

Anticipate giving the following VIP Acknowledgements and Thank you's:

Bill Davies
~~Congressman LaHood; Congresswoman Bustos; Reverend DeLoatch (De~~
~~LOESCH),~~ thank you for the wonderful invocation; ~~City of Peoria Mayor Ardis;~~
Mr Steve Sonnemaker, Peoria County Clerk--thank you for all the hard work
you've done to add what I'm sure will be a wonderful addition to the memorials
we see here today; *Medal of Honor Recipient Lt Col Hal Fritz* ~~Colonel Robertson;~~ a very warm "Thank you" to Ms Carol
VanWinkle, Peoria County Auditor, for inviting me to speak to all of you today.
City Councilman Eric Chatter Turner
Thank you Roger Monroe for the fabulous introduction. I want to extend a warm
welcome to the leaders of the many Veterans' groups present. Immense thanks to
my fellow citizens who came to observe Memorial Day here with us today. And a
very special thanks to my wife and my children: Thank you for your support, I'm
grateful you came along on this amazing journey. Finally I want to offer a
heartfelt "Thank you" to my friends Gary and Connie Patriquin, *and Daniel Patriquin* who are in the
audience today. There is nothing I can do to express what it means *us that* to you are here
with us on this solemn day.

Today is the 150th anniversary of Memorial Day. Words cannot express the magnitude of the honor it is for me to be able to speak to you today. The message I will deliver to you today is especially meaningful to me because after 21 years of service this will be my final official act wearing the uniform of an Airman of the United States Air Force in service to my country and to the State of Illinois. I would like to offer this message as a special thank you to those with whom I served and I dedicate it to the memory of my friends. Consider me the humble herald of those upon whose mighty shoulders I stand. In a few moments I will relate the stories of a handful of my heroes. These were men who I knew; men who I worked with; men with whom I broke bread; men whose memories I honor; friends I will not see again in this lifetime. These personal friends are now memories. They rest now, enshrined in eternal heroism with Peoria Counties' own honored fallen heroes. Among the names etched in granite here before us and among other memorials around Central Illinois you can find the names Lieutenant Richard Gienau, Sergeant Eric Pearrow, Sergeant Mark Simpson, Sergeant Paul *Smith*

Smith, Private First Class Gregory Goodrick; and the Peoria Air National Guard's own Staff Sergeant Jacob Frazier.

While it is critically important for us, the living, to speak words of praise of those who, in the immortal words of Abraham Lincoln, gave their last full measure of devotion; we must also remember Lincoln's caution that "The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here." As we speak of and remember our honored fallen, we must also remember that mere words will never adequately describe properly the meaning of the deeds of the fallen and their meaning to each of us. In some sense we will never be able to say enough in honor of the dead.

Instead of using only words, it may be useful for us to borrow the imagery from the movie *Saving Private Ryan*. Think of ourselves as if we were briefly transported to a windswept green cemetery in Normandy, France. Perhaps if we put ourselves in the place of the fictional survivor James Ryan, we can imagine ourselves standing before the memorial markers of the men whose sacrifice let us go on to live a life in freedom. Perhaps we too can hear the echo in our minds of

Captain John Miller's admonition to Ryan to ~~"Earn this"~~ as Miller's life ebbed and darkness covered his eyes. If we too can turn to our friends and loved ones and each honestly answer ^{Ryan's} the question "Am I a good person" in the affirmative, and go forth from this place rededicated in our hearts to summon the discipline to live lives of meaning and goodness, we too shall have done the best we can to earn the freedom purchased for us by the men whose names are etched into the monument before us, by the sacrifices of Peoria County's heroes, by the sacrifices of my departed friends.

I want to take a moment to make an important note about the families of all of us who have served. A family sent each of these men away on a journey. A family feels many different emotions at their loved ones' departures. They undoubtedly felt immense pride that their child or their spouse had accepted responsibility not only for themselves, but also for something greater than themselves. The families felt a twinge of sorrow that sometimes went unexpressed as they dwelt briefly on the vast unknown they sent that son or daughter, husband

or wife toward. They felt that unwelcome sense of dread that as they stood there at the seaport or airport, train station or curb, that there was a chance, however small, of the unthinkable happening, and that that parting might be very final; that that may be the final day, hour, minute, and second that they ever see their beloved again. As I tell you about my friends, remember as you share my sorrow the grief borne by the families of these heroes. Keep them in your thoughts, keep them in your prayers.

I will tell you now of four of my friends, two of whom were brother F-16 pilots, and two of whom were brother Army soldiers. The first of these friends will be Major David Brodeur.

