

*LTG John Riggs
Memorial Day Remarks
Herndon, VA
May 27, 2002*

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, IT IS A GREAT DAY TO BE A SOLDIER AND A GREAT HONOR TO SHARE THIS DAY OF REMEMBRANCE WITH YOU...THE EVENTS OF THIS DAY SPEARHEADED BY AMERICAN LEGION POST 184 AND THE CITY OF HERNDON. I CAN'T THANK ALL OF YOU ENOUGH FOR PERMITTING ME TO JOIN YOU IN HONORING OUR BRAVE MEN AND WOMEN WHO MADE

THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE FOR
FREEDOM AND LIBERTY FOR US ALL.

MEMORIAL DAY IS A UNIQUE
NATIONAL HOLIDAY. IT IS THE MOST
IMPORTANT NATIONAL DAY OF
PATRIOTIC OBSERVANCE. AT
NATIONAL CEMETERIES AND TOWN
SQUARES ACROSS THIS NATION AND
IN THIS GREAT STATE OF VIRGINIA,
THERE ARE GATHERINGS SUCH AS
THIS OF PATRIOTIC AMERICANS,
VETERANS, FRIENDS AND FAMILIES

WHO HAVE BORNE THE SACRIFICES
AND WHO UNDERSTAND THE MEANING
OF THE PHRASE – FREEDOM ISN'T
FREE. THIS IS A DAY OF MIXED
EMOTIONS...FOR IT IS A DAY OF
REFLECTION IN HONOR OF THE
SOLDIERS, SAILORS, AIRMEN,
MARINES, COAST GUARDSMEN, AND
CIVILIANS WHO MADE THE ULTIMATE
SACRIFICE THROUGHOUT OUR
HISTORY. THE NUMBER IS TRULY
STAGGERING. MORE THAN ONE
MILLION MEN AND WOMEN HAVE

FALLEN IN BATTLE THROUGHOUT OUR
NATION'S HISTORY.

OUR NATION...OUR WORLD, HAS
CHANGED SIGNIFICANTLY SINCE LAST
SEPTEMBER. I BELIEVE THIS
MEMORIAL DAY HAS MUCH DEEPER
MEANING TO MANY AMERICANS AS WE
CONTINUE TO REMEMBER THOSE
MORE THAN 3000 AMERICAN SERVICE
MEMBERS AND CIVILIANS WHO DIED
LAST SUMMER IN THE WORST
TERRORIST ATTACKS ON U.S. SOIL.

NOW PERHAPS MORE THAN EVER, WE
RECOGNIZE WHAT IT MEANS TO
HONOR THE LIVES OF THOSE WHO DIE
IN THE SERVICE TO OUR NATION.

ON THIS DAY, LAST YEAR, WE
WERE FOCUSED ON THE SACRIFICES
MADE IN PREVIOUS WARS. TODAY
OUR CONCERNS ARE PERHAPS MORE
IMMEDIATE THAN REFLECTIVE. THIS
FIRST WAR OF THE 21ST CENTURY IS
BEING FOUGHT DIFFERENTLY THAN
OUR PREVIOUS WARS. OUR FIRST

CASUALTY OF ENEMY FIRE WAS NOT A SOLDIER, BUT A CIVILIAN AGENT IN GOVERNMENT SERVICE. IT WAS EVIDENT FROM THE VERY BEGINNING THAT THIS IS A DIFFERENT WAR FROM ANY OTHER THIS NATION HAS FACED ...A WAR ON MANY FRONTS, AGAINST TERRORISTS WHO OPERATE IN MORE THAN 60 DIFFERENT COUNTRIES. AND THIS WAR MUST BE FOUGHT NOT ONLY OVERSEAS, BUT ALSO AT HOME. THIS WAR IS PERHAPS MORE PERSONAL THAN PREVIOUS WARS. HERE WE

HAVE AN ENEMY NOT REPRESENTING
A NATION, BUT REPRESENTING ONLY
EVIL. INSTEAD OF TRYING TO OCCUPY
LAND MASSES OR DISPLACE MILITARY
FORCES, THE ENEMY WISHES TO
DESTROY THE VERY EXISTENCE OF
AMERICA AND OTHER CIVILIZED
NATIONS, CULTURES, AND RELIGIONS.
THERE CAN BE NO RATIONAL
JUSTIFICATION FOR THE EVENTS OF
SEPTEMBER 11TH – AND WE AS A
NATION CANNOT ALLOW THE CRIME TO
GO UNPUNISHED. AND, WE WILL

FINISH THE JOB, WE **MUST** FINISH THE
JOB WE HAVE STARTED!

