



**Cresson American Legion
November 9, 2013
Keynote Remarks
Tom Foley, President of Mount Aloysius College**

Thank you for that generous introduction, Commander Eberhart. Michele and I are grateful to be with you and your colleagues on this Day of Remembrance.

First, let me thank you for the example of good citizenship that you in the American Legion represent in our Cresson community and in so many communities across America. There is hardly a family in this country that has not benefitted in some way from the American Legion,

- as *student recipients* of the thousands of scholarships you finance every year
- as *youth baseball players* in the hundreds of leagues you sponsor every year
- as *wounded warriors* in the dozens of Hometowns for Heroes you support every year
- as *military families* whose sacrifices you re-dedicate on the wall outside Post 238 every year and
- as *active duty soldiers* whose service you celebrate on this day every year.

I remember that there was no higher honor at eighth grade graduation than winning the American Legion Medal, one for the boys and one for the girls. You can laugh when I tell you that that medal was one of the things Michele and I discovered we had in common, and we both still have the medals that came with that honor.

One of our sons received an American Legion scholarship, two of our boys played Legion baseball, and at least half of my 11 brothers and sisters wore the team jersey of the William Boulton Dixon Post 10 at some point in their athletic careers.

I myself had an absolutely wonderful experience with the American Legion through its oratorical contest. I was escorted around the state by a Glenside Post 248 Legionnaire with a name exactly opposite his personality—Mr. Colflesh. The name suited his profession (undertaker), but not his heart. In my day, the first prize for the state winner was a full scholarship to one of four Pennsylvania universities, and Mr. Colflesh was determined that I would win, if it was the last thing he ever did. And you know it almost was. He died of throat cancer within a year of our last cross state trip together, and his wife told me at his funeral that it had been his goal to last long enough to see me get that scholarship. Thank you, Mr. Colflesh. I am with your brothers and sisters in this Legion hall tonight.

So first, tonight, thank you for your example of good citizenship, and for allowing so many Foleys the benefit of your good works.

Second, at Mount Aloysius we try to model your example of good citizenship. We are in the midst of an all-campus, yearlong campaign focused on “21st Century Citizenship: The Common Good.” We have had four campus speakers on the subject to date (with four more due in the spring); we built orientation of new students around the citizenship theme with skits and small group discussions; even our on-campus child care center gets into the act, with lessons on citizenship tailor made for pre-schoolers (from a coloring book called *The Color of Us*, which teaches little people the meaning of “citizens”—family and friends, the police, our military, our teachers, etc.).

We also try to practice at Mount Aloysius what you preach at this Post, service to community. We want our students to be active-duty citizens wherever they choose to build their lives. Last year, over 900 Mount Aloysius students volunteered almost 13,000 hours in service to their home communities on 366 projects with 217 different community partners. They volunteer at Cresson Heritage Days, they dance at Senior Center proms in Ebensburg and Clearfield, they refill food banks in Johnstown and Philadelphia, and they spend their winter and spring breaks in places like Guyana and Biloxi, China and Dublin, places where our students bring help and hope one person at a time.

Our Mount Aloysius team works hard to follow your example in the treatment of our veterans as well. We have been named a Military Friendly School every year since that honor became available and declared a Yellow Ribbon School ever since the GI Education Enhancement Program passed in 2008. The *Military Times* named Mount Aloysius a “Best for Vets” School three times since 2010; we have a Military Service Members Club and a chapter of Student Veterans of America, both founded last year. On Monday, we will host our Mount Aloysius Veterans lunch, where I will be joined by the Dean of our Nursing Division, a career Navy nurse, and by the chair emeritus of our English Department, an Air Force veteran of the Vietnam War. On Tuesday, a delegation of Mount Aloysius veterans will raise the flag for the first time at our new Athletic Convocation and Wellness Center, and the leader of our student veterans (Amber Lenhard) will sing the national anthem for us. At least in part due to these and other initiatives, the number of veterans at Mount Aloysius has increased by 46% since 2004—69 on campus this fall, with 11 more starting in January.

So secondly, thank you for providing a model of good citizenship that we can emulate at Mount Aloysius—in the classroom, in our campus activities with veterans and by our service to community.

Lastly, I want to thank you for the opportunity to be here among you tonight and to remember and honor my family’s story.

Almost 75 years ago, my Irish grandmother, Nellie Loftus Foley, sent three of her four sons off to fight in what President Roosevelt called the "War for the Four Freedoms." My father, the baby of the family, recalls that it was not an easy parting for my grandmother.

My uncles' letters home—which my father passed on to me a few years ago—gave more evidence of that. Her sons wrote to her with reassurances and with pride, and clearly hoped that their optimism and their clear sense of duty and of mission would ease her sorrow, and her fear about what might happen to them.

