, it threatens ill lodging, cold, heat, thirst and hunger.

Like slavery, it threatens humiliation, injustice, and arbitrary rule.

And, Like exile, it separates you from all you love.”

Most veterans, whether they experienced a field training exercise – or intense combat, have distinct memories of ill lodging, discomfort, arbitrary rule and separation. It goes part and parcel with military life and it's why we hold veterans in such high esteem.

Then there are those who face pain and death so that others can be spared. Such was the case of two American veterans and their longtime friend as they bravely stopped a terrorist attack aboard a train bound for Paris this summer.

Airman First Class Spencer Stone, Army Specialist Alek Skarlatos and close friend Anthony Sadler could have run from danger when a heavily armed gunman boarded the train.....

Instead, Specialist Skarlatos said, “Let's go” as the men ran toward a future which could have easily meant instant death or maiming to themselves and all of the other innocent people within range.

Fortunately, this story is mostly remembered not for the HORRIFIC tragedy that *nearly* happened but for the HEROISM that did. ---

Even after enduring serious stab wounds while disarming the gunman, Airman Stone administered life-saving first aid to an injured passenger.

The American Legion deems this incident NOT SURPRISING – - -

You may think that's an odd comment for an event like this ?

While we take nothing away from the heroic actions of Spencer, Alek, and Anthony, - - - America's military men and women risk life and limb every day so that we can be free.

From Bunker Hill to Baghdad, there has always been a select group of Americans willing to fight - and possibly die - for a cause greater than their self-preservation.

And while we set aside November 11th as a special day to honor and remember our veterans, we should continuously endeavor to serve our veterans as well as, they have served, our nation.

We must honor all of their families not just with Blue and Gold Star Banners, but with compassionate hearts. - - -

PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury and life-altering war wounds not only affect our veterans, but those injuries take enormous tolls on their families as well.

Part of their sacrifice, often includes unemployment, or underemployment, when the veteran's military service is over.

We must not forget the unique needs of our women veterans. There are more than 1.8 million women in America today who have worn the uniform.

You may have heard this one before – yet this definition, is as true now as it ever has been - - -

A veteran - whether active duty, retired, national guard, or reserve - is someone who, at one point in their life, wrote a blank check made payable to "The United States of America," for an amount "up to and including THEIR LIFE."

Sometimes all that is needed is a simple 'thank you' directed at the veteran or family member for his or her sacrifice. So today, as always, I chose to express - my appreciation to those who help keep us free with a simple thank you to all Veterans.

God bless you all for being here, God bless our Veterans (the Red, White, and True One Percent), and God bless America !