Maj David L "Klepto" Brodeur

I met David at Luke Air Force Base in Arizona in 2006. David was an F-16 instructor pilot; a pilot who taught students who were new to the jet how to fly it; or in my case, re-taught students who'd been out of the jet how to remember how

to fly it. He flew with me at least once that I remember. He briefed a training flight ~~one day~~, one of the more challenging types of flights for students who hadn't flown for some time. He then had to monitor my flying from the back seat of what we referred to as a "Family model," or a two-seat F-16D. You will be happy to know that David was such a good instructor that he never had to touch the controls of the jet that day, his explanation had been thorough; the training mission succeeded, and we both congratulated and thanked each other at the end of the flight after the manner of fighter pilots everywhere. We had formed the bond that each of us do who share the ordinary, everyday perils of flying high performance fighter jets. That carefree, easy bond of friendship showed occasionally in subsequent weeks: A "Hello" and high-five in the hallway; a quick question-and-answer regarding a long-forgotten tactical problem; a congratulation after other successful missions; or a tidbit about teaching mortals how to tame 27 tons of aluminum, steel, and fire.

The days in requalification training went by quickly, and soon David and the other instructors said their farewells to my class. My classmates and I moved onward to our new squadrons. I ran into David just one more time at my new base in northern Japan. We were pleased to see each other, and at the end of another all-too-brief conversation, we said to one another "See you around!" as we all do, as we always do.

Then one day in late April 2011 I watched a news report that on the 27th an Afghan pilot who had been in a training program at Kabul International Airport had gone on a berserk shooting rampage, killing twelve Americans. I learned shortly thereafter that my friend David, who had just deployed to Afghanistan from his base in Alaska, had been one of the casualties. My friend David was survived by his wife Susan and two children, Lizzie and David Junior. Today there is a memorial to David in his home town of Auburn, Massachusetts and a Memorial Foundation in his honor that anyone can access via the Internet.

David was not the first of my buddies to fall. The other three I will talk about all made their ultimate sacrifices in 2006. Next I'll tell you about one more air warrior.

Maj Troy L. "Trojan" Gilbert

Major Troy Gilbert was another friend and fellow F-16 pilot. Like David, I met Troy at Luke Air Force Base in early 2006, the day before I was scheduled to fly on the General's wing on a training mission. At that time, Troy worked directly for the Luke's Wing Commander, then-Brigadier General Robin Rand (now the four-star commander of Air Force Global Strike Command). Troy was a thorough planner and I noted he was very attuned to General Rand's style of flight instruction. I could quickly tell why the General had chosen Troy to be an executive officer. Troy was able to plan every iota of the training mission down to a fraction of a second. Troy also patiently and discreetly explained the updates that had occurred in air combat tactics in the two years I had been out of the jet in my

assignment with the Army. As much as I learned on that day's flight, the highlight of that mission was that I'd gotten to know Troy, a pilot destined to save the lives of several of his fellow Americans.

Troy, like all good Airmen, wanted to be where the action was, and the action in 2006 was in Iraq. On the night of November 27th, 2006, Troy was flying a combat mission supporting soldiers on the ground who were themselves guarding a downed Army helicopter between Baghdad and Fallujah. The soldiers suddenly found themselves taking fire from a pair of insurgents' trucks with machine guns mounted to them. Troy descended from a high altitude until he could see the trucks and attack them. During a second strafing pass, ^{Troy's} ~~his~~ F-16 impacted the ground and Troy was fatally injured in the crash. Troy fell in Iraq supporting my friends and fellow Americans on the ground in harm's way. According to the Armed Forces Journal website, "... [Troy] was a warrior pilot — an airman who died with his boots on."ⁱ Troy was survived by his wife Ginger and their five children. In one of the most poignant comments I've ever seen, an anonymous

commenter at Troy's memorial on the website F-16.net stated, and I quote "Ginger... Thank you, your husband saved my teams' life."ⁱⁱ Troy received a posthumous Distinguished Flying Cross with Valor, and was interred at Arlington National Cemetery; a bridge connecting two halves of Luke Air Force Base was named in his honor.

These were the stories of David and Troy, two of my brother men who flew. Next I want to tell you about two of my friends in the Army who likewise sacrificed their lives.

CPT Jason M West

I met Army Captain Jason West not long after I arrived at the Friedberg Army Installation in Germany to begin my assignment as the Air Force Detachment Commander. Jason was the personnel adjutant, and he was

immensely helpful to me, a young Air Force officer who needed to find various soldiers whose job titles I barely understood. Without Jason's help, I could not have been as effective leading my Battlefield Airmen. Jason did his job very well, and he was on-track for a highly promising career. I noted that Jason was always busy, but never too busy to say "Hello!" He was always friendly and always ready to do what he could to help. He was never too busy to sit down at meals and explain the intricacies of the Army personnel system, even when we were in the middle of one of countless field training exercises. I had no doubt Jason would become a leader of great caliber.