[PAUSE]

ULTIMATELY, IT IS THE SUPPORT OF
THE AMERICAN PEOPLE – THE PUBLIC
WILL TO SUSTAIN THE FIGHT – THAT
SERVES AS THE FOUNDATION FOR
VICTORY IN ANY WAR, INCLUDING THIS
WAR ON TERRORISM. “THESE ARE
TIMES THAT TEST US AS CITIZENS AND
DEFINE OUR NATION,” PRESIDENT

BUSH SAID. “OUR LIVES, OUR WAY OF LIFE, AND OUR EVERY HOPE FOR THE WORLD DEPEND ON A SINGLE COMMITMENT: THE AUTHORS OF MASS MURDER MUST BE DEFEATED, AND NEVER ALLOWED TO GAIN OR USE THE WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION. AMERICA AND OUR FRIENDS WILL MEET THIS THREAT WITH EVERY METHOD AT OUR DISPOSAL. IT IS OUR TASK – THE TASK OF THIS GENERATION – TO PROVIDE THE RESPONSE TO AGGRESSION AND

TERROR. WE HAVE NO OTHER
CHOICE, BECAUSE THERE IS NO
OTHER PEACE.”

THIS IS A DAY OF PERSONAL
SORROW FOR THOSE WHO HAVE LOST
LOVED ONES IN UNIFORM AND IN THE
SERVICE OF OUR NATION. BUT IT IS
ALSO A DAY FOR THE NATION TO
MOURN, TO SHOW OUR COLLECTIVE
NATIONAL PRIDE, AND TO ILLUSTRATE
OUR APPRECIATION FOR THIS ALMOST
UNBEARABLE SACRIFICE. WE **HONOR**

THOSE BRAVE WARRIORS BY NOT
FORGETTING THEM. WE **HONOR** THEM
BY NOT TAKING FOR GRANTED WHAT
THEY DID FOR US.

[PAUSE]

TRADITION IS A SPECIAL PART OF
THIS DAY, WHICH DATES BACK TO THE
CIVIL WAR WHEN CONFEDERATE
WIDOWS AND GRIEVING FAMILIES
BEGAN PLACING WILD FLOWERS ON
THE GRAVES OF THEIR LOVED ONES.

TWO YEARS LATER, IN 1868, MAJOR
GENERAL JOHN A. LOGAN, THEN
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE GRAND
ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC, ISSUED AN
ORDER FOR HIS POSTS TO DECORATE
GRAVES “WITH THE CHOICEST OF
FLOWERS OF SPRINGTIME.” HE ALSO
URGED THAT, “WE SHOULD GUARD
THEIR GRAVES WITH SACRED
VIGILANCE...LET PLEASANT PATHS
INVITE THE COMING AND GOING OF
REVERENT VISITORS AND FOND
MOURNERS ...LET NO NEGLECT, NO

RAVAGES OF TIME, TESTIFY TO THE
PRESENT OR TO THE COMING
GENERATIONS THAT WE HAVE
FORGOTTEN AS A PEOPLE THE COST
OF A FREE AND UNDIVIDED REPUBLIC.”

OUR NATION PRESERVES THE
MEMORY OF THOSE VALIANT MEN AND
WOMEN AND THE GIFTS THAT THEY
SECURED FOR AMERICA THROUGH
ERECTION OF SYMBOLS...MEMORIALS
TO PRESERVE THE MEMORY OF THOSE
WHO HAVE DEDICATED THEIR LIVES

FOR OUR FREEDOM. AMERICA HAS
RECENTLY ERECTED SEVERAL KEY
MONUMENTS TO SERVE AS BOLD
REMINDERS THAT WE SO
DESPERATELY NEED. JOINING THE
VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL IN OUR
NATION'S CAPITAL IS THE KOREAN
WAR MEMORIAL, THE WOMEN IN
MILITARY SERVICE MEMORIAL AND
NOW LOCALLY THIS OUTSTANDING
MEMORIAL WE DEDICATE HERE TODAY
TO VETERANS OF ALL WARS. EVERY
TIME YOUR EYES GAZE ON THIS

MONUMENT IN THE FUTURE, YOUR
HEARTS SHOULD SWELL WITH PRIDE
KNOWING YOU WERE A PART OF THE
TOWN OF HERNDON AND THEIR
EFFORTS TO CARRY ON THE MEMORY
OF THOSE WHO HAVE PAID THE
ULTIMATE SACRIFICE FOR THIS
NATION. HERNDON, AND YOUR
AMERICAN LEGION POST 184, WITH
ASSISTANCE FROM THE
COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA, WERE
INSTRUMENTAL IN ERECTING THIS

MONUMENT...MADE FROM THE SAME
GRANITE AS THE U.S. CAPITOL.

