

We Remember

Chris Mitchell, Life Care's chief operating officer, was invited by the Cleveland and Bradley County community to give the address for the annual Memorial Day service on the steps of the Bradley County Courthouse. Chris retired as a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army after 20 years of service. Here is the speech he delivered on Monday, May 30.

– Beecher Hunter

Good morning, [Cleveland] Mayor Rowland, [Bradley County] Mayor Davis, distinguished guests, fellow citizens of Bradley County: Thank you for the invitation to speak with you today. It's an honor to be here.

We remember.

Today, we remember the courageous men and women who died so that we might live in this land of liberty and plenty.

We remember the depth of their sacrifice.

We remember the sacrifice of those lost and their legacy of duty, courage and decency.

We remember, because if we do not remember, we risk forgetting that freedom is not free and eternal vigilance is the price demanded for our freedom.

Those of us who are still breathing cannot repay the sacrifice of those who gave their lives defending us, but, at the very least, we can and we must remember them.

Memorial Day was born of compassion and empathy. In 1863, as the Civil War raged, grieving loved ones in Columbus, Miss., dedicated a day to cleaning Confederate soldiers' graves and placing flowers on them. They noticed Union soldiers' graves overgrown with weeds nearby. While grieving for their own fallen soldiers the Confederate women understood that the dead Union soldiers were cherished loved ones of families and communities. They cleared the weeds and laid flowers on those graves as well. That is now thought to be the first Memorial Day; 19 years later, the nation observed its first official Memorial Day.

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**LTC Christopher A. Mitchell,
2nd BN 112th Armored RGT,
49th AD Commander**

On this Memorial Day, we are once again involved in hostilities in foreign lands. Our soldiers are once again fighting and dying for the ideals that our nation holds so dear. Our nation is still able to call upon its sons and daughters to go into harm's way to protect us and defend our way of life.



With more than 47,000 killed or wounded in action as a part of the war on terror, the youth of our nation continue to fight and die for a cause larger than them. These young soldiers are part of an unending line of proud citizens who answered our nation's call to duty. It is the service of the soldiers around the world, and especially in the combat zones, that mark their sacrifice. And, their families answer the call to duty by their unwavering support to their loved ones who are in harm's way. It is

important that the American people continue to support our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines by honoring their service and welcoming them home.

In 2003, Army Private First Class Diego Rincon of Conyers, Ga., wrote this to his mother from Iraq:

“Whether I make it or not, it’s all part of the plan. It can’t be changed, only completed. ‘Mother,’ will be the last word I’ll say. Your face will be the last picture that goes through my eyes. I just hope that you’re proud of what I’m doing and have faith in my decisions. I will try hard and not give up. I just want to say sorry for anything I have ever done wrong. And, I’m doing it all for you, Mom. I love you.”

Nineteen-year-old Diego never did make it home from Iraq. But we honor him by honoring the request that he made to his mother – to be proud of what he did and to have faith in his decisions. America must remain the world’s beacon of freedom. We must represent the aspiration and hope of millions of people, that through hard work and perseverance, anyone can succeed in this fair and just society. Freedom is not a gift. It is an earned benefit that was paid for by the blood of our heroes.



From the Revolutionary War to the War on Terrorism, the sacrifices and caliber of America’s fighting men and women have been nothing short of inspirational. Author John Antal wrote: “One sterling example of the fighting spirit during Operation Desert Storm occurred when the U.S. Army’s 1st Brigade, 2nd Armored Division [Tiger Brigade], advanced in February 1991 to the Mutla Ridge that lay astride the principal

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Iraqi escape route from Kuwait City, known to many as the Highway of Death. The Iraqis had mined and fortified this ridgeline, and the Tiger Brigade attacked down the ridge to block the enemy's escape.

“The 3rd Battalion, 67th Armor, had to breach an Iraqi minefield and then seize an Iraqi-occupied building that was originally a Kuwaiti police post. The Tiger Brigade's tanks raked the entrenched enemy with fire as the riflemen of the attached mechanized infantry battalion dismounted to clear the bunkers in close-quarters combat. During the battle, 3rd Battalion's tactical command post was hit by Iraqi fire.

“Sgt. 1st Class Harold Witzke, the battalion master gunner, led by example. SFC Witzke courageously engaged several Iraqi snipers with a light machine gun, suppressed the enemy and directed other members of the operations center to return effective fire. He was killed in this action and posthumously awarded the Silver Star for valor. Over the night and into the next morning, troopers of this task force cleared the enemy complex, rapidly established medical clearing stations, and treated hundreds of wounded Kuwaiti civilians and Iraqi soldiers, who surrendered in huge numbers.”

Sgt. Witzke was one of my sergeants, and I was with him that day. He was my friend, my mentor and my brother in arms.

And, in a final tribute to SFC Witzke and to all those who have given their lives for this country, let me share with you an Army tradition that is a part of all memorial services: it is the Last Roll Call. This is a final tribute paid by soldiers to their fallen comrade. It has its origin in the accountability roll call conducted by the unit First Sergeant following combat. Although sometimes painful to listen through, the Last Roll is called with the conviction held by soldiers that all unit members will be accounted for, and none will ever be forgotten. Here it is:

Sgt. 1st Class Witzke...

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Sgt. 1st Class Witzke...

Thank you all, and God bless America!

