

Brothers -- this is version two of the infamous speech -- I may have version one as well if anyone wants to see it!

Larry Gugles Speech on November 10, 2005

230TH MARINE CORPS BIRTHDAY BALL SPEECH (VERSION - 2)

All, following is the text from version two of the two versions I have planned for my speech on November 10, 2005;

Marine Corps Birthday Ball - November 10, 2005
Speech (Vietnam)

1. I want to begin by thanking you for giving me the privilege of speaking to you. We have come together tonight to honor the birth of our beloved Marine Corps and honor those Marines who are currently serving in the Global War on Terror and honor the memory of those Marines that have come before us.

2. If you want to honor someone, it's beneficial to first understand their experience. Many people believe they understand the experience of the men and women who served in Vietnam. Unfortunately, that understanding for those that have never served in a War has often been derived from stereotypes.

3. I want to talk about the Vietnam War Veteran, of which I am one. I served in the United States Marine Corps from 1965 to 1995 and in the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) from 1967 to 1971. I was a member of the famed 1st Battalion 9th Marines operating in I Corps TAOR. My unit is better known as ""The Walking Dead"".

4. I would like you to understand that experience, so that you may comprehend the contribution we believe we have made. Let me attempt to explain. The average age of the majority of men who served in Vietnam was nineteen. This means that most went almost directly from high school into combat.

5. Nothing can prepare a human being for the reality of war. It isn't anything like war movies or television programs. War is a physically exhausting, terrifying business. It places human beings in situations for which they are intellectually, emotionally and morally unprepared. Modern weapons do not simply kill people, they blow them to pieces. Guerrilla warfare has no front or rear lines. The enemy is often unseen and frequently indistinguishable from the civilian population. Unrestrained violence becomes the means for survival.

6. Teenagers placed in such an environment returned home old men, having lost

their youth and innocence. They returned home with emotional and moral conflicts in need of resolution and closure. Unfortunately, that resolution and closure were unavailable for Vietnam veterans.

7. First let me begin by stating a few facts about the 1st Battalion 9th Marines.

a. The Battalion earned by Bravery and Sacrifice, an Honor and Reverence, unique in the history of the Marine Corps.

i. The Battalion had the longest sustained Combat in history -- A total of 48 months.

ii. The Battalion had Personnel Killed In Action (KIA) all 48 months.

iii. 92.25% (738) of a Battalion strength of Marines & Navy Hospital Corpsman were Killed In Action (KIA), and .25% (2) Marines were Missing In Action (MIA).

b. The Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC has a total of 58,479 names from the Combat Area Casualty Current File (CACCF), which is the basis for the names. 14,836 or 25.4% of these names are U. S. Marines. 740 or 5% of these names are casualties from 1st Battalion 9th Marines. (Total 740 = 738 KIA, and 2 MIA).

c. Of the top 25 Battles in USMC History - Three of the highest casualty dates in Vietnam:

i. Operation Name Dates KIA WIA MIA

Buffalo (13 Days) July 2, 1967 -- July 14, 1967 113 170 1

(On July 2nd in less than seven hours of combat, Bravo Company had lost 60 men KIA and 60 men WIA, (86 Total KIA by the end July 2nd) -- the worst single disaster to befall a Marine Corps rifle company during the entire Vietnam War.)

Scotland (100 Days) Jan. 21, 1968 -- Apr. 30, 1968 157 430 0

Dewey Canyon (57) Jan. 21, 1969 -- Apr. 30, 1969 70 380 1

d. The number count for the top "3" Personal Decorations for Heroism are;

i. Medal of Honor -- 2

ii. Navy Cross Medal -- 18

iii. Silver Star Medal -- 60

8. How the nickname of "The Walking Dead" ("Di Bo Chet") was earned;

i. There is a valley about 15 miles south of Da Nang, Republic of South Vietnam, which had always been a strong hold of the Viet Min. Neither the Japanese nor the French could ever establish a garrison in that valley, many tried and died, but none could. We were sent to a little red hill in the middle of the valley, at the fork of the Song Nu Yi River.

