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BPCC Veteran's Day
LIEUTENANT GENERAL JAMES M. KOWALSKI
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(Acknowledgement of intro, distinguished guests, etc....)

The support provided by this community to our local military and civilians who defend our country sets the benchmark for any community, and I appreciate the strong partnership you all provide myself and the Airmen of Barksdale AFB. Thank YOU for *your* service to us!

Two hundred years ago Thomas Paine encouraged American revolutionaries, when he said, "...tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph..."

It is appropriate for us to reflect on those first American veterans, our founding fathers. Their example of courage and sacrifice provided our nation a beacon to navigate the treacherous waters of history. They clearly stated the price they would pay for our freedom, as they wrote in the declaration of independence:



“with a firm reliance on the protections of Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.”

During the course of the 7-year war that followed, 9 of the signers died of wounds or hardships, 17 lost everything they owned, and 5 were imprisoned or captured. They all kept their sacred honor.

When the founding generation passed, our nation’s dedication to these principles allowed us to time and again face our destiny when freedom was challenged. Within just the last century our veterans broke the empires of old Europe in WWI, turned back global fascism in WWII, and under the dark shadow of the nuclear age, prevailed in a long and precarious war against communist totalitarianism.

Today we remember all veterans – those who have served and those who are serving.

A few moments ago we stood together in a shared a moment of silence. That veteran’s day ritual dates back to 1918, when the armistice called an end to World War I. Guns fell silent on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month.

An American private described his unit’s observance in a letter home:



“We stood up and didn’t say a word. It felt as if I had dropped my pack after a long hike and straightened out my back, i was twice as light as any bird. But all we did was stand and stare and stare. I stood up and stared and never said a word.”

Today we stood in silence to reflect on the example our generations of veterans provide our nation—values which have stood the test of time—duty, honor, and country.

Veterans like Purple Heart recipient Sgt. James Bollich, who in 1940 joined the Army Air Corps at Barksdale Air Force Base. He was subsequently assigned to the Philippines where he became a prisoner of the Japanese and somehow managed to survive the Bataan death march. Sgt Bollich was from Mowata, Louisiana, a small community south of Fort Polk. Now that small town’s sacrifice for the war effort was significant--Forty-nine young men from Mowata heeded their nation’s call to service; seven of them never returned. The Bollich family’s sacrifice was also notable—three of those seven casualties were from the extended Bollich family. In 1995, a monument was erected to those “boys from Mowata” who gave their lives for their country.



Today we stood in silence to reflect on the sacrifices of generations of veterans, to honor those who died and to thank those who are still alive.

Veterans like General Peyton Cole, a Shreveport resident who was assigned to the 4th Special Operations Squadron, South Vietnam, and flew AC-47 gunship missions from Phu Cat and Da Nang Air bases as well as from Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand. The decorations earned by General Cole during his career include the Defense Distinguished Service Medal, our nation's highest peacetime award; the Legion of Merit, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal with seven oak leaf clusters, and the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm. Gen Cole's last assignment was as the wing commander at Barksdale AFB.

Today we stand in silence to reflect on the sacrifices of those veterans presently serving. Men and women who stand watch on foreign soil, bring food and medical supplies to people in distress, keep the peace in strife torn nations, and fight our ongoing war on terrorists.

One of those veterans still serving is Airman First Class Bryenna Brooks, a young Air Force Airmen who was awarded the Purple Heart for injuries received in June of this year while serving as a medic in



Afghanistan. While assisting a resupply mission the vehicle she was riding in was hit by a rocket propelled grenade that penetrated the rear compartment of her vehicle. The grenade entered the vehicle over Airman Brooks' left shoulder, injuring her and four of the soldiers inside with shrapnel. Ignoring her own wounds she immediately began to treat her injured team as they continued down the road to the nearest combat outpost. All of the wounded members fully recovered from their injuries and were returned to duty. In addition to the Purple Heart, Airman Brooks was awarded the Army Combat Medical badge, the Air Force Combat Action medal and the Joint Service Commendation medal. She is still on active duty at Barksdale AFB. To the veterans in the audience today, let me thank you not only for your service, but for your legacy. A legacy of integrity, service, and excellence. We're not the world's greatest military because of our size or our technology...we are the greatest military thanks to the example you gave us, and the traditions you fostered. And just as importantly, we are the greatest military because we serve a nation whose leaders understand the deep moral difference between the use of force for liberation and the use of force for conquest. All of you were liberators



and no one should have doubted your cause. You have seen the worst that man can do, but you have also seen, and been part of, the best that man can do.

We must also remember that behind every Soldier, Sailor, Airmen, Marine, or Coast Guard are family members who also serve. To all the families and loved ones who have supported, or continue to support their warrior, I and every current and past service member thank you for your sacrifice and commitment.

The task of your military today is unchanged—many of you can still recite it from memory—to protect and defend the constitution of the United States, against all enemies, foreign and domestic...to bear true faith and allegiance to the same...to well and faithfully discharge our duties.

The weapons and tactics have changed over time; but the courage and dedication of our soldiers, sailors, marines and airman, have not.

The last decade since 9/11 has changed our nation and reminded us that evil is still in the world and freedom will always require vigilance.



But the last decade has not changed the core values and mission of your military.

To our veterans, know that every one of today's warriors serves in your shadow, and each one of them prays their service measures up to your legacy. You did not let us down and we will not let you down.

May God bless our veterans, may God bless all who wear the uniform, and may God continue to bless the United States of America.