



Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War LTG Taylor's Remarks

Scott, thanks for that kind introduction and I promise to keep my word about not telling any stories today about your teenage years here at Ft Irwin and Silver Valley High School.

General and Mrs. Broadwater, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army Bill Gang and his wife Kathryn, Vietnam veterans and families as well as the veterans of other past and current wars, ladies and gentlemen,

Thanks so much for asking me to join you here today and allowing me to make a few remarks regarding the significance of this event and countless other similar ceremonies that are being conducted across our nation during this period of remembering the heroism and sacrifices of those who served in Vietnam or in support of the Vietnam War. These ceremonies are being conducted in various ways around our country ranging from large formations like today to simple pinning ceremonies at VFW or American Legion Halls. I have had the privilege of participating in many of these and all were unique and a special way to welcome our veterans home.

Needless to say, this is also a special day for me, as I not only get to return to Fort Irwin and the NTC, a place where I have frequently trained and had the opportunity to command for 2 1/2 years, I also get to be with all of you and play a small role in honoring you for your service. Be assured, there is no place I would rather be.

While today may well be the very first welcome home some of you have personally experienced, many of you have been instrumental in organizing similar events for your family members and friends who were returning from our more recent wars. Now, it is finally your turn and it is long overdue and well deserved. Fort Irwin and the NTC have been hosting these recognitions since 2009 and believe me, no one does it better. My congratulations to this great military community for what you have done and continue to do. It is reflective of the inseparable bond between warriors of all generations because we as a collective group have seen things and experienced events that while fought on different terrain are very similar.

This bond between service members who have participated in all of our nations wars is unbreakable and is forged not only in the blood of family relationships which we have many examples of here today, but also in the bonds of service or unit affiliations. As mentioned in my introduction, I served with the First Cavalry Division in Vietnam and seeing that big yellow patch on a hat or jacket immediately identifies a First Cav soldier and quickly launches a conversation regarding shared experiences even though years apart in time. I am sure at your tables today many discussions are already ongoing with your active soldier or marine regarding what military service is like now as compared to when you Vietnam veterans served. Please candidly share your experiences.



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In a more formal sense, similar discussions have gone on after every war in our nation's history and has allowed us to make many advances in our equipment, how we are organized, how we train and how we fight. The National Training Center, where we are located today, is a prime example of how "lessons learned" from Vietnam drove a historic change in how we train. While force on force exercises (red against blue) have been conducted for many years, the realism and fidelity of the NTC, Red Flag and Top Gun models revolutionized military training and were a direct result of the lessons learned from Vietnam. In our train up for that war, we had very few combat simulations and the after action review process was almost non-existent. From that experience, the leaders of that era made a commitment to make all training as much like real combat as possible and provided a feedback loop that ensured that learning occurred. Many of you here today contributed to developing that process and some served right here in the early eighties to help make what we have now a reality. We must never forget the value of what we learned from those experiences in Vietnam and regardless of where you served or at what level, we all must be willing to share those experiences (good or bad) with the current generation of warriors. Whether it is just auto-biographical stories about what you saw and did that you capture and jot down for your family to read; formal participation in oral history projects or writing and publishing stories and books, your contribution in capturing the real history of the Vietnam War is tremendously important. I know many of you have already participated in such projects and I encourage those who haven't, to do so. Fortunately, this period of commemoration and recognition of your service has encouraged many more of you to "tell your stories". Again, I strongly encourage you to do so. Regardless of what you have read or heard about that period in our nation's history, your role was heroic. You are heroes! You never lost a battle and you and your family can be justifiably proud of your service. I'll say that again – you can and should be proud of your service.

As most of you know, our involvement in Vietnam started slowly with an initial deployment of advisors in the early 1950s, grew incrementally through the early 1960s and expanded with the deployment of full combat units in July 1965 which was followed by a period of intense combat through the early seventies. In 1973, and after the Paris Peace talks the last US Troop units were withdrawn, however the remaining US personnel did not leave Vietnam until April 1975.

Through more than two decades of conflict that tested the fabric of our nation, your service was something you could be proud of then, as well as now. Therefore, it is absolutely fitting that we continue to honor the more than 9 million Americans who served our nation during that period and we pay tribute to the memory of the more than 58,000 who died and whose names are inscribed on the Wall in Washington DC.



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Thus we reaffirm our dedication to showing a generation of veterans the respect and support of a grateful Nation. The Vietnam War is a story of service members of different backgrounds, colors, and creeds who came together to do what their nation asked. It is a story of Americans from every corner of our Nation who left their families to answer their nation's call to arms. It is a story of patriots who cast themselves into harm's way to save a friend, who fought hour after hour, day after day to preserve the liberties we hold dear. From the Ia Drang to War Zones C and D to Hue to Cambodia they won every tactical battle of the war and upheld the highest traditions of our Armed Forces.

Those years of combat left their imprint on a generation of young Americans. Thousands returned home bearing the scars of war; still more were burdened by the invisible wounds of post-traumatic stress, of Agent Orange, of memories that would never fade and of friends that we lost.

Our veterans answered our country's call and served with honor, and yet, in one of the war's most profound tragedies, many of these men and women came home to be shunned or neglected -- to face treatment unbecoming their courage and honorable service. We must never let this happen again. Today, we reaffirm one of our most fundamental obligations: to show all who have worn the uniform of the United States the respect and dignity they deserve, and to honor their sacrifice by serving them as well as they served us. Half a century later, we pay tribute to the fallen, the missing, the wounded, the millions who served, and the millions more who awaited their return. For many years after our departure from Vietnam, many of us were reluctant to talk about our service and you rarely saw Vietnam bumper stickers or a Veteran wearing a hat or jacket indicating they had served there and with whom. I am pleased to note as I travel the country that much of this has changed. Most veterans of that era are beginning to recognize that it is alright to be proud of their time in Vietnam. Please go back to your communities and tell your friends about today and encourage them to participate here next year or at some other similar ceremony.

Tell them that our nation stands stronger because of their service, and we sincerely want to honor their proud legacy with our deepest gratitude.

Thanks again Gen Broadwater for allowing me to join you and your soldiers in recognizing this distinguished group of veterans today. I am also truly honored to be back here at this great military installation which has been so important to me as well as many others over the years. The National Training Center has done more to improve the combat readiness of our Army than any other single factor in the past 50 years. The training done here has saved literally thousands of lives in recent wars and you veterans of Vietnam can take pride in knowing that you were and are part of that tremendous legacy. Thank you and WELCOME HOME!!