ii. Everything out side of our wire was undisputedly controlled by Victor Charlie [""VC"", ""Viet Cong"", or ""Charlie"" as they were called], including the village at the bottom of the hill. Our mission was to Search and Destroy the enemy and all of his support. Charlie found out within weeks we were not the Japanese or the French and he couldn't hold his own in fighting us man for man. So he changed his tactics to harassing & sniper fire mines & booby-traps, he would only take us on if he out numbered us 10 to 1, or he had a good escape route.

iii. At first the 1st Battalion 9th Marines became infamous as the 'Zippo', battalion, because we had operational orders to burn and kill everything if a Vill was deserted when we entered. Villagers ran or hid when we swept through their Vill, so we burned most of them. Search and Destroy. War was HELL for everyone!

iv. None of the events in the Valley escaped Hanoi. During a speech in early spring of 1966, Ho Chi Minh said the phrase "Di bo chet" (The Walking Dead) to describe the Marines in the Valley, He meant us, that we were already dead, just had not been buried yet. During the same event, General Vo Nguyen Giap promised President Ho and the Vietnamese people that he would liberate the valley as a birthday present for Ho.

v. It just happened that within weeks of the speech, on May 12th, Bravo Company stepped into a VC Boot camp. For four days we fought a very fierce series of battles that saw a lot of our brothers die, and it gutted the military options of General Giap. On Ho's birthday, the grunt companies Alpha, Bravo, Charlie & Delta re-enforced H&S Company and dug in around the hill for their attack, it was a non-event. Bravo, with the support of Alpha and Delta, had destroyed them at the village of Ho Thay. Hanoi Hanna had labeled us 'The Walking Dead', and played our song 'No-Where to Run, No-Where to Hide, which we were very proud of.

vi. A patrol of 14 Marines from Bravo Company on May 12th 1966 paid a very high price for 1st Battalion 9th Marines to be proudly known as the Di bo Chet, ""The Walking Dead"". 9. I was a member of 1st Squad, 1st Platoon, Charlie Company, 1st Battalion 9th Marines in Vietnam.

a. Total Time: Aug 4, 1967 -- Jul 31, 1969 (23 months 27 days)

b. Wounded & Hospitalized 1st Time: Apr. 16, 1968 -- Jul 1, 1968 (2 months 15

days)

c. Wounded & Hospitalized 2nd Time: Feb 22, 1969 -- March 4, 1969 (12 days)

10. Poems & stories written by one of the squad leaders Delta Company.

a. Always Faithful -- ©© 1997 Doug Todd

i. Here are those who have borne the battle
Those, in the crucible of combat, tried.
Tempered and turned of the finest mettle,
These were The Sons of America's Pride!

ii. The First Battalion of The Ninth Marines,
Hammered and forged in the fires of Hell;
Built of their blood and their broken dreams,
A legend for scribes, unborn, to tell.

iii. They fought like Warriors and they died like men
"Till their page of history was stained blood red;
And they earned from foe as well as from friend
That Honorable title, "The Walking Dead"!

iv. These were the Sons who stepped forward bravely--
Courage and Strength and Faith un-tried;
To fight as the Valorous "Always Faithful".
These are The Sons of America's Pride! ---

b. The Return of the Walking Dead -- ©© 2004 Doug Todd

i. The Walking Dead disbanded! The colors of 1st Battalion of The 9th Marines, were retired, with proper ceremony, in 1994. The legendary unit no longer existed. This was a matter of great disappointment for some who had served under those colors.

ii. "Esprit De Corps" is more than just something we pick up in boot camp, as you might learn the fight song of the college you attended. It is us - or something that becomes such an integral part of us that it remains with us forever. Part of it - a very large part - is learning whose boots we are trying to fill.

