

Raymond F. DuBois  
Veteran's Day Address  
Wakefield Country Day School  
November 11, 2009

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Thank you Kathy and thank all of you for inviting me here on this special day at this great school. I am humbled to be in this auditorium dedicated to 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Leonard Cowherd, USA, a Wakefield alumnus, who was killed in action in Iraq in 2004. A special thanks to the families and students of Wakefield with relatives serving in harm's way around the world and to the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade singers!

I must confess that talking to Colonels is sometimes easier than speaking before 250 young students. You are a tough audience, but since I have two teenage children, I am reasonably well prepared.

As my wife, Helen, and I left our house this morning, hard by the Jordan River some six miles away by road from here, we ran into a neighbor as we turned onto North Poe's Road. He's a veteran – a solitary fellow – a widower who lives alone. We said hello and my wife said we were on our way to deliver a Veteran's Day talk to you all, and his face lit up and he said in his laconic way, "Well, it's the right day for that." Yes, it is the right day, and as a veteran I thank you all for allowing me to share some personal thoughts about this special day with you.

President Ronald Reagan said 24 years ago at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, "The timing of this holiday is quite deliberate in terms of historical fact but somehow it always seems quite fitting to me that this day comes deep in autumn when the colors are muted and the days seem to invite contemplation." Sort of a day like today – grey, cold, rainy – a good day to think about selfless service. But before I share some personal thoughts on this day, let's make sure we know how this day came to be: World War I officially ended when the Treaty of Versailles was signed on June 28, 1919, in the Palace of Versailles outside of Paris. However that four year war – a most destructive and bloody war, which took away much of a generation of young men in England, France, and Germany – actually ended seven months earlier when an armistice, or temporary cessation of hostilities, between the Allied Nations and Germany went into effect on the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month. For that reason, November 11, 1918, is regarded as the end of the "war to end all wars." And a year later, President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed November 11<sup>th</sup> as the first commemoration of "Armistice Day", today known as Veteran's Day, with the following words: "To us in America, the reflections of Armistice Day will be filled with solemn pride in the heroism of those who died in the country's service and with gratitude for the victory, both because of the thing from which it has freed us and because of the opportunity it has given America to show her sympathy with peace and justice in the councils of nations." And so it was – a day to remember and honor our war dead and a day to recognize our military achievement – victory – but also a day to reinforce our values of freedom and liberty.

Here we are 90 years later to the day, and nearly to the very hour. The 'war to end all wars' was anything but – World War II, Korea, the Cold War, Vietnam, the Gulf War, and now today Iraq and Afghanistan. Tens of thousands of American Soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen have paid the ultimate price in those wars. But today let us not debate the right or the wrong of those wars – today let us agree we owe them a debt we can never fully repay. At each and every Veteran's Day we renew a compact with those who died for us and for those who served and came home to us. It is a day of celebration to honor America's veterans, living and dead, for their patriotism, for their love of country, and for their willingness to serve and sacrifice for the common good.

But for me personally, it is sometimes difficult to celebrate in that traditional way, with parades and pomp and circumstance as solemn as it might be. Not because I honor any less the noble cause for which I honorably fought as a young man 40 years ago in Vietnam. No, it is because when I go to Arlington National Cemetery or the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the National Mall, I recall some other words of President Reagan. I sometimes hear the “whispering voices that pass gently through the surrounding trees” and a chill wind comes over me as I cast my gaze over the garden of stone or the wall with the 58,000 plus names of my fallen comrades. It is not an easy moment for me. I stand still. I am quiet. I am at peace as they are finally. But the whispers come out and they speak to me of their heroism and their bravery and of their gift to me and to us. I hear them. I know “how much we owe them, how much they’ve given us and how much we can never fully repay,” And slowly I salute and silently I pray that the country loves them as much as I do. At a distance, a lone bugler plays Taps. It is a call that beckons us to remember patriots who served our country with honor and valor. It is the most familiar of calls and one that rightly reaches our deepest emotions. We heard it again mournfully at Ft Hood yesterday.

So it is Veteran’s Day today and I ask you to remember the sacrifices of our Armed Forces and to recognize their achievements, and in your daily lives to reinforce the values for which they died: freedom and liberty. I am not asking you to serve your country in uniform as I did and as LT Cowherd did, although it is a most noble duty. But, I am asking you to serve your country some day, pay down that debt somehow, to those who went before you. Thank you and God bless.