



# S M D C / A R S T R A T



**Maple Hill Veteran's Cemetery  
Memorial Day Wreath Laying Ceremony**

**30 May 2011**

**LTG Formica Remarks as Presented**

Good morning. You know, I wasn't really quite sure what to expect today at this event. But looking out at the many veterans, the veterans organizations that are represented here, civic leaders, Congressman Brooks, Rep Sanderford, Mayor Battle, members of the community. When I look out and see what you are doing today at this ceremony, and consider the music sung by Mr. Bob Smith, the National Anthem and God Bless the USA, it just reminds me of how great America is. Any time you forget, you just need to come to an event like this. Thank God for the United States of America, and for its communities like this one here in Huntsville, Alabama.

It is an honor and a privilege for Diane and me to be here today, and to represent our Active, Guard and Reserve Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines who bravely defend our freedom.

Today, on Memorial Day, we honor those who have given their lives in the service of their country. Memorial Day is a solemn day of remembrance for those men and women who paid the ultimate price for our freedom. Earlier Mr. Tillman acknowledged the Jeffrey Hall family. SSG Jeffrey Hall who gave his life for our country, and who is buried in the cemetery behind me. And I'd like to again acknowledge his wife Allison and daughter Audrey, father Charlie and wife Annette – thank you all for

being here. Thank you for sharing your husband, father, son with the United States of America, and on behalf of America and all who serve, we again extend our most sincere and genuine sympathy to you, and our grateful appreciation for the sacrifice of Jeffrey's life. God bless you.

And I know somehow there will be some people who are going to feel badly about the PA system, and in their mind they will think of this as the ceremony at Maple Hill Cemetery where the system had problems. I wouldn't pay one bit of attention to that. There are more important things going on here today than the PA system; whether it's Bob Smith's rendering, the presence of the Hall family, many of you here, the posting of the colors by the veterans group, the presence of the young Marines here in front of me in uniform. There's a lot going on that's more important than the PA system, so don't worry about it a bit.

Since 1866, when the people of Waterloo, New York first dipped their flags to half mast and decorated their village to remember the Soldiers who died during the Civil War, our nation has paid tribute to Soldiers and those who gave their lives; all service men and women who have fallen in the line of duty.

Since the birth of our nation, tragically over one million men and women in uniform have died to defend our country. Of that number, over 6000 now, along with many Civilian patriot counterparts, have given their lives in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Each of those service members left behind – left a surviving spouse...a son or daughter, a brother or sister, a mom and dad, grandma

and grandpa, and friends. For many of us, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, World War I...even World War II and Korea are increasingly parts of our past history. The Vietnam War is a fading memory for our country, occurring far away and so long ago. The recent operations in Desert Storm and our current operations, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom, have caused our nation to once again remember those who are fighting and dying today.

The graves at the National Cemeteries like Arlington and Normandy, and at national and local cemeteries across our country such as the one here at Maple Hill remind us that freedom is not free. The many veterans and Service Members resting there died defending the lives and the values that create the backbone of our nation.

Today's Service Members share a special heritage, a common bond with the men and women whose lives we honor. If you would look into their lives, whether privates or generals, you would see the same core values that we cherish today -- loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage.

These were ordinary men and women who rose to meet seemingly impossible odds and did extraordinary things. Their lives were dedicated not to conflict or to death, but to protecting lives and freedom.

On Memorial Day, I particularly remember the 20 Soldiers from III Corps Artillery, who died in Iraq during the time I was the Commanding General there, and who we memorialized in the Corps Artillery area at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. And I remember the 45 Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines

USASMDC/ARSTRAT Release #1171

26 May 2011

Distribution A: Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited

and Civilians who died in Afghanistan while I was the Commanding General of the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan, training the Afghan Army and Police. They each died doing their duty; they died with courage and honor, and each of those deaths still touches me equally. And I will forever remember them, and I will value their service and their sacrifice.

We have all been touched by the ultimate sacrifice these Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines have made in service to their country and the suffering it has brought to mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, spouses, sons and daughters, colleagues and friends. We remember all of our families, those of the missing and those who have lost Soldiers to illness, injury and combat.

Our nation is committed to the Warrior Ethos that “I will never leave a fallen comrade behind.” And in ceremonies like this, all around America, we are reminded that Americans will never forget those who gave so much.

On Friday, Diane and I went to Cullman, Alabama, to participate in a school awards ceremony. On the way back, we stopped at a Cracker Barrel for lunch. I was in my ACUs, and as we were finishing lunch, an older gentleman, probably World War II or maybe Korean War vintage, came up and stood by our table. And he quietly handed me this dollar bill folded in the shape of a cross. Diane and I politely waited for him to say something. But it became increasingly clear to us that he was not going to be able to speak. He was overcome with emotion; his eyes filled with tears; his face choked. And we knew that he wasn't going to say anything,

USASMDC/ARSTRAT Release #1171

26 May 2011

Distribution A: Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited

so we politely accepted the dollar, the cross, and he looked at us and quietly walked away. That, ladies and gentlemen, is what Memorial Day is all about. It's in our hearts, and in our expressions of gratitude for the sacrifice and service of those who've fallen.

And so today when you leave this ceremony, and you return to your home, and you have the opportunity to relax and participate in those events that mark the first day of summer...or you're bombarded on the TV with all of the activities of Memorial Day that talk to summer and fun and relaxation, I would first acknowledge and thank you that you began your day by remembering what Memorial Day is all about. And I ask you, and encourage all of you, to take time today to remember again those who have given their lives; to acknowledge the enduring sacrifice of their Families; and to say a prayer for those who are serving in harm's way today.

Thank you. God bless you, all of our Veterans, all of those who have served, those who have lost their lives, and those who were left behind. God bless Huntsville, and the United States of America. Thank you.