

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH FOR
VFW NATIONAL COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF AL LIPPHARDT
125TH VFW NATIONAL CONVENTION
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY
AUGUST 1, 2024

Before I begin my remarks, I must thank you for your support, love, respect, and trust. To my VFW Comrades, Auxiliary Brothers and Sisters, Distinguished Guests, and my family. I am deeply humbled to stand before you today having been elected and installed to the highest office of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, Commander in Chief. Standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before us, the founders from the Spanish American War followed by World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom and deployments placing you between the weapons of our enemies and these shores.

It is my custom when I speak to groups like yourself, I want five Vietnam Veterans to join me here at the podium Private Lewis Sloan of East Point, GA, Corporal Kenneth Adams of Santa Clara, CA, Corporal Philip Adams of Croton Falls, NY, Robert Waddell of Batavia, OH and Rodney Loatman of Newark, NJ. I said I wanted them to join me here, but they can't. Lewis Sloan was killed in action on November 16, 1967, after stepping on a mine. Kenneth Adams, Philip Adams, Robert Waddell and Rodney Loatman were killed in action on November 23, 1967, from enemy automatic weapons, shrapnel from rocket propelled and hand grenades during an intense battle with elements of the 2nd North Vietnamese Army Division. Their names are inscribed on the Wall in Washington, DC but forever living in my heart. These men served under my command when they paid the ultimate price for freedom. I promised myself, those who gave their full measure of devotion would be honored for their service and sacrifice by saying their names whenever I had an opportunity. *No greater love hath a man than to lay down his life for another.*

I have only been a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars for 20 years, but I have seen too many members who have forgotten our roots. Whatever the branch, whatever the military specialty, or whenever the conflict let us never forget those who no longer have a voice.

You elected me to lead this organization in accordance with the National Bylaws, Manual of Procedures and Ritual to which I was installed.

LEAD I SHALL

Your Department and State Commanders were provided an Alert Order when they were Junior Vice Commanders. When they became Senior Vice Commanders, I issued a Warning Order on Pearl Harbor Day, December 7, 2023. The full order, Operation All In was issued on April 19, 2024,

Today August 1, 2024 is D-Day

“OPERATION ALL IN”

THIS IS NOT AN EXERCISE

THIS IS NOT A DRILL

We have been preparing for this moment for three years. In 2022-2023 we focused on “Every Veteran Counts”, successfully achieving those goals because you came together. You realized how critical our membership is to mission accomplishment. In 2023-2024 we focused on credibility under the label of “Meet the Challenge”. Again, you realized how critical it is for this nation’s veterans to know we speak the truth. The principles we were founded upon 125 years ago remain our bedrock. The Legislative accomplishments this year that our organization spearheaded and successfully passed during, what is politely called, a politically charged Congress is monumental. In addition, you met the challenge by increasing our membership total set by Chief Sarmiento. The oath of enlistment we all said ended with four words that sealed your pledge to the people of this nation, “So help me God”.

This year, 2024-2025 our focus at all levels is on *Courage*. Your courage is undeniable. When you were ordered to deploy your courage was confirmed by placing yourself between the weapons of our enemies and these shores. Veterans of Foreign Wars posts are some of the very few places where heroes gather, and warriors meet. Too many people in this nation have forgotten what it is to be a warrior. Heroes are what others think of us. Warriors are who we are.

With changing geo-social-economic conditions and partisan politics, we seem to have lost sight of the most critical treasure lost to war, our sons and daughters. Failing to have a clear plan to achieve victory appears to be the case in our strategies over these last five decades.

Many of our soldiers, marines, sailors, and airmen perceive they are but pawns to be used over and over in this Global War on Terror. The material costs of war and the lifetime of grief and tragedy both physically and mentally to our warriors and their families is quickly forgotten by our nation’s leaders. Even more dangerous to this nation is the failure of its leaders to keep the promises made to those ordered to place their bodies between the weapons of our enemies and these shores. Slowness to grant healthcare and service-connected disabilities is only one part of this failure.

We depend on a volunteer military. Recruiting is an issue across the various services. Those who have deployed to combat have very long memories. The memories I am referring to are those of 1975 and the evacuation of Saigon. Those memories came rushing back when we saw the debacle in Afghanistan at Bagram Air Base as our equipment was abandoned but more tragically was witnessing troops and allies left behind. In 2018 I introduced my Vision for the future. That vision was Commitment, Credibility and Courage. You and I know membership is more than about numbers. We are not numbers. We are people. I am proud to share with my community, I am a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

I took an oath to deploy if called upon, and my word is my bond. It was for love of country. I wanted to be an example for others to follow.

Credibility is also known as integrity. You can only claim one element that belongs to no one else and that is your word. Of the values we learned, loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service,

integrity, honor, and personal courage, none is more important than integrity. If your word is not to be trusted, everything and anything you do is unreliable. You can't be called on nor can you be counted on. There is no place in the Veterans of Foreign Wars for these individuals. When you talk about members of the VFW you are talking about our nation's heroes and warriors, of men and women who would sacrifice all to keep our loved ones safe and secure in accordance with our Constitution.....that all men are created equal and endowed by their creator with inalienable rights of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.

The vision for 2024-2025 is courage. I had three uncles that served in WWII. Two were Army and one was Navy. Our family was very proud of all three. One of them went on to make the military a career, also serving in the Korean War. Unfortunately, I was not close to him as he seemed to always be deployed overseas. Edward J. Sims, Colonel United States Army. June 6, 1944, D-Day he was part of the 82nd Airborne landing on Anzio and went on to participate in the Battle of the Bulge and Market Garden.

A battlefield commission, several Silver Stars, Bronze Stars for Valor and several Purple Hearts, I certainly viewed him as a warrior. In my pre-teens I remember a conversation that confused me at the time. The talk was about what was I going to do with my life. At age 11, in 1957 America, I didn't know what I was going to do the next 15 minutes much less had I considered my life. I did not remember what he said until many years later when I heard it again from a fellow Vietnam Veteran and Rotarian I respected. My Uncle Eddie's words were "the talent you have is your gift from God, the use of that talent is your gift to God". As I remembered I thought, did I really hear those words from that rock hard chiseled old soldier. But then I also remember he said, I chose to be a soldier. I chose to be a peacemaker, a Warrior of God.

Evil exists and it cannot be appeased reasoned with or converted. Evil is and there is only one way to eliminate it and that is to destroy it wherever it appears. Like many of you in this room, I have seen the face of evil.

My ask is for you to embrace the vision of courage. Rekindle the warrior's fire in your belly. Put that vision into action. I am proud to lead you, as together, we seek the courage to be the best we can be in all things and at all times.

Stand steadfast for righteousness sake, apply the beliefs you held when you raised your hand for the final 100 yards of the battlefield belong to you when you,

"Believe In What You Do – Do What You Believe In."

God Bless You, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and it's Auxiliaries and God Bless the United States of America.

"Follow Me."

Thank You.