iii. Every Marine is a rifleman and every Marine knows two things - no matter that he may be trained as something else; a clerk typist, truck driver, aviation mechanic or any other job that may be called for - he is a rifleman and he knows his rifle and he knows his Corps! In boot camp we start with Tun's Tavern and learn what made our Corps what it is. We know who fought, and where and how

they fought, in all the wars the Corps has participated in down through the years. We know what Sgt. Dan Daly said that took his troops across that wheat field at Belleau Wood; we know where the marines fought and how they died - and eventually triumphed, in WW2; we know what Chesty Puller did in Korea at a place called Chosin Reservoir. We know those heroes - who they were and what they did; we honor them and the spirit of their sacrifice that lives again in us - we call it Esprit De Corps; the Spirit of The Corps.

iv. Early in 1966, when I learned that I was being assigned to the Ninth Marines, a barrage of images flashed through my mind - Bougainville and...Iwo Jima...and...and...and...they kept coming - That Ninth Marines? I was to be one of them?

v. I was, and soon I found myself at Da Nang reporting to Delta Company, first as a fire team leader and later a squad leader. I was there for only a few months and will not go into it here. I did nothing spectacular. My record shows a good marine with good marks. I was wounded, got my Purple Heart and was shipped out to a hospital. The important thing is not what I did - but, what I was part of! During that spring and summer we began to hear the phrase Di Bo Chet - The Walking Dead; that is what the enemy were calling us. Apparently someone high up on the other side had decreed that we should be purged from the world of the living and, in fact, should be considered dead already! They tried to make good on that and the Battalion went on to earn, by courage and sacrifice, a unique place in the history of The Corps. It endured the Longest Sustained Combat (48 months) of any unit in USMC history - sustaining KIA for each month of that time until the KIA to unit strength ratio was another USMC all-time record.

vi. The name "The Walking Dead" stuck and the Corps made it official. I was part of that (a very small part) and it became a "defining moment" in my life. I must admit that I felt a sense of loss at the dissolution of the unit and the retirement of Our Colors.

vii. Now, more than ten years out of service, they say that the battalion will be reactivated! "The fabled 1st battalion, 9th Marines...returns to service!" the headlines said! There will be a reactivation ceremony and some of us may get to attend.

viii. I remember a Marine Corp Birthday ball I attended during my first year in the Corps. There were a lot of veterans there from "The Old Corps" and they were fascinating to me. I suppose I saw a lot of their medals and some of the scars - but what I remember are the gray hair and their eyes. They had eyes that mostly had a "distant" look in them until they focused directly on one of us, and then they seemed to see something in us that we didn't understand. That was a little uncomfortable sometimes. But they were fascinating! They spoke casually,

intimately even, of things I knew only from textbooks and old movies. History - sitting across the table from me with a mug of draft beer and a handful of pretzels!

ix. Veterans of "The Old Corp" with their potbellies, funny hats, and gray hair - if they had any hair! Aging Marines with their first hand talk of battles that belong only to historical archives - talk that makes it sound as if those battles might have happened only yesterday! Those old men who remember and whose eyes see you far too clearly - Am I to be one of them?

x. I guess I am! And I think maybe I know what they saw. They saw what we were and they knew us better than we knew ourselves. They knew what we had gone through; how we had struggled to earn the privilege of being called "Marine"! Because they knew where we had been - they knew where we were going. Not that, in any practical way, our war would be like their war but in the sense that, at the most basic level, all wars are the same. Because they knew who we were, where we had been, and what we had gone through just to be where we were - they knew something that we couldn't have known yet. They knew what was ahead - where we were going.

xi. We are here, now, in some kind of intermediate position; neither point nor rear guard; here between the long line of those who made Our Corps what it is and those who will keep it as it was when we handed it off to them. If there is something we might take from those aging warriors with the knowing eyes and pass on to this new generation - maybe it is this; "We know you, Marines! We know you; we know whom you are, where you have been and where you are going!

xii. We know you. We know the farm, and the small town, and the ghetto and the suburb you call home! We know the musty old halls of the school you attended. We know you. We know the boys you were and the men you have become and we know what you went through on your way here! We know what you have left behind and what lies ahead. We know the girl whose picture you keep in a special place where it will be safe but you can reach it quickly. We know her - we know her face and her eyes and the smell of her hair that lingers sometimes in her letters. We know that she will not be forgotten - even if she forgets!