She had left Ireland — a country whose history is full of heroic battles, patriotic songs and lost wars — thinking she had left all that sorrow and fear behind. For centuries, the Ireland of my grandparents' birth was a place where, as one Dublin street ballad puts it,

"we fight like devils for conciliation,
and hate each other for the love of God."

I spent two years as a volunteer with a Nobel Prize winning peace group in Belfast, and experienced firsthand the anguish that my grandmother thought she had left behind. In one month—at a time when I still recorded such things, the following happened:

- A 17 year old boy was shot dead by the British Army, for joyriding in someone else's car.
- A police officer was shot and killed by his own co-religionists, on the steps of a church where he had just attended Mass.
- A prison officer was murdered on his way to church. Again by his own. And in sight of his screaming young family.
- Three young Provisional IRA men traveling in Spain were killed in an ambush by the British Army.
- A 24-year old man, the father of three infants, was shot dead in the head, within hours of the ambush, again by his own, on the charge that he was "an informer".
- And nine policemen were murdered in a mortar attack, as they sat in a heavily barricaded police station, enjoying their cups of tea between shifts.

I did not serve in a war, but I lived two years in the middle of one. And with all of that, I had some sense of what my grandmother thought she had left behind. The difference from my grandmothers' time was only in the precision of the killings. Open streets and automatic weaponry will do that for you.

Almost 70 years ago, she got a letter. It said that one of her sons had died a hero on a hillside in Italy, and it told her when to expect the body. Two medals came later, a purple heart and a silver star.

He was her favorite and my father's idol. He was a handy athlete, a handsome lad, a high school graduate, maybe a future leader. My father named one of his sons for his beloved brother. That was me.

Twenty six years ago, Michele and I had our first son. Our no longer “little guy” carries the name of Staff Sergeant Thomas Patrick Foley, killed in action —September 22, 1944.

Shortly after his birth, my father appeared on our doorstep with Uncle Tom's medals, his letters, and that final letter. These were a legacy, like the name Thomas Patrick is a legacy. There are no earthly riches that go with that name, no inheritance waiting for its bearer. But the name and the medals represent a greater legacy that we pass from father to son to grandson.

I told you this story on Veterans Day because I hoped that it would remind you of the 100 stories that are in this room tonight—your own uncles, your father, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, and buddies whose heroism, though so often anonymous, is no less appreciated by all of us in this room tonight.

On Veterans Day, it is our duty to remember—to remember each and every story in this room tonight, and to remember the stories engraved on the wall outside—because it is our responsibility to recognize what war is all about. War is about winning and losing. Someone wins and someone loses. War is also about how even as we win, we are leaving behind—losing—a part of ourselves. General Schwarzkopf—who led us in the Persian Gulf War and who died this year—said it best, and I quote:

“War is profanity. It really is. It’s terrifying. And nobody is more anti-war than an intelligent person who’s been to war.”

He said those words after leading our troops in the most modern of military battles, where a single computer targeted scud missile could take out a thousand lives. I don’t think his message would have been any different after any war, anywhere. Siegfried Sassoon, a World War I infantryman who won the Military Cross and was named a Commander of the British Empire (CBE), was also celebrated poet.

His writing puts to verse General Schwarzkopf’s sentiments. In his poem *Dreamers*, he wrote

Soldiers are citizens of death's grey land,
Drawing no dividend from time's to-morrows.
In the great hour of destiny they stand,
Each with his feuds, and jealousies, and sorrows.

And later, the poet says that

Soldiers are dreamers; when the guns begin
They think of firelit homes, clean beds and wives.

And finally, the poet imagines soldiers

Dreaming of things they did with balls and bats,
And mocked by hopeless longing to regain
Bank-holidays, and picture shows, and spats,
And going to the office in the train.

We are here today as a community at least in part because we know that General Schwarzkopf is right. We who pass in front of that memorial outside, who put our fingers in the crevices of their names, we sense what war is. We know, thru the struggles and the heroism of our lost loved ones, that war is often the maximum sacrifice, the ultimate test and penalty for a nation, a people, a community, a family, a man or a woman.

So on this Veterans Day, we celebrate two memories. One is the memory of the glory that our heroes brought home to us—the magnificence of victories quickly won, of battles hard fought, of duties done to the last. The other is the memory of what war is—death and destruction, here and overseas.

Today, we remember the first—the glory— because we want to give thanks to those who put their lives on the line for us. And we choose not to forget the second—the loss that Schwarzkopf and Sassoon described, almost a century apart— because none of us wants the honor roll of war dead to get one line longer.

Thank you for honoring Michele and I with this invitation to be with you tonight. We will do our best to follow your example at Mount Aloysius, and to match our deeds to the example of those who went before us.