

Honored guests, neighbors and friends, welcome to the Bridgewater Martinsville Memorial Day ceremony. Today is one of the most solemn days of remembrance among all of our nation's holidays. Today, we gather to pay tribute to those brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice, giving their lives to secure our nation's freedom.

In October of last year I took the opportunity to visit the Vietnam Wall traveling exhibit at North Branch Park. The wall is an 80% replica of the monument in Washington D.C. which serves to forever remember those who lost their lives in that terrible conflict. It was truly emotional to speak to some of our veterans who returned home to face a country divided upon our involvement in the war. These veterans, as well as veterans today, served honorably and for our protection, they dealt with the savagery of war during their deployments. For many it was difficult to return to civilian life after spending time in the war zone of South Vietnam. That day, I had the privilege to speak with several visitors, some of them my friends. Even though each conversation was unique there were two common themes. Each veteran was grateful for the lives they have led and remembered with reverence their less fortunate comrades who did not return home. Their passion and commitment to their fellow soldier should be the remembrance standard for us all. The exhibit continues its travels around the nation and if you have the opportunity to see the wall I would urge you to do as it is a moving tribute to those who lost their lives in the war.

Each year the Disabled Veterans Organization (DAV) posts a story about a courageous individual whose sacrifice, honor and dedication make him a poignant example of the brave men and women who serve our Country and the sacrifices they make on our behalf. I'm sure many of you have a story you know or might have heard of a courageous soldier. Each is equally important to remember and honor. This year the Disabled Veterans Organization chose the story of a soldier, Marine Sergeant Justin Noyes (No-ize) from Oklahoma, who came home from high school one day and told his mom he'd joined the Marines. He told her he wanted to make a difference. He signed up to be a demolitions expert and deployed with the Explosives Ordnance Company, 1st Marine Logistics Group, of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force Forward at Camp Fallujah, Iraq. As a newlywed on his second deployment, one month shy of his 24th birthday, Justin was disarming one roadside bomb when an unseen second bomb was detonated. He lost his life that day. Today we remember. Thank you, Sergeant Noyes.

While Sergeant Noyes made the ultimate sacrifice, today more and more of our war veterans thankfully are surviving their initial wounds but unfortunately are returning home facing serious difficulties. The wounds

that used to claim lives on the battlefield are now being treated. These once fatal injuries are instead becoming a lasting part of life for so many who return home. The men and women who have sustained serious illness or injury as part of their military service are today fighting their own private fights and deserve our support and prayers.

On behalf of Bridgewater's 44,000 residents I give my thanks and respect to the families of those who have given their lives for our freedom, and appreciate the sacrifice that is yours as well as your loved one. Do we have any families here today who have a loved one serving in the military? (Thank you, we appreciate the sacrifices your family has made.)

The commitment we share in supporting the men and women who comprise our military remains steadfast and true. But as the nature of battle evolves, and our ability to save wounded soldiers increases, the resources needed to meet that commitment grows. So too must our commitment grow to provide the needed resources.

As I was in October, I am today, reminded of a poem by Tennyson – The Charge of the Light Brigade. It is a famous poem calling to mind a soldier's bravery. A few famous lines drive home – "Into the Valley of Death Rode the Six Hundred. Theirs was not to question why, theirs was but to do or die!" But the more important lesser known lines come later in the poem when Tennyson asks "When can their glory fade?" When will they be forgotten?" In the poem he gives no answer. But, for our soldiers, for our fallen warriors, I know the answer. For they are Americans and we are Americans. And, as Americans we will never forget. Their Glory will never fade. We will always remember.

As we depart today let us each take a moment to share our reflections with a friend or relative and by doing so give voice to the great respect we share for those who have died to protect our freedom. I urge you to live each and every day in gratitude for the precious gift they have given to us and paid so dearly for.

May God give peace to our fallen and our veterans. May God bless and protect those who actively serve in our nation's military, and may God grant them safe return home to their friends and loved ones. May God Bless Bridgewater and May God Bless America. Thank you and enjoy your summer.

Mayor Dan Hayes  
Memorial Day 2016