

# Virginia War Memorial

Richmond, Virginia

## Memorial Day Speech

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Lieutenant Colonel, United States Army

Thank you, ADM Hekman and thank you and your fantastic team here at the Virginia War Memorial for your tremendous performance in support of our noble mission. I am incredibly blessed to serve on this Board of Directors. I would be remiss if I did not publicly state my deepest respect and admiration for my friend and my leader CDR Paul Galanti. One of the greatest professional accomplishments of my professional life was creating the Virginia Values Veterans program in 2011. I am honored to be on the same team as Paul Galanti. Thank You!

I believe the Virginia War Memorial's mission recognize and honor the contributions of those who .... were given the honor to serve our nation by the American people. Yes, you heard that right—given the honor to serve. I am always a little uncomfortable when “Thanked” for my service... the idea and intention is noble and right though in my opinion; the premise

maybe a little misguided or at least it was in my case and for most of those I served with. The flawed premise is “I was born to be a soldier.” I really could never imagine my life NOT being a soldier. Though I did not always recognize it at the time the best days of my life, besides the day I married the love of my life almost 41 years ago and my four sons and 2 grandchildren were born, were June 25, 1973 when at the AFEES Station in Atlanta, GA with my Mother crying and my Father laughing raised my 17 year old right hand and joined the Army in route to Basic Training at Fort Dix, NJ; June 7, 1978 when my Father Commissioned me as a 2LT of Armor at West Point; March 23, 1991 when I walked across the parade field at Fort Stewart, GA into the arms of my family after leading soldiers in combat during Operation Desert Storm and returning home with our Mission Accomplished and our head’s held high because we accomplished our mission with honor. May 31, 1997 at Fort Monroe, Virginia retiring from Active Service and remembering all the soldiers, non-commissioned officer, and leaders who believed in me over an incredible 20-year career. Quite frankly if the American people would not have given me their trust and confidence to lead their son’s and daughter’s, I’m not sure where I would have ended up. So, when I am Thanked for my service my first reaction is to Thank them for allowing me to serve—for giving me a job...it was the

only one I ever wanted. At West Point we are driven by what we call the “sons and daughters” rule. No matter what the task during those 4 years it is all about preparing us to accept the responsibility for and be held accountable for our unit’s performance when given a mission by our nation to do it’s business around the world when called and then given America’s sons and daughters to accomplish it. The challenge always is; “Are we good enough to look those parents in the eye when their sons and daughters have made the ultimate sacrifice and know we did the right thing and their son or daughter did not die because we were not good enough leaders? This is why we are gathered here today at this wonderful place, to remember those given the honor to serve, raised their right hand and swore to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic, did their duty willingly and without reservation or expectation. It is truly the ultimate bond between the American people and those who serve in its Armed Forces.

One of the first things I learned in the Army was the very simple 4 phrases of the Warrior Ethos:

*I will always place the mission first*  
*I will never accept defeat*  
*I will never quit*  
*I will never leave a fallen comrade*

For a few minutes today, I'd like to give you a very personal example of the last phrase and what it means to me. "*I will never leave a fallen comrade*". Certainly it has a very tactical meaning to those Americans conducting the dangerous and deadly work of our nation around the world; when you are in the fight. That said it is also the bond between the American people and those that serve them... a bond that lasts for life.

My parents Joe and Evelyn Barto are remembered here at this great Memorial by a simple brick. Yet I am truly honored this day to share their story as a very personal example of that bond between the American people and those that serve and the families.

Joseph C. Barto, Jr. raised his right hand and swore to support and defend the Constitution of the United States on June 20, 1942 in Bethlehem, PA. He began Horse Cavalry Basic Training at Fort Riley, Kansas where he said he was a "left/right" Cavalryman. Horse went right he went left... horse left him right. Upon graduation was assigned to the 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion at Camp Hood, Texas. In January 1943, his unit was deployed to Camp Ibis, California near the now National Training Center where they conducted intensive Armored Warfare training under General

George Patton. In August 1943, his unit was transferred to Camp Maxey, Texas where on a Saturday afternoon in September at a local diner he met a local girl Evelyn Louise Finch and they married on New Year's Eve 1943. On February 18, 1944, the 704 proceeded by rail to Camp Miles Standish, Massachusetts where they prepared for embarkation for England on February 27, 1944 arriving in Liverpool England on March 12, 1944—his 21st birthday. The 704 was assigned to the 4th Armored Division landing at Utah Beach July 11, 1944 and entered combat on July 17, 1944 fighting in all 5 European Theater Campaigns and 230 days of continuous combat operations. After Victory in Europe day he assumed constabulary duties and began his journey home on October 13th 1945 arriving on October 24th 1945 and honorably discharged from Active Service and transferring to the Enlisted Reserve on October 28, 1945. After a stint as a Lathe Operator at the Bethlehem Steel Company, on September 11, 1947 he was activated from the reserves at the rank of Technician- 4 and was assigned to the Adjutant General's School at Fort Lee, Virginia. Over the next three years he was promoted three times to Sergeant, Staff Sergeant, and Sergeant First Class. He was promotable to Master Sergeant when approached by his Commanding Officer and asked to apply for a direct commission while temporarily assigned to Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana.

