Today we celebrate Veteran's Day. I am delighted to be with you -- for today I am with family. For we are each uniquely connected by our shared memories, our shared service and our shared commitment to our country. To us, this is not a day off of work. It is not a big sale at the Mall or an excuse to go to the beach. It is solemn occasion, a day set aside for memories and reflection and prayer.

I served in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. (fill in personal experience here, try to express in approximately 200 words)

I will never forget this time. I cannot forget the names or the faces of those who served with me just as you cannot forget your unit, your squadron, or your shipmates. These are the ties that bind. The friendships that were forged through adversity and memories stay in our hearts and minds for the rest of our lives.

And some of these memories are of sad times. I remember watching the movie, the Sixth Sense – when the little boy said to Bruce Willis "I see dead people." Well, we all share in that understanding for so many of our friends did not come back home. They did not return to their see their mothers or fathers or wives or their children. They did not come home to build a house or go back to school or start a new career after their time in military service. They did not get to see their American Flag wave proudly against a blue sky as we can see today. They will not march in today's parade or go to today's picnic. But they will not be forgotten.

Remembrance is the essence of the Veteran's Day celebration. Remembering the good times, the jokes and the laughs. Remembering the screw-ups in training or the close calls on leave. Remembering our shipmates on the morning of their last day -- when we shared in the same anxiety, in the same anticipation and in the same commitment to win. And, of course, remembering the feeling of shared loss and grief when they remained and we returned home. Remembering their families when they received the news and remembering the stoic faces at their gravesite.

War is serious business. War is real. It has real costs and real impact on all who serve. As fellow veterans you know this. As fellow veterans we share the same memories and feelings and understand much which does not need to be said.

So we must direct our words to those that do not have our same experience. We must celebrate Veteran's Day by telling our stories and sharing our history. With each shared memory, we honor our lost friends

For thousands of years history was told at the campfire, at the tavern or town square through story-tellers. They would memorize hours of passages –from the epic poems of the ancient Greeks to the bards of Elizabethan England, heroes were honored because they stories were told and retold and told again. Today we have the History channel and scores of magazines and other publications that recount or report events. But no matter how well they are done, nothing is as valid, is an impacting or better received than the first hand knowledge of someone who was there. So I encourage friends and neighbors and most of all your families to ask for your story. And I encourage you to share it.

There are other ways of sharing our experiences and honoring our fellow veterans. If you haven't personally visited the many war memorials in our nation, you should consider doing so. In Washington DC we have many of the national memorials and monuments that reflect our history and commemorate those who served.

So I'd like to take you on a tour with me – a virtual tour – and visit the many war memorials that honor our veterans. Perhaps by visiting these places even though it will be through my words and descriptions, that each of you will have a better understand the importance of this Veteran's Day.

First stop, the newest monument to veterans -- the WWII memorial. As I hope you know the WWII memorial is on the Mall in Washington DC and was dedicated on May 29th of this year. It is placed between the Lincoln Memorial and The Washington Memorial. On what is known as the Announcement Stone the message of the WWII Memorial reads as follows.

HERE IN THE PRESENCE OF WASHINGTON AND LINCOLN, ONE THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY FATHER AND THE OTHER THE NINETEENTH CENTURY PRESERVER OF OUR NATION, WE HONOR THOSE TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICANS WHO TOOK UP THE STRUGGLE DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND MADE THE SACRIFICES TO PERPETUATE THE GIFT OUR FOREFATHERS ENTRUSTED TO US: A NATION CONCEIVED IN LIBERTY AND JUSTICE.

On flagpoles, the following is carved:

AMERICANS CAME TO LIBERATE, NOT TO CONQUER, TO RESTORE FREEDOM AND TO END TYRANNY

These messages will live for eternity for it was this "Greatest Generation" who literally saved the world. Over 16 million came from farms, from small towns, from large cities, they came to "join up" and fight. They fought on islands in the Pacific and in villages in Europe. They fought in the desert, in the skies and on mountains throughout the world. And over 400,000 died. The veterans of WWII waited a long time for their legacy to be honored. And the memorial accomplishes the task.

It also honors many who served in specific events or specific roles. These include Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, with the very famous quote from President Franklin Roosevelt, which reads:

A DATE WHICH WILL LIVE IN INFAMY…NO MATTER HOW LONG IT MAY TAKE US TO OVERCOME THIS PREMEDITATED INVASION, THE AMERICAN PEOPLE, IN THEIR RIGHTEOUS MIGHT, WILL WIN THROUGH TO ABSOLUTE VICTORY.

