

(9:30 sharp - Tim Chesnutt starts, introduces you)

(Mayor at the podium)

Statement of Purpose

Welcome to the 78th Annual Rockville Memorial Day Ceremony.

On behalf of the Council, staff and our community, thank you for being here to Honor and Remember those who gave their all – the ultimate sacrifice - in service to our Country.

As we navigate our way through the Third Year of a Pandemic - it would be easy to let traditions like Rockville's Memorial Day Ceremony and Parade slip away, passing from our collective consciousness as a relic of the past - of the times before the pandemic.

But these two years have taught us that traditions such as this one - 78 years strong – are way too important to just let disappear.

They unify us. They give us perspective. They reinforce resolve - and renew our sense of purpose.

This Memorial Day tradition binds us as a community. It helps us to fulfill our sacred obligation to honor those who laid down their lives in the name of Freedom:

Freedom to live peacefully together.

Freedom to speak – and with that comes listening. Freedom to have our own thoughts
– and with that comes the obligation to speak the truth.

Yesterday Fred and I went down to the Mall to see the Poppy Exhibit. After a two year hiatus – the USAA Poppy Wall of Honor returned to the National Mall and it was an amazingly beautiful tribute to our fellow Americans.

The Wall commemorates the more than 645,000 US service members who lost their lives fighting for our Country since World War I – and there are 645,000 hand made poppies honoring them in this temporary installation.

Most of you know of the poem - “In Flanders Fields” – written by Canadian Doctor Lt. Col. John McCrae to honor his fallen comrades after a battle during World War 1.

“In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our space, and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up your quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch, be yours to hold it high.

If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

The US lost 116,000 in World War 1 - 26,277 men in the Battle of Argonne Forest alone – almost half the Nation’s combat deaths for the entirety of World War I.

Also during World War 1 – and pertinent to our situation today - the US lost more military personnel to disease than to combat – mostly due to the 1918 Influenza Pandemic.

During World War II – 405,000 lives were lost and 72,722 World War II US Service members remain unaccounted for as of May 2019.

More than 54,000 American lives were lost in the Korean War – a War that lasted 38 months – and on a sunny day – the 19 statues of the Korean War Memorial cast reflections onto the granite wall creating 38 total images. 7,544 members of the US military who served in the Korean War remain unaccounted for as of April of this year.

Of the more than 58,000 lives lost in Vietnam - more than 900 men died on their first day of combat. And more than 1,400 died on their scheduled departure day. 120 men who are named on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial listed a country other than the U.S. as their birthplace.

Almost 1600 still remain unaccounted for from this war.

More that 383 lives were lost during 1990-1991 in Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Out of nearly 695,000 deployed servicemembers – the ratio of 1 death per 1,813 is the lowest of any of America’s major wars.

And in the Global War on Terror – which began in 2001 with the bombing of the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and the attempted crash into the US Capitol – more than 7,000 lives have been lost.

American lives were also lost in the Civil war in El Salvador, Grenada, Libya, the USS Stark, Panama, Operation Provide Comfort, Somalia, Haiti, Columbia's Drug War, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, the USS Cole.

Last year, after two decades, the United States ended military operations in Afghanistan.

The sacrifices of our men and women and their families are unimaginable – but if we are to learn anything – they must be remembered.

The poppy flower was first worn in 1918 as a symbol of remembrance by an American teacher named Moina Belle Michae – who became known as the Poppy Lady. Inspired by Lt. Col. John McCrea's 1915 poem "In Flanders Fields" – she wrote a poem called "We Shall Keep the Faith".

Oh! You who sleep in Flanders Fields,
Sleep sweet to rise anew!
We caught the torch you threw
And holding high we keep the faith
With All who died.

We cherish too the poppy red
That grows on fields where valor led;
It seems to signal to the skies
That blood of heroes never dies,

But lends a lustre to the red
Of the flower that blooms above the dead
In Flanders Fields.

And now the torch and Poppy Red
We wear in honor of our dead.
Fear not that ye have died for naught
We'll teach the lesson that ye wrought
In Flanders Fields.

This may seem like a History lesson – and maybe you didn't come here today for one – but I believe that it's more important today than ever - that we think about the human cost of war. The massive number of sacrifices so that we could live the lives we are leading.

Our fathers and brothers and mothers and sisters, aunts and uncles and friends and neighbors - fought to keep American free.

They fought for equal rights for every MAN. WOMAN. AND CHILD.
They fought for the FUTURE of AMERICA.

Let's not forget that. Let's come together and work through our differences. Break bread and talk together. As Reverend Barry Moultrie of Mount Calvary Baptist Church said at our Vigil on Thursday – please can we learn to love one another?

Today – the Rockville City Council wears the Poppy Pin. We and all who stand together today have caught the torch and will carry on.

We are here because they answered the call.

We give some. They gave all.

We have many veterans with us today. I would like to recognize you and the sacrifices you've made in answering the call and protecting our freedom.

If you served our country, please stand or wave and let us thank you for your service.

[Begin applause.]

Thank you for your Service.

AND thank you All - for joining with us today - and may God Bless the United States of America.