IN RECENT REMARKS BEFORE THE
U.S. CONGRESS ON THE
CONTRIBUTIONS OF OUR SOLDIERS,
THE ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF GENERAL
ERIC SHINSEKI STATED, “WILLINGLY
AND WITHOUT HESITATION, OUR MEN
AND WOMEN IN UNIFORM
DEMONSTRATE THEIR PROFOUND AND
ABIDING DEVOTION TO THIS NATION.
ON OUR BEHALF, THEY TAKE RISK,

THEY GO INTO HARM'S WAY, THEY
SHED THEIR BLOOD – PREPARED TO
GIVE THEIR LIVES, IF NECESSARY –
AND SOME HAVE PAID THAT PRICE TO
PRESERVE PEACE AND FREEDOM AND
OUR WAY OF LIFE. THEY CONTINUE TO
MAKE INCREDIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS
AND EVEN MORE INCREDIBLE
SACRIFICES.”

HISTORY HAS CLEARLY SHOWN US
THAT WE CANNOT COUNTER THE
HUMAN DIMENSION OF WARFARE WITH

PURELY TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS.
IF OUR GOAL IS TO PUNISH, WE CAN
DO THAT WITH PRECISION STRIKE
...BUT IF OUR GOAL IS TO CHANGE
SOCIETIES, IT ULTIMATELY TAKES
SOLDIERS ON THE GROUND. WARS
ARE FOUGHT ON THE GROUND
BECAUSE THAT'S WHERE PEOPLE LIVE,
WORK, PLAY, AND WORSHIP.

AS HARSH AS IT MAY SEEM, I
BELIEVE T.R. FEHRENBACH IN HIS
BOOK, THIS KIND OF WAR,

ACCURATELY DESCRIBED WAR WHEN HE STATED, “YOU CAN FLY OVER A LAND FOREVER; YOU MAY BOMB IT, ATOMIZE IT, PULVERIZE IT AND WIPE IT CLEAN OF LIFE BUT IF YOU DESIRE TO DEFEND IT, PROTECT IT, AND KEEP IT FOR CIVILIZATION YOU MUST DO THIS ON THE GROUND, THE WAY THE ROMAN LEGIONS DID, BY PUTTING YOUR YOUNG MEN INTO THE MUD.”

THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES STANDS GUARD IN A

WORLD THAT CONTINUES TO POSE
SIGNIFICANT THREATS TO OUR
COUNTRY, OUR WAY OF LIFE, AND TO
OUR ALLIES. AMERICA REMAINS
VIGILANT AT HOME AND RESOLUTE IN
STOPPING FOREIGN LANDS FROM
HARBORING TERRORISTS. WE MUST
NEVER FORGET THE SERVICE AND
SACRIFICE – THE ENDURING LEGACY –
OF THESE BRAVE SOULS WHO GAVE IT
ALL FOR US.

[PAUSE]

WHEN I ENLISTED IN THE ARMY
OVER 37 YEARS AGO I DID NOT FULLY
COMPREHEND THE GREATNESS OF
NEITHER OUR ARMY NOR THE
ENDURING COMMITMENT THAT GROWS
WITHIN THOSE WHO DEDICATE THEIR
LIVES TO THE SERVICE OF OUR
NATION. TODAY I STAND BEFORE YOU
WITH THE REALIZATION THAT WE ARE
TRULY BLESSED TO HAVE INHERITED
THE BEST ARMED FORCES IN OUR
HISTORY AND WE OWE IT TO THOSE
WHO COME BEHIND US TO LEAVE

THEM WITH A MILITARY EQUALLY
CAPABLE OF DEFEATING ANY
ADVERSARY TODAY AND IN THE
FUTURE. THE EVENTS OF 11
SEPTEMBER HAVE SERVED TO
CONFIRM WE MUST TRANSFORM OUR
SERVICES TODAY TO MEET THE NEEDS
OF THE FUTURE. WE OWE YOU, THE
AMERICAN PEOPLE, THE MOST
RELEVANT ARMED FORCES WE CAN
PROVIDE, JUST AS THOSE WHO CAME
BEFORE US PROVIDED. THE
TRANSFORMATION OF OUR ARMED

FORCES IS THE LEGACY WE LEAVE TO
OUR FUTURE SOLDIERS, SAILORS,
AIRMEN, MARINES, AND COAST
GUARDSMEN, AMERICA'S SONS AND
DAUGHTERS...AND THIS
TRANSFORMED MILITARY WILL
BECOME THEIR DESTINY.