I said my goodbyes to Jason in January 2006 as he deployed to Iraq. ~~Jason was later awarded command of an infantry company.~~ My friend Jason was leading ~~his company during~~ a patrol of Ramadi in July 2006 when his company was attacked by insurgents. My friend Jason was killed in the ensuing firefight. Jason was survived by his wife Juli. Today there are memorials to him in his home town

of Pittsburgh, and he is remembered fondly by his family, ^{and by} his friends, and his
~~"Friedberg Mom" and my friend, Mrs Judy Brown.~~

CPT Travis L Patriquin

Finally, let me tell you a little bit about Army Captain Travis Patriquin. Travis arrived in Friedberg, Germany in 2005 and quickly made friends with his fellow Brigade staff mates plus my very outstanding deputy commanders and me. Travis was the kind of man that all of us just wanted to get to know. My friends and I came to know Travis as a gregarious man who could spin a great tale and could converse easily with anyone. We all got to know him through the earthy banter that characterizes soldiers in the field and we all liked him.

On a personal level, I got to know Travis a just a bit better than most of my other friends on the staff. Perhaps this was because of the shared experience of two native St Louisans who grew up in adjoining neighborhoods in North County having traveled throughout the world and met each other in faraway Europe. Or

perhaps it was that like me, Travis had had disparate experiences that set him apart from the other officers. Or perhaps it was the pang of loss that sharpened my memories of my time with Travis just a little more. In any case, Travis was a warrior. He had the moxie to look for a career that would intentionally put him into harms' way a long way from home with only a handful of his buddies to fight their way in and fight their way out. He had the strength of will, the stamina and guts to join into and succeed in a very challenging career, and the patriotism to love doing his job. As Travis and I said our goodbyes in January 2006, I thought to myself "If anything bad happens to the Brigade, Travis will probably be the last man standing." My foreshadowing was unfortunately wrong.

Many Americans know Travis through the work of his excellent biographer William Doyle, who wrote about him in 2011 in the book *A Soldier's Dream: Captain Travis Patriquin and the Awakening of Iraq*. Perhaps many more know about Travis from the stories about him that have appeared on ABC, CBS, the BBC, or many of the Internet news sites in 2011 at the conclusion of Operation

NEW DAWN and the end of the long Iraq War. If you are familiar with him through these venues, you are aware that his life story read like an epic.

Travis was a quick study in languages, and he used his language and cultural skills to great effect in many parts of the world, including Afghanistan and especially in Iraq's Anbar province. Travis put his understanding of the local culture in Iraq and his Arabic fluency ^{to good use} to engage in effective dialogue with the local Sheiks in Ramadi, explaining the American mission in Iraq to them. The Sheiks, who had become horrified by al Qaeda's increasingly indiscriminant violence, learned that they could trust Travis and the Ready First Combat Team to back them up. Perhaps most famously, Travis put his understanding of military culture and his disdain of PowerPoint together to create a clever PowerPoint presentation of the situation in Anbar using, of all things, stick-figure diagrams!ⁱⁱⁱ This PowerPoint is probably the most famous of the entire war; it was designed to explain to Americans why the Sheiks of Anbar were the key to winning in Anbar

province. His message succeeded beyond his wildest dreams, taking on something of a life of its own while doing the job Travis intended.

On December 6th, 2006, Travis was traveling through Ramadi in a Humvee with Marine Corps Public Affairs officer Major Megan McClung, and a Specialist with whom I was acquainted named Vincent Pomante manning the gun in the turret of the Humvee. The three and their driver were returning to Camp Ramadi from a meeting with Sheik Sattar abu Risha. Travis had become very close friends with Sheik Sattar, and Sheik Sattar was most closely associated with the turn of the tide in Anbar province and was one of the founders of the Anbar Awakening. Travis' Humvee was struck by an improvised explosive device; the driver was injured but survived; Travis, plus Megan and Vincent, were killed as a result of the explosion.

My friend Travis was survived by his wife Amy and their children Emily, Harmon, and Logan. ^{Travis' parents,} *[Mention Gary (father) and Connie (mother), both of Lockport, IL if they attend]*. Travis had become so influential amongst the Sheiks

that Sheik Sattar ensured a police station in Ramadi was named after Travis. I remember with gratitude to the State of Illinois that it flew its flags at half-staff for Travis. A special award for graduates of a key Army school was named after Travis. Travis has been eloquently eulogized by many of his friends, co-workers, and leaders; by the Sheiks of the Anbar province and the Mayor of Tal Afar in Iraq; and by the commanders of the Ready First Combat Team, retired Colonel Peter Mansoor and now-Lieutenant General Sean MacFarland, who is back in Iraq leading the Combined Joint Task Force fighting Da'esh, the so-called Islamic State. General MacFarland stated in his funeral oration "When the history of [Operation IRAQI FREEDOM] is written, [Travis'] contributions will loom very large. And I will personally do all I can to make sure he receives the credit and recognition that he deserves. . . he was the architect of one of the central and perhaps *the* decisive aspect."^{iv} [*Emphasis added*] Today, let one Airman add to that effort as his final act in uniform in memory of a friend.