xiii. We know you! We know where you are going. We know the long march through Hell with an empty canteen. We know the days without rations and the weeks without rest. We know the exhaustion of giving more than is in you to give and then, because more is called for - giving that too. We know. We know the bone-chilling cold and the soul-shriveling loneliness of the sentry post at midnight when there is no sound but your own heart - and it is beating way to loudly.

xiv. We know the unthinkable anguish of tenderly picking up pieces of what was a brother to be wrapped in a poncho and loaded on a chopper. We know that this is too much to ask anyone to do - but we know that you will do it because it must be done. We know the futility of standing at some semblance of "attention" until the helicopter is merely a fading speck in an alien sky, already beginning to be obscured by clouds or smoke - or tears, and repeating the unanswerable question, "Why?"

xv. We know the eerie stillness of the fog-shrouded fighting hole where you wake suddenly thinking of something you must say to the man who shares that hole with you and turning to speak to him before you realize that he will not be there again. We know about waking to that same knowledge every morning for a long lifetime of mornings. We know that it really does not get easier and that some questions may never be answered. We know that the emptiness of one fighting hole can mean the whole world is empty - and it doesn't matter whether they bring rations today; you won't be hungry, anyway.

xvi. We were called Di Bo Chet, "The Walking Dead", and our history, someone said, was "Written in Blood and Fire" but we know that, in the fire of your zeal and the blood of your sacrifices, greater chapters will yet be written! When you step on the field to lift our colors to the wind again; when you "Dress Right" and come to attention - you will rouse a spirit that has slept, briefly, between engagements. When you shake out our colors, and the light takes them, you will conjure the spirit of Ky Lam and Hill 55, Phu An and The Marketplace, The Rock Pile and The Street Without Joy, the agony of Con Thien and the savage cruelty of Khe Sanh, the bitter struggle of The Hill Battles, Operation Dewey Canyon and so many, many others! As you begin to form your ranks, restless spirits will mingle with you - spirits of men who left their young bodies as scattered fragments strewn across a moonscape of impact craters in places almost forgotten now except by those who were there. They died - but their spirit will live in you and it lives in the memory of those aging warriors among the spectators who are watching you. These are the old men with strangeness in their eyes - men who left fragments of their souls in that field where the killing happened - and they know where you are going. They are here to Honor you. Not for what you have done but for what you are prepared to do.

xvii. You know us and those who came before us - you know where we went and what we did. You honor us for that. We know you and we know where you are going and what you will do. We honor you for that.

c. I was there last night -- ©©Larry Gugle; i. A couple of years ago someone asked me if I still thought about Vietnam. I nearly laughed in their face. How do you stop thinking about it? Every day for the last thirty-four years, I wake up with it, and go to bed with it. But this is what I said. "Yea, I think about it. I can't

quit thinking about it. I never will. But, I've also learned to live with it. I'm comfortable with the memories. I've learned to stop trying to forget and learned instead to embrace it. It just doesn't scare me anymore."

ii. A psychologist once told me that NOT being affected by the experience over there would be abnormal. When he told me that, it was like he'd just given me a pardon. It was as if he said, "Go ahead and feel something about the place, Larry. It ain't going nowhere. You're gonna wear it for the rest of your life. Might as well get to know it."

iii. A lot of my "brothers" haven't been so lucky. For them the memories are too painful, their sense of loss too great. My Sister told me of a friend she has whose husband was in the Nam. She asked this guy when he was there. Here's what he said, "Just last night." It took my sister a while to figure out what he was talking about. JUST LAST NIGHT. Yeah I was in the Nam. When? JUST LAST NIGHT. During sex with my wife. And on my way to work this morning. Over my lunch hour. Yeah, I was there.

iv. My sister says I'm not the same brother that went to Vietnam. My wife says I won't let people get close to me, not even her. They are probably both right.