On May 22, 1951 he raised his right hand again and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant of Armor. His first assignment was at Fort Hood, Texas where the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division was being re-formed and he served as a Platoon Leader in D Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Tank Battalion. In 1952 he was transferred to the Federal Republic of Germany and was assigned to the 63<sup>rd</sup> Tank Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division based in Kitzigen, Germany. His company commander was Captain Donn Starry and his battalion commander LTC Creighton Abrams both later 4 star Generals and certified American War Heroes. He was the only non-West Point graduate in the Battalion. Later in life, he always told me he learned how to handle us “Ring Knockers” during that tour. The 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division returned to the United States in 1955 and for the next 5 years served in the 63<sup>rd</sup>, 69<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalions and the 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry. In 1960 he was assigned Military Advisory Group Cambodia and spent 12 months in Southeast Asia. In 1961, he returned to Fort Riley was promoted to Major and served as the Battalion Executive Officer of the 69<sup>th</sup> Armored Battalion. In November 1963 he was assigned as the Executive Officer of the 318th Army Security Agency Battalion stationed at Herzo Base, Germany until his transfer to the European Headquarters of the Army Security Agency in Frankfurt, Germany. In 1966 he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and his final

assignment as the Post Maintenance Officer, Fort Knox, Kentucky where he retired on August 31, 1968 after more than 26 years of service. Over that career, my Mother was their beside him every step of the way raising 5 children, moving countless times, and as much of the American Army as any soldier. When they met in 1943, she was a Telephone Operator. When they married, she became an Army Wife... short 2 words for a huge job as many of you here can attest. To the day she passed, she was most proud of being called a good "Army Wife".

I am an Army Brat and proud of it. In July 1978, Tricia and I were brand newly married and starting our lives in the Army. This was during the days when newly assigned officers and their wives were bound by tradition to put on their dress blue uniform and cocktail dresses and pay a social call on their commanding officer. I was informed by the Adjutant, when the Brigade Commander would be receiving social calls. We arrived along with several of my West Point classmates also newly assigned, rang the door-bell answered by our Brigade Commander COL Dick Coffman's wife Betsy. As I went to introduce myself and Tricia, she threw open the door and announced for all of my friends to hear, "I know exactly who you are... I changed your diapers when you were a baby!" Turns out 2LT Dick

Coffman was a Platoon Leader in my father's company at Fort Riley on 1956. I took a lot of ribbing from our friends for many years after that—the blessing and burden of being an Army Brat.

Several months later, I was on a tank gunnery range when COL Coffman came to visit. As he was leaving, he pulled me aside and said, “Just want you to know your Dad was a good man and a great soldier and I would be honored to serve with him again anytime, anywhere.”

There is no greater compliment one soldier can give another.

So, in closing, as you walk around today and glance down at a brick with the name Barto on it you will know the rest of the story. If you have occasion to visit Arlington National Cemetery and walk that hallowed ground and happen across the grave of LTC Joseph C. Barto, Jr. in Section 35, Grave 2222 you will find three words on his headstone which we think tell Joe and Evelyn's story.

American: American was huge word for my parents and their life's work is done now leaving a legacy of service to our great nation and pride in being an American for generations to come is the ultimate compliment.

Hero: They certainly were our Hero's even though they never saw themselves as Heroes.

Victory: It was how they lived their lives and, oh by the way, the motto of the 704 Tank Destroyer Battalion.

In Anton Myrer's classic novel "Once and Eagle" which shaped my generation of Leaders, the hero Sam Damon describes in one sentence what my parents stood for. "You can't help where you were born and you may not have much say in how you die, but you can and should try to pass the days in between as a good person."

The last thing the Commander of the detail says to the next of kin during a burial with military honors while presenting the flag from the casket of the fallen is; "On behalf of the President of the United States, the United States

Army, and a grateful nation, please accept this flag as a symbol of our appreciation of your loved one's honorable and faithful service”.

It is the way our country demonstrates the last line of the Warrior Ethos. *I will never leave a Fallen Comrade.*

This honor will be given again on this Friday in Roaring Spring, PA for COL Robert H. Saylor a WWII and Korean War Veteran—also a good man and a great soldier.

These places like the Virginia War Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery are how we as American's never leave a Fallen Comrade by coming together, remembering their lives and continuing their legacy of honorable service to our great nation.

Thank you for allowing me to serve one more day today with you.

Happy Memorial Day!

God Bless those we remember today.

God Bless You and Your families.

and

God Bless America!