



THE AMERICAN LEGION
Veterans Strengthening America

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

PO BOX 1055, INDIANAPOLIS, IN, 46206-1055 • WWW.LEGION.ORG • P: (317) 630-1350 • F: (317) 630-1223

Suggested Remarks for Veterans Day 2026

The American Legion National Headquarters
Media & Communications
P.O. Box 1055
Indianapolis, IN 46206
(317) 630-1298
magazine@legion.org

Veterans, family members and supporters of our military,
Today we gather to honor the defenders of freedom. Too often we look to professional sports or Hollywood productions in search for heroes. Yet a much greater case can be made that it is a next-door neighbor, business acquaintance or distant relative who has exhibited the traits most associated with genuine heroism.

One of those quiet heroes is Royce Williams.

For most of his life, few Americans had heard his name. But on November 18, 1952, then-Lieutenant Williams accomplished one of the most courageous feats in our nation's military history. While flying an F9F Panther on a combat patrol mission near North Korea, the naval aviator encountered a formation of seven Soviet-built MiG-15 fighter jets.

For more than thirty minutes, he fought against faster, more powerful and superior aircraft. By the end of the battle, he had shot down four enemy fighters in what has been described as the longest aerial dogfight in United States military history.

His own aircraft returned riddled with damage, but he was able to land it safely aboard a carrier.

Because the Soviet Union's involvement in the Korean War was classified at the time, the future Navy captain was ordered to keep the battle secret.

Decades later, after classified records were released and historians pieced together the facts, Americans finally learned his full story. The passage of time did not diminish the courage. It simply reminded us that heroism does not depend on recognition.

In 2026, Royce Williams received the Medal of Honor, our nation's highest military award for valor. It was long overdue.

True heroism is doing the right thing when duty calls, whether anyone knows about it or not.

In many ways, Royce Williams represents the very spirit of Veterans Day.

Most veterans do not return home looking for recognition. Most simply return to being citizens.

Some actually *do* become famous, such as Audie Murphy.

At just 19 years old, Murphy landed in Europe as an infantryman during World War II. By war's end, he had become the most decorated American combat soldier of the conflict. His awards included the Medal of Honor, Distinguished Service Cross, two Silver Stars, the Legion of Merit, two Bronze Stars, and three Purple Hearts.

But what made Audie Murphy remarkable was not the number of medals on his uniform. It was what he did when everything was on the line.

Like many veterans, he came home carrying invisible wounds. Long before terms such as PTSD entered the American vocabulary, Murphy openly discussed the challenges faced by combat veterans. Instead of suffering in silence, he used his fame to advocate for those who had served.

In many ways, Audie Murphy's greatest legacy was not how he fought in war, but how he continued serving veterans in peace.

After experiencing war in real life, Audie Murphy re-enacted his service by portraying himself in the aptly titled film “To Hell and Back.”

While no simulation can replace the dangers and horrors of combat, it is up to veterans to bear witness and fulfill The American Legion's promise to “preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in all wars.”

Diane Carlson Evans took her role as a witness and preservation of history seriously. Raised on a Minnesota dairy farm, she joined the Army Nurse Corps and volunteered for Vietnam.

Beginning in 1968, she cared for the wounded as a surgical and burn nurse at the 36th Evacuation Hospital in Vung Tau and later served as head nurse in a surgical unit at the 71st Evacuation Hospital in Pleiku.

She treated the casualties of war. Then, years later, she took on another mission: making sure the women who served were not forgotten.

As the founder of the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project. Diane led the long effort to place a memorial to those women beside their brothers-in-arms at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington. The American Legion backed that effort, and on Veterans Day 1993, the Vietnam Women's Memorial was dedicated on the National Mall.

A member of American Legion Post 2 in Helena, Montana, Diane Carlson Evans received The American Legion's Patriot Award and Distinguished Service Medal for that work. On May 20, 2026, at age 79, Diane transferred to what The American Legion refers to as “Post Everlasting.”

Her life reminds us that service does not always end when the uniform comes off. Sometimes the next mission is to make certain that those who served beside us are seen, remembered and honored.

Originally known as Armistice Day, November 11th was the day chosen to honor veterans because it marked the end of World War I. Though the guns went silent at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918, the peace was temporary and the world would once again be at war a generation later.

Especially between conflicts, Americans are wise to remember George Washington's first annual message to Congress in which he stated, - quote – “To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace,” – unquote.

Not all veterans have seen combat. Many have never been to a war zone. Yet since the founding of the United States, an estimated 50 million men and women swore an oath upon entering the military that they would be willing to die in defense of their country.

Memorial Day is about honoring veterans who never made it home.

Veterans Day is about honoring those who did.

Whether it's thanking a veteran, hiring one or supporting a veteran-owned business, there are many ways we can show our appreciation.

Most important, as we observe Veterans Day 2026, let us remember that freedom is neither automatic nor self-sustaining.

Every generation must be willing to defend it.

The veterans we honor today answered that call. Our military members are at risk daily in places such as the Middle East and other global hotspots.

Audie Murphy once said, “The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him.”

That spirit has guided generations of American veterans. It guides the men and women who defend us today.

Let us always remember them.

Thank you, God Bless America, and God Bless our Veterans.