I HAVE ALSO COME TO REALIZE
OVER THE YEARS THAT SOLDIERING IS
AN AFFAIR OF THE HEART...AND IN THE
FUTURE WHEN I TAKE OFF THIS
UNIFORM AND STAND BESIDE YOU IN

THE RANKS OF THE VETERANS, I WILL
CHERISH THE DAYS I WORE THE
UNIFORM AND AS LONG AS I BREATHE I
WILL NEVER GIVE UP MY LOVE FOR
THIS NATION AND OUR ARMY.

ON BEHALF OF THOSE WHO HAVE
WORN THE UNIFORM PAST AND
PRESENT...I PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING
FROM A YOUNG SOLDIER OF NOT SO
LONG AGO:

**PLEASE DON'T WEEP FOR ME...
I DIED FOR WHAT I BELIEVED IN...**

TO KEEP MY FAMILY AND COUNTRY
FREE.

I WAS ONLY EIGHTEEN WHEN I
LEFT FOR WAR
NOT LONG AFTER I WAS ON A
DISTANT SHORE...

I LEFT BEHIND A WIFE AND SON
NOW I CARRY C-RATIONS AND A
GUN...

I'VE STARED DEATH STRAIGHT IN
THE EYE
I'VE SEEN MANY YOUNG MEN COME
HERE ONLY TO DIE...

THEY DIDN'T RUN, THEY DIDN'T
HIDE
THEY FOUGHT FOR WHAT THEY
BELIEVED

AND THEY FOUGHT WITH PRIDE...

HERE I AM IN THIS FAR OFF LAND
WITH A 40 POUND PACK AND M-16
IN HAND
TRUDGING THROUGH MUD AND RICE
PADDIES
THINKING HOW MANY CHILDREN
BACK HOME MUST MISS THEIR
DADDY'S...

MY OWN YOUNG SON NOW WEEPS
FOR ME
HE DOESN'T UNDERSTAND THAT I
DIED TO KEEP HIS LAND FREE
NOR DOES HE UNDERSTAND WHY
HIS MOMMY'S SO SAD
HE'S BEEN THROUGH SO MUCH FOR
SUCH A YOUNG LAD...

MAYBE SOMEDAY THERE WILL BE
NO NEED FOR WARS
NO NEED TO SEND YOUNG MEN TO
DISTANT SHORES
NO MORE MAIMING AND KILLING
FOR REASONS UNKNOWN
NO MORE LEAVING A FAMILY AND
LOVED ONES ALONE...

PLEASE DON'T WEEP FOR ME...
I DIED FOR WHAT I BELIEVED IN...
TO KEEP MY FAMILY AND COUNTRY
FREE.

THOSE OF US WHO HAVE BEEN
TOUCHED BY THE DEATHS OF LOVED
ONES IN THEIR SACRIFICE TO THIS

GREAT NATION, LIKE ALL WARRIORS
WITH THE EXPERIENCE OF COMBAT,
REALIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF
REMEMBERING THOSE WHO DID NOT
MAKE IT HOME. THESE ONE MILLION
MEN AND WOMEN, WHOM WE HONOR
HERE TODAY, WILL INDEED CONTINUE
TO LIVE ON IN OUR NATION'S MEMORY.
IT IS WITHIN OUR POWER TO KEEP
THEM ALIVE. IN FACT IT IS OUR DEBT.
LET US DEPART HERE TODAY, NOT
WITH SADNESS OF HEART FOR THOSE

WE HONOR, BUT WITH GRATEFULNESS.
BECAUSE THEY DIED, WE MAY LIVE...

MAY GOD BLESS THE UNITED
STATES OF AMERICA AND ALL
AMERICAN HEROES WE HONOR
TODAY, AND MAY HE BLESS AS WELL
THOSE WHO STILL STAND AT THE
READY FROM THE GATES OF OUR
LOCAL AIRPORTS TO THE HILLS OF
AFGHANISTAN, AND MAY HE GIVE US
THE WISDOM TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT
FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW.

MAY GOD BLESS ALL OF YOU...AND
GOD BLESS AMERICA...