



**Wreaths across America:
Service and Sacrifice**
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General Norty Schwartz

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Introduction

Ms. Courter, thank you for that very kind introduction. Mr. and Mrs. Worcester, thank you for being here, and more importantly, for what you do to support our military members and our families.

Also, I would like to recognize our Gold Star Mothers, who are among the most generous, most selfless, and most remarkable of patriots. Mere words could never begin to repay the debt of a grateful Nation to you and your family, so at every occasion such as this, we offer to each of you our most sincere gratitude.

Service and Sacrifice

What began in 1992, as a generous donation of 5,000 wreaths and a worthy project here at Arlington National Cemetery—an effort that was modest only in scope but unlimited in compassion—expanded to a burgeoning nation-wide effort in 2006. Today, in its 19th year, Wreaths across America will donate more than 200,000 wreaths, to be solemnly dedicated in 535 observances in all 50 states and 24 off-shore locations.

What a truly remarkable expression of American generosity and appreciation toward those of our Nation's citizens who wear her uniform, and serve in her defense. Morrill and Karen, we in your Armed Forces are thankful for your efforts to "remember, honor, and teach." We *remember* those who have fallen, and who remain missing in action; we *honor* those who serve, and their family members who provide love and support for their efforts; and, we *teach* the value of freedom.

And, if I may, I offer another point: we also teach the value of *service*. We all know that our liberty is among what we cherish most as a Nation, and that its absence would greatly diminish the otherwise abundant blessings of freedom and opportunity that we enjoy as a Nation. That is why we are also very thankful for organizations like the Civil Air Patrol, which, since 1943, has served our Nation faithfully as an Air Force partner in providing airpower for civil support. Amy, I ask that you please pass on my congratulations, on behalf of the men and women of the



United States Air Force, to the Civil Air Patrol for its 69th anniversary ten days ago. In that sense, you are our “senior partner” by six years.

From humble beginnings as “flying Minutemen” and “sub chasers” in World War II, to now flying more than 112,000 hours each year to support local-, state-, regional-, and national-level efforts, this proud organization has boosted its ranks to 61,000 volunteer members nation-wide. And, by involving nearly 26,000 cadets, ages 12 to 20, in aerospace education and cadet programs, C.A.P. inspires our Nation’s youth. Amassing many impressive feats in U.S. inland search-and-rescue missions, including 113 lives saved in Fiscal Year 2010, Civil Air Patrol not only performs a vital function for our country; it exposes our youth to what it means to serve, and to lead others to do the same, through emphasis in physical fitness, leadership, and character development.

In other words, while aviation is important—indeed, it has been a life’s calling for many of us—this is about something that is more than aviation. It is about *service*, and it is about higher purposes that are exemplified by extraordinarily thoughtful efforts like Morrill and Karen Worcester’s brainchild, Wreaths across America. I submit to you that, together, the Civil Air Patrol and Wreaths across America are sounding a clarion call for selfless service—to set aside pure self-interest, and be a part of something greater than any single one of us.

Ladies and gentlemen, that is the broader point of their worthy efforts. As President Obama has repeatedly noted, this Nation needs its talented citizens to serve. It is what made this country exceptional, and what will sustain our hallmark liberty, equal opportunity, and prosperity for future generations of Americans.

Conclusion: A Time to be Thankful

Finally, at this very special time of the year, we again have the opportunity to reflect on all for which we are thankful. Too often, as we address the many requirements and rigors of everyday life, we are left with little time or energy to take proper note of our many blessings. The Holidays represent a chance to meaningfully consider our broader aspirations. I suspect that this is what Morrill may have felt when, not too many years ago, as a young boy, he had the opportunity to visit these hallowed grounds, here at Arlington. I imagine that he may have



taken inventory of the many blessings of living in America, and realized that they were made possible in no small part by those who have worn the cloth of the Nation.

Today, we are especially thankful for thoughtful and compassionate Americans like Morrill and Karen Worcester—for organizations like Wreaths across America and the Civil Air Patrol, and the tremendous partnership that they have forged. And, of course—the ultimate reason why we are all here—we are grateful for our brave service members and their selfless families, especially our Gold Star Mothers, our wounded warriors, our missing-in-action, and our fallen. Their generous and giving spirit—their devotion to service—inspire all of us to rededicate ourselves to the higher purposes that have made, and will continue to make, our Nation exceptional.

And, during this holiday season, let us also especially honor the continuing efforts of our deployed men and women, when loved ones normally would come together, except when the demands of service during a time of war take no break, and offer no reprieve.

Ladies and gentlemen, on this special afternoon, you have honored me with the opportunity to say a few words. I thank you very much. And, Suzie and I wish you the very best for the most memorable of Happy Holidays. Thank you.