

**Remarks
of
William G. Gang
Civilian Aide to the
Secretary of the Army
for
California (South)
Miramar National Cemetery
Veterans Day, 11 November, 2016**

Thank you, and good morning, ladies and gentlemen. From the Secretary of the Army, the Honorable Mr. Eric Fanning, I bid you greetings! It is a privilege for me to be here on Veterans Day to dedicate the Veterans Tribute Tower and Carillon. Let me begin by recognizing our distinguished guests who have honored us with their presence. Here with us we have:

Bob Baker, Principal Donor to Tribute Tower

Rex Kern, Director, Fort Rosecrans and Miramar National
Cemeteries

Bradley Phillips, National Cemetery Administration Regional
Dir.

Congresswoman Susan Davis

Congressman Duncan Hunter

Congressman Scott Peters

SD County Supervisor Bill Horn

Brig. Gen. Bob Cardenas, Foundation Chairman emeritus

SD City Council Member Chris Cate

Col. Jason Woodworth, CO, MCAS Miramar

John Baca, MOH

Robert Modrzejewski, MOH

Col. Jay Vargas, MOH

Today, all across our country – in Town Halls, City Squares, parades and places such as this – we celebrate and honor America's veterans for their devotion, patriotism and selfless service and sacrifice on behalf of us all.

We join hands – in the name of peace and freedom – to pay them proper tribute. To say “thanks.” For it is their loyalty to their country and their own great courage which have made us what we are today – and what we’ve been for more than two centuries: The world’s Indispensable Nation....the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave...a beacon of hope in an oft-troubled world.

Regardless of which military branch our Veterans have served in – the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines or Coast Guard - this day belongs to all of them, just as it belongs to the vast generations of patriots who came before. From the Minutemen who won our independence, to today's warriors turning back aggression all around the world, the line of Americans willing to risk their lives for this land and the ideals and people they love is long and never-ending. Each of them is part of our military's patriotic legacy.

They have served with honor and with dignity. They have served in different places and in different ways, but serve they have. They have not only fought our wars, they have preserved the peace, whether in faraway lands or in home station. They have lived uncommon lives under a common banner: a love of country and service to their fellow man.

It is therefore fitting that we pause as a nation – as a people – to recognize their service and sacrifices.

President Calvin Coolidge said long ago, “The nation which forgets its defenders will itself be forgotten.” Well, America doesn’t have that problem. Your attendance here today attests to that. We will never forget our Veterans. Nor will we ever forget our POWs and MIAs who have yet to be accounted for. This is the solemn promise of a grateful nation.

I might also add that we will not forget the families of those Veteran’s either; for they, too, have served and sacrificed and deserve our thanks and admiration. May we have a round of applause for the families?

As many of you know, we celebrate Veterans Day on the anniversary of the armistice that ended the First World War. The “War to End All Wars” as it was ironically known. On the 11th hour, of the 11th day of the 11th month, the battlefields of war-torn

Europe finally fell silent as more than four years of unfathomable destruction came to an end.

Unfortunately for us all, that silence was short lived. In the intervening years we witnessed another World War, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, a Cold War, a Gulf War and a Global War on Terror. But, just as fortunately, in every case, whenever freedom was threatened, gallant men and women have risked and sometimes gave their lives by donning the cloth of this great nation. It's what has always made America exceptional: the generations of patriots who dedicated themselves to the defense of the United States.

Today, we are here for another symbol of our veterans' dedication—the dedication of a monument and a carillon honoring our veterans of all services and all wars. On this spot now stands a Veterans Tribute Tower with a bell at the top. The Tower will be accompanied by a carillon, which will be capable of playing a

selection of music for the peaceful appreciation of those visiting the cemetery and those passing by.

Since its dedication in November 2010, thanks largely to the work of the Miramar National Cemetery Support Foundation, who began working the issue in 2006, this 313-acre site has provided a “Garden of Heroes” for San Diego Veterans and their spouses. This plot of land, which used to be on the grounds of old Camp Kearney and Camp Elliott, is already the resting place of more than 10,000 Veterans and spouses. The entire burial ground has the capacity to hold 235,000. After the closure of Rosecrans Cemetery to most burials in 1966, the only option for casket burials was Riverside National Cemetery. A National Cemetery located here made a lot of sense, and San Diegans are proud and pleased that this land was dedicated to that purpose.

You will hear from Veteran Bob Baker, with whom I am honored to share this podium, the story of Outpost Harry, a vicious and victorious battle of the Korean War. The opposing forces had more troops, but we had more ammunition and more

determination. This Tower is appropriately dedicated to the Veterans of the Korean War and to the Veterans of all our Armed Forces who have engaged in every war America has joined.

Recently, and prior to his retirement as Chief of the Army Reserve, LTG Jeffrey Talley addressed an American Legion Post and its invited guests here in San Diego. In his remarks, LTG Talley spoke of the Department of Defense goal of the creation of a SEAMLESS military force. He talked about a force where a member of one component could transfer from his service to another service to duty with no penalty in pay, rank or time in grade or service. That means that someone in the Army could transfer to the Air Force and assume a new job without impediment. This is a new and novel concept for our Armed Forces, as you Veterans here might realize. LTG Talley did not discuss any schedule by which this concept might become reality, so it is undoubtedly safe to assume that this seamless force concept is still in the idea stage.

While I am sure that where we are today did not serve as the inspiration for this innovative idea, it struck me when I first visited this cemetery, that we have a SEAMLESS force right here, and indeed in every National Cemetery in the United States. Here, we have interred members of all ranks and all forces. We have a Congressional Medal of Honor recipient, SGT Charles Schroeter, a US Army veteran (and also once a Marine), who was born in Germany in 1837 and died in San Diego in 1921. It is quite remarkable that someone like SGT Schroeter, who saw bullets fly in both directions in both the Civil War and the Indian Wars, was wounded 7 times, and was awarded the Medal of Honor should die peacefully of old age, and is now buried here. Around him, seamlessly, are the graves of CAPT Robert G. Sullivan, USN, PFC James Koban Sr, USAAF, and Jerry Coleman, USMC, who was once the Chargers announcer. There are no differences among them, nor are there any differences among the appearance of the other headstones, except that SGT Schroeter's

headstone has the script illuminated in gold—truly a seamless force.

As those at rest in this hallowed ground, we should also be seamless in honoring them and all other veterans who have served to make our country a great power among all nations. In closing, I would like to leave you with a quote from Congressman Dan Lipinski from Illinois: “On this Veterans Day, let us remember the service of our veterans, and let us renew our national promise to fulfill our sacred obligations to our veterans and their families who have sacrificed so much so that we can live free.”

Thank you, and please enjoy your Veterans Day holiday.