



Veterans Day 2016

I want to take this opportunity to share a few thoughts with you as we enter the holiday season. Veterans Day is nearly upon us and the significance of that day is something upon which we should reflect. It is on this occasion that we honor the hard work and sacrifices of those who came before us, and recognize what they have done to promote the principles of peace and freedom.

100 years ago humanity was embroiled in World War I, which at that time was known as "The Great War." The level of misery and destruction experienced in that conflict was something never seen in human history. The end of that war was marked by an armistice and a cease fire that started on the eleventh hour, of the eleventh day, of the eleventh month of 1918. Soon after the end of the war, the western nations of the world made November 11th a holiday in recognition of those who had sacrificed in that conflict. Some nations called it "Armistice Day," some called it "Remembrance Day," and in the United States it is referred to as "Veterans Day," where we honor not only those who fought in the First World War, but pay homage to all veterans who have served.

Most of you know that we are here today as a direct result of our involvement in the Korean War that was fought from 1950-1953. As many of you are aware, our nation lost over 38,000 lives in the defense of Korea, and another 8,000 are Missing in Action to this very day. But there are many others who have fought and died here since 1953. For example, from 1966 to 1969 there were flare ups along the DMZ in what was dubbed "The Second Korean War." South Korean and American servicemembers fought and died intermittently for three years in scores of skirmishes and ambushes. All told, there were over 1,000 ROK and US casualties.

On August 18th, 1976 Captain Arthur Bonifas and Lieutenant Mark Barrett led a tree-cutting detail in the Demilitarized Zone near the famous "Bridge of No Return." On that day they were mobbed by North Korean soldiers and brutally murdered. Killed for no other reason than they were removing a tree that was blocking an observation post.



On November 23rd, 1984 a Soviet citizen by the name of Vasily Matusak was on a tour of the Joint Security Area in North Korea. When he got close enough to the South Korean side of the border, he bolted for freedom, and his defection triggered a forty-minute long firefight in the JSA between the North Korean border guards and ROK/US personnel. Three North Koreans were killed; and one KATUSA—Corporal Jang Myung Ki—lost his life as well. PFC Michael Burgoyne was wounded, but ultimately survived the incident.

It is events like this that serve as a reminder that peace here in Korea is fragile, and we may be called upon at any time to fight and defend this nation. It also highlights the continued sacrifice made by members of our alliance and the reason why Veterans Day is still relevant especially for those serving here.

Over these past few months, we've celebrated Chuseok, and Canadian Thanksgiving. We celebrated the birthdays of all of our military services and the 38th anniversary of the Combined Forces Command. And Veterans Day marks the beginning of the American holiday season with Thanksgiving right around the corner. It is a time of celebration, family and fellowship and one that I want everyone to enjoy.

For many of you, this is your first time in Korea and I want you to make the most of your experience in this wonderful country. Most people never get the chance to experience Asian culture and to see it first hand, so I encourage you to get out and see the sights, taste the food, and above all, make some new Korean friends. There is much to see and do here so don't miss out.

Most importantly, don't forget about taking the time to connect with other people. Be sure to call, text or video chat with your loved ones back home and let them know how you are doing, and that they are in your thoughts. Link up with your battle buddies and venture out to see some of the tourist attractions and visit some of the local restaurants. Don't be intimidated by the language barrier, just get out there and do your best; it's all part of the experience of serving overseas. If you're here with family, take a journey together and spend time with them. Don't squander your time cooped up in your rooms; get together with people and see what this country has to offer. Your tour here in Korea



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can be an enriching life experience that you will cherish forever and you will see why those of us who have served here before have such affection for Korea and the Korean people. You just have to get together with people and seize the opportunity.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge all of you and the terrific work that you do, keeping this alliance strong and defending the people of Korea and our national interests. The miracle of South Korea's growth is in no small part due to your dedicated and faithful service. Your contribution, in whatever capacity you serve, is absolutely critical to the success of our collective mission and I appreciate everything that you do. The history of this alliance is written in lonely guard posts, on negotiation tables, in tedious planning sessions and grueling training exercises. You are part of that history.

Remember, you make history by just doing your duty each and every day. So I want to thank you for making history. Thank you for serving here, and now. Have a safe and enjoyable Veterans Day and Thanksgiving holiday. We go together!



VINCENT K. BROOKS
General, U.S. Army
Commander



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