Many women left their homes to serve on the factory floor, as Rosie the Riveter became the battle cry for housewives to become factory workers. They too are honored with the following:

"WOMEN WHO STEPPED UP WERE MEASURED AS CITIZENS OF THE NATION, NOT AS WOMEN…THIS WAS A PEOPLE'S WAR, AND EVERYONE WAS IN IT. " quote of Colonel Oveta Culp Hobby

To those who fought in the battle of Midway – the battle that turned the tide of war in the Pacific, the following words are dedicated:

"THEY HAD NO RIGHT TO WIN. YET THEY DID, AND IN DOING SO THEY CHANGED THE COURSE OF A WAR…EVEN AGAINST THE GREATEST OF ODDS, THERE IS SOMETHING IN THE HUMAN SPIRIT – A MAGIC BLEND OF SKILL, FAITH AND VALOR – THAT CAN LIFT MEN FROM CERTAIN DEFEAT TO INCREDIBLE VICTORY. Quote by Walter Lord, Author

And lastly of D-DAY, the final battle. The words of General George C.Marshall are as follows:

"WE ARE DETERMINED THAT BEFORE THE SUN SETS ON THIS TERRIBLE STRUGGLE OUR FLAG WILL BE RECOGNIZED THROUGHOUT THE WORLD AS A SYMBOL OF FREEDOM ON THE ONE HAND AND OF OVERWHELMING FORCE ON THE OTHER."

The Korean War Memorial is placed to the left of the Lincoln Memorial. Larger than life size bronze statues of a patrol appear in the field, weary, cold and wet with rifles at their sides, and their boots seeming to sink in the mud. The statues depicting fighting men on patrol represent the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force working together for a common goal - victory. A polished granite mural of over two thousand sandblasted photographs seems to gaze at the patrol.

These images honor the supporting services that provided supply, medical, spiritual, and fire support to the frontline units. On the opposite wall, the United Nations wall, lists the countries that provided troops, medical support, or supplies to help South Korea. These were: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Columbia, Denmark, Ethiopia, France, Greece, India, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, Republic of Korea, South Africa, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, United Kingdom, and the United States of America. All point toward the Pool of Remembrance where the sacrifice of 54,246 American lives can be contemplated. It is here where an inscription summarizes the true meaning of the memorial:

"OUR NATION HONORS HER SONS AND DAUGHTERS WHO ANSWERED THE CALL

TO DEFEND A COUNTRY THEY NEVER KNEW AND A PEOPLE THEY NEVER MET."

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is the most visited of all landmarks in Washington DC. It consists of three main elements. The Wall, the first part of the memorial to be erected, was dedicated November 13, 1982. There are 58,235 names inscribed on the wall including the names of deceased and missing. The goal of the memorial was to allow all people to reflect on the price of war and to honor those who served. In the fall of 1984, the Three Servicemen Statue, by Fredrick Hart, was placed near the wall. The Vietnam Women's Memorial rounds out the memorial. Designed by Glenna Goodacre, the statue honors all women who served in Vietnam. The Women's Memorial was dedicated on Veterans Day, 1993.

The Marine Corps Memorial honors those Marines who have given their lives in defense of our country since 1775. It is also known as the Iwo Jima Memorial as the statue shows a group of Marines raising the American flag atop Mount Suribachi during the invasion of Iwo Jima in February 1945. The memorial was a replica of the famous picture taken by Joe Rosenthal and was dedicated by President Eisenhower in 1954.

Of course I have to also mention the US Navy Memorial and Naval Heritage Center are located on Pennsylvania Avenue. It was authorized in 1980 by President Carter, himself a former Naval officer, and was dedicated on October 13, 1987. The plaza has a mast and the statue of the Lone Sailor, honoring the men and women who have served in the Navy.

And last, the ultimate symbol to honor our veterans is the Arlington National Cemetery. Overlooking Washington DC, it houses the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the gravesite of President John F. Kennedy, Arlington House and various memorials as well as being the final resting place of honorably discharged members of the armed services. There are 268,000 persons buried at Arlington, among them Presidents, great national leaders, astronauts and Supreme Court justices.

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is guarded around the clock by specially selected members of the US Army 3rd Infantry Regiment (the "Old Guard") based at Fort Myer, Virginia. The changing of the guard occurs every hour during winter and at night and every half hour in summer and during the day. The Tomb has an Unknown Soldier from each of the major wars the US has been a part of in this century: World Wars I and II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. The Unknown Soldier from World War I, the first to be buried at the Tomb of the Unknown, was interred in 1921 after lying in state in the Capitol Rotunda. The Unknown Soldier from the Vietnam War was disinterred in 1998 when DNA tests proved his identity and the decision was made that the crypt with the remains of the Vietnam Unknown would remain empty.

One of the newer additions at Arlington honors the often-untold role of women in the military services throughout our nations' history. So many moving examples can be found in the special courage of the women who served during the Vietnam War, though they have by no means been the only ones.

The war memorials reflect our need to say thanks – and often to say goodbye. Many veterans never got a chance to say goodbye to buddies over there. Many of us had a family member or friend who on behalf of our service. These monuments, our celebration of Veteran's Day commemorate and honor our service men and women. We are reminded of the human costs of war. I’ll close today with two powerful quotes that seem to best summarize the reason be our celebration today. Let me start with President Harry Truman who said:

OUR DEBT TO THE HEROIC MEN AND VALIANT WOMEN IN THE SERVICE OF OUR COUNTRY CAN NEVER BE REPAID. THEY HAVE EARNED OUR UNDYING GRATITUDE. AMERICA WILL NEVER FORGET THEIR SACRIFICES.

And from Admiral Chester W Nimitz.

THEY FOUGHT TOGETHER AS BROTHERS-IN-ARMS.

THEY DIED TOGETHER AND NOW THEY SLEEP SIDE BY SIDE.

TO THEM WE HAVE A SOLEMN OBLIGATION.