v. Ask a vet about making friends in Nam. It was risky. Why? Because we were in the business of death, and death was with us all the time. It wasn't the death of, "If I die before I wake." This was the real thing. The kind where boys scream for their mothers. The kind that lingers in your mind and becomes more real each time you cheat it. You don't want to make a lot of friends when the possibility of dying is that real, that close. When you do, friends become a liability.

vi. A guy named Roy Hurlbert was my friend. Roy Hurlbert is dead. I put him in a body bag one sunny day, April 16, 1968. We'd been talking, only a few minutes before he was shot, about what we were going to do when we got back in the world. Now, this was a guy who had come in country the same time as myself. A guy who was loveable and generous. He had blue eyes and sandy blond hair.

vii. When he talked, it was with a soft drawl. Hurlbert was a hick and he knew it. That was part of his charm. He didn't care. Man, I loved this guy like my real brother. But, I screwed up. I got too close to him. Maybe I didn't know any better. But I broke one of the unwritten rules of war. DON'T GET CLOSE TO PEOPLE WHO ARE GOING TO DIE. Sometimes you can't help it. You hear vets use the term "buddy" when they refer to a guy they spent the war with. "Me and this buddy of mine.""

viii. "Friend" sounds too intimate, doesn't it? "Friend" calls up images of being close. If he's a friend, then you are going to be hurt if he dies, and war hurts

enough without adding to the pain. Get close; get hurt. It's as simple as that.

ix. In war you learn to keep people at that distance my wife talks about. You become so good at it, that thirty-four years after the war, you still do it without thinking. You won't allow yourself to be vulnerable again.

x. My wife knows seven people who can get into the soft spots inside me. My sons & daughters. I know it probably bothers her that they can do this. It's not that I don't love my wife, I do. She's put up with a lot from me. She'll tell you that when she signed on for better or worse she had no idea there was going to be so much of the latter. But with my kids it's different.

xi. My boys & girls are mine. They'll always be my kids. Not marriage, not distance, not even death can change that. They are something on this earth that can never be taken away from me. I belong to them. Nothing can change that. I can have an ex-wife; but my boys & girls can never have an ex-father. There's the difference.

xii. I can still see the faces, though they all seem to have the same eyes. When I think of us I always see a line of "dirty grunts" sitting on a paddy dike. We're caught in the first gray silver between darkness and light. That first moment when we know we've survived another night, and the business of staying alive for one more day is about to begin. There was so much hope in that brief space of time. It's what we used to pray for. "One more day, God. One more day." And I can hear our conversations as if they'd only just been spoken. I still hear the way we sounded, the hard cynical jokes, and our morbid senses of humor. We were scared to death of dying, and trying our best not to show it.

xiii. I recall the smells, too. Like the way cordite hangs on the air after a fire-fight. Or the pungent odor of rice paddy mud. So different from the black dirt of Missouri. The mud of Nam smells ancient, somehow. Like it's always been there. And I'll never forget the way blood smells, sticky and drying on my hands. I spent a long night that way once. That memory isn't going anywhere.

xiv. I remember how the night jungle appears almost dream like as the pilot of a Cessna buzzes overhead, dropping parachute flares until morning. That artificial sun would flicker and make shadows run through the jungle. It was worse than not being able to see what was out there sometimes. I remember once looking at the man next to me as a flare floated overhead. The shadows around his eyes were so deep that it looked like his eyes were gone. I reached over and touched him on the arm; without looking at me he touched my hand. "I know man. I know." That's what he said. It was a human moment. Two guys a long way from home and scared sh"tless. "I know man." And at that moment he did.

xv. God I loved those guys. I hurt every time one of them died. We all did. Despite our posturing. Despite our desire to stay disconnected, we couldn't help ourselves. I know why Doug Todd writes his stories. I know what gives Jack Neeley the words to create poems so honest I cry at their horrible beauty. It's love. Love for those guys we shared the experience with.

xvi. We did our jobs like good Marines, and we tried our best not to become as hard as our surroundings. We touched each other and said, "I know." Like a mother holding a child in the middle of a nightmare, "It's going to be all right." We tried not to lose touch with our humanity. We tried to walk that line. To be the good boys our parents had raised and not to give into that unnamed thing we knew was inside us all.

