

Thank you, Congressman Buyer for your kind introduction – it’s a distinct honor and privilege to join Congressmen Buyer and Kosmas, and Mrs. Mica (representing her Husband Congressman John Mica), and get the opportunity to meet all of YOU. Frankly, I am just humbled to be in YOUR company – the company of the generation that won WWII — members of the Greatest Generation – Welcome to our Nation’s capital.

Honoring your brave and courageous service – as well as those who have gone before us is what I consider to be part of the “manners of our profession.” I am just so proud we are doing just that today – and it’s wonderful that the Honor Flight Network, and in particular the Volusia Flight Network were able to make this event possible. It looks like you now have all served credibly in yet another unit – Volusia Flight Network 6 – VFN 6!

Today provides us the opportunity to reflect upon and honor your service – as well as the service of those who gave the ultimate sacrifice. WWII truly was a World War – ranging from Pearl Harbor and the Pacific Islands, over the U-boat infested waters of the Atlantic, to the Beaches of Normandy and across Europe, and on into the deserts of North Africa...

Many people forget that there were dark hours when the outcome of this conflict was far from certain. But your generation of heroes – 16 million Americans in total (most of whom were closer to the age of boys than men) – unhesitatingly stood up, and selflessly answered the call to serve. And, when it mattered most, you gave your **utmost** – often while cold, wet and tired – or hot, parched and exhausted – and always in harm's way, far from home. YOU defended our freedoms, and protected our ideals.

WWII was unique in another way. It was the last war that required, what I call an **“all hands on deck”** effort – for it not only took YOUR service, but it took the hands of our entire nation – including women – to produce the supplies and equipment necessary to win the war effort. Everyone was impacted. And everyone joined together as a Nation to secure victory.

As President Franklin Delano Roosevelt said during his fireside chat following the bombing of Pearl Harbor,

"We are now in this war. We are all in it - all the way. Every single man, woman, and child is a partner in the most tremendous undertaking of our American history."

As you know, today's conflicts are different. While the armed forces remain one of the most well respected institutions in our Nation, the whole nation does not collectively feel the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Sometimes I fear this lack of collective effort could result in some of our citizens taking for granted what it means to serve, and what it takes to defend our freedom. It's important that we all know – like YOU know – what it means to serve. And, it's equally important to know WHY we serve...it's because we have something sacred to defend...a Nation, a people, and a way of life worth living.

That's precisely why your history – your heroism – **MUST** be remembered, persevered, and memorialized. We must *never forget* – and never let our children forget that freedom is not free. And we must never let them forget **YOUR** service, and the service of the many that went before you.

I know all of you assembled here are former soldiers, sailors, marines, airman, merchant mariners – perhaps a few are Coast Guardsmen like myself?

As you know, the Coast Guard, as it often does, operated under the Navy during the war. Now, some Coast Guard WWII Veterans would say that the Coasties were in actuality so absorbed into the Navy that many folks did not even know about the Coast Guard's war efforts. But Coast Guardsmen contributed in many ways during the War. Most notably conducting convoy escorts to protect supply ships from the threat of German U-boats and piloting troop landing craft.

Coast Guardsmen were chosen to pilot landing craft because our coxswains — or small boat captains — were highly valued for their specialized boat handling skills — particularly in the surf — a skill they had perfected while serving in lifesaving stations. Only experienced coxswains could successfully maneuver landing craft through strong currents, reefs, sand bars and heavy surf to safely land troops ashore. Once a beachhead was secured, while soldiers and Marines pushed ahead, Coast Guardsmen continued to ferry supplies ashore to keep the offensive alive.

By way of example, 19 of the 23 naval transports in Guadalcanal and Tulagi were manned by or carried Coast Guardsmen — including our only Medal of Honor winner Signalman 1st Class Douglas MUNRO. Signalman MUNRO steered his landing craft between evacuating Marines and the

enemy – providing covering fire – and ultimately sacrificing his life to save 500 Marines.

Marvin J. Perrett was one of these Coast Guard coxswains. He braved rough seas, enemy fire, and lowered his ramp to land troops in Normandy and Iwo Jima. Marvin recalls that piloting these flat bottomed landing craft – LCVPs or Higgins boats – was like driving a “bulldozer in the water.”

With 36 troops aboard, each with 90 lbs of gear on their back, Marvin said they were packed like sardines. They could not move. They could not even sit down – “they were frozen in space and time.”

Marvin also told a funny story – now fair warning – this might be a sea story...but Marvin said that he reported aboard his assigned Navy Ship, with the Coast Guard operating under the Navy, the Coast Guardsmen aboard began wearing Navy uniforms – (this part of the story is true!) the only minor difference being that on their right sleeve, the Coast Guardsmen wore a simple Coast Guard shield. The Navy ship Martin was assigned in made its first port call in Glasgow. Liberty was granted in sections, and the Coast Guard section was one of the last to go ashore. When Marvin finally made it ashore, he was astounded to find that his Navy brethren had told, as

Marvin said “*all the ladies that would listen*” not to fool with the guys with the shield on their sleeve because it means they have a disease!” According to Marvin, this situation was quickly straightened out after a few heated bar room discussions! I am sure you all have many similar and fascinating stories!

Now, I understand you have already visited the World War II Memorial. I trust you found it spectacular. It sends a chill up my spine every time I visit. And, I am especially proud that it was built in the most prominent of places – on our National Mall right in between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument. I think the announcement inscription facing 17th Street says it all –in case you missed it, I’ll share it with you...it reads:

“Here in the presence of Washington and Lincoln, one the eighteenth century father and the other the nineteenth century preserver of our Nation, we honor [YOU] those twentieth century Americans who took up the struggle during the second world war and made the sacrifices to perpetuate the gift our forefathers entrusted to us: a nation conceived in liberty and justice”

On May 29, 2004, President George W. Bush dedicated the WWII Memorial...his final words of dedication were:

“At this place, at this Memorial, we acknowledge a debt of long-standing gratitude to an *entire generation of Americans*: those who died; those who fought and worked and grieved and went on. They saved our country, and *thereby saved the liberty of mankind.*”

Simply put, Our Nation, and the freedom loving people of the world owes YOU their existence. It's a debt that can't truly be paid—but what we can do is honor your service – and your heroism. So on behalf of the men and woman currently serving in the armed forces, Thank you. Now it's our duty – our responsibility to safely pass along your story – and continue in your footsteps defending our freedom. It has been an honor to be with YOU today. I trust you will enjoy the remainder of your day, our capital city, and visiting the memorials commemorating the service of our soldiers, sailors, marines, airman, merchant marines and Coast Guardsmen who, as you so ably did, defended our freedom. *Thank you Volusia Honor Air 6!*

Semper Paratus