What do the deaths of these Americans mean in a larger context? What can we learn from them? What will fill our minds as we leave this place?

The most important common thread, the common thread that means the most to the fighting man, the thread that runs through each warrior is that we fight for our comrades. These who died, died fighting for their friends. The United States has had the most remarkable volunteer armed force mankind has ever seen. Everyone in this all-volunteer force signs their name on the proverbial dotted line for multifaceted reasons. But when we arrive at the fight, we fight shoulder-to-shoulder for our friends. We would have it no other way.

It is important for citizens to remember that the most basic thread, the most essential thread of our service is the oath each volunteer takes upon entering service. Regardless of the prime motivation for signing up, we all affirmed an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America. That document, the US Constitution, has done more than anything in human history to codify a social compact between citizens and their government. That document set

out as its vision “To form a more perfect union.” Not “To form a perfect union,” for among mankind there is not nor can there be perfection. The document itself was not perfect at its inception, nor will it ever be completely perfected. But by the genius of the authors, and by countless years of toil in an untold number of political campaigns, and by the blood sacrifices of men such as the ones etched into the monument in this very plaza, Americans have continued to strive to make this a more perfect union. This effort continues to this day, guarded by warriors like my friends.

The continual striving to improve our Republic and to pass on the love of liberty from one generation to the next must continue. I do not believe history is predefined. I do believe humanity’s story arc is driven by the choices and efforts of individuals. I believe that the United States has traditionally been the country that maximized our freedom to work to become our best. I believe that freedom-loving Americans will choose to delve for the universal truth, find the facts, and choose the best course of action based on those facts; Americans will do what is

right and what works. I believe it was America's greatest blessing to the world to flip the notion "Might makes right" into "Right makes might." In her righteous might, I believe Americans have been and can continue to be the city shining on the hill that Ronald Reagan made us believe in. I am very privileged to have served among many heroes that reinforced my belief in the righteousness of America.

In the times of strife when their cause was just and their righteousness waxed, my friends and many others made their ultimate sacrifices. I find myself asking in light of today's technology "Why did my friends have to make that sacrifice?" The painful truth is that until an army of robots armed with nonlethal weapons can march into an adversaries' capital and can coerce them to surrender with no loss of life on any side, we will need men such as these to stand ready, to stand guard, and to be ready at a minute's notice to defend our way of life, to defend the Republic for which we stand. For now, as the philosopher George Santayana observed, "Only the dead have seen the end of war." The ancient words

of the Roman Publius: *Si vis pacem, para bellum* (see wees pakem, para behl-lum) will remain true for the foreseeable future. We will continue to need warriors guarding our freedom and our way of life.

I would like to thank each and every one of you, my fellow citizens, for coming to this memorial. As I now become the “Grey-haired wonder” mentioned in the final verse of the Air Force song and shall henceforth be “Keeping my nose out of the blue,” I will watch with pride as my fellow Airmen carry on in echelon. To my friends across the joint force, I bid you one final *Semper Fi*, *Huah*, and Anchors Aweigh!

To finally conclude, I hope that each day henceforth all of us can look at our friends and our loved ones, and with some remote bit of our memory think back to this 150th anniversary observance of Memorial Day in Peoria County. I hope that we internalize the lessons we take home today from the sacrifices made by our heroes and from my friends. *Earn it!* As we look upon that which we love and

think about those whom we've lost, I hope that we renew our dedication to be the best American citizens we can be. *Earn it!* For the sake of those who are no longer here to remind us: Go forth and join with me in spirit as we do what we can to earn this grace of American citizenship; this birthright these heroes secured for us all. *Earn it!*

Thank you. God bless you! And God bless these United States of America.

ⁱ "To Major Troy Gilbert" in *Armed Forces Journal* at <http://armedforcesjournal.com/to-air-force-maj-troy-gilbert/>. May 1, 2007.

ⁱⁱ Anonymous comment to "In Memoriam, Major Troy L Gilbert" in *F-16.net* at http://www.f-16.net/inmemoriam_tribute142.html.

ⁱⁱⁱ I'd like to think when he created his PowerPoint that somewhere in the back of his mind he remembered my admonition to the Brigade staff during one briefing when my PowerPoint slides failed to load that "For lack of a picture, a thousand words will have to do!" I went on to describe in detail what would have been on my slides, to the horror of COL MacFarland and the staff!

^{iv} Doyle, William, *A Soldier's Dream: Captain Travis Patriquin and the Awakening of Iraq*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2011. Page 258.