xvii. You want to know what frightening is? It's a twenty-year-old-boy who's had a sip of that power over life and death that war gives you. It's a boy who, despite all the things he's been taught, knows that he likes it. It's a twenty-year-old who's just lost a friend, and is angry and scared and, determined that, "Some *@#*s gonna pay." To this day, the thought of that boy can wake me from a sound sleep and leave me staring at the ceiling.

xviii. As I write this, I have a picture in front of me. It's of two young men. On their laps are tablets. One is smoking a cigarette. Both stare without expression at the camera. They're writing letters. Staying in touch with places they would rather be. Places and people they hope to see again. The picture shares space in a frame with one of my wife. She doesn't mind. She knows she's been included in special company. She knows I'll always love those guys who shared that part of my life, a part she never can. And she understands how I feel about the ones I know are out there yet. The ones who still answer the question, "When were you in Vietnam?" "Hey, man. I was there just last night."

11. It is true that about half of those who served in Vietnam experience some psychological and physiological residual of their war experience (e.g., sleep disorders or exaggerated startle reflex). It is also true that approximately one-third of those who served have some degree of Post traumatic Stress Disorder. A minority of those so afflicted are homeless. Only a small percentage of Vietnam veterans have ever been arrested or incarcerated for criminal acts. The truth is, that despite some lingering psychological symptoms, the vast majority of Vietnam veterans have gotten on with their lives. They are productive, functional members of society. In many cases, they have become civic, educational and business leaders in their communities.

12. The popularized portrayal of Vietnam veterans as lost and disturbed souls, lingering on the edge of violence, is as inaccurate as any group stereotype. However, saying these things does not deny, or diminish, the intense, often

painful reality of our experience.

13. In recent years, it has been said that we “lost” the war in Vietnam. That seems to imply that those who fought it were ineffective warriors. Nothing could be further from the truth. Combat marines in Vietnam distinguished themselves with courage, tenacity and skill. On most occasions, they were victorious in battle. The war ended because those who made policy decisions decided it was a political imperative to stop the fighting. That the conflict ended unresolved was not the fault or responsibility of those who fought.

14. We returned expecting our society would do what it had done for our fathers and uncles returning from World War II. We believed the nation would gratefully honor our service, bringing resolution and closure to the conflicts our wartime experiences had created. That honoring, resolution and closure didn’t occur. For a variety of reasons, people simply did not want to talk through, think about or be reminded of Vietnam. America wanted the war to be over, to put a decade of foreign and civil conflict away. Returning veterans felt confused abandoned and, on occasion, betrayed.

15. Near the end of the last century, Rudyard Kipling wrote a poem entitled “Tommy.” It describes the experience of a British soldier home from the colonial wars. Let me share a portion of it, because it eloquently describes the experience and feelings of many Vietnam veterans:

a. You talk o’ better food for us an’ schools, an’ fires, an’ all, but prove it to our face.

For it’s Tommy this an’ Tommy that, an’ “Chuck him out, the brute!”
But it’s “savior of ‘is country” when the guns begin to shoot;
An’ it’s Tommy this an’ Tommy that, an’ anything you please;
An’ Tommy ain’t a bloomin fool—you bet that Tommy sees!

16. We were not fools; we did see that our society was not going to give us the honor, resolution, and closure that we needed. So as individuals, and as groups, we created our own honoring, resolution and closure. We built a memorial to our fallen comrades in Washington, D.C. We staged welcome-home parades. We created rap groups, counseling centers and support systems.

17. Finally and belatedly, the nation roused to honor our service. It was no more than we deserved. We had kept faith with the values our parents, pastors, teachers and coaches taught us. The nation called, and we went forth into that far away place to face the realities of war, with a profound sense of patriotism. We served with honor, pride and courage. We put our lives on the line in service to our country. We said yes, while others were saying, “Hell no, we won’t go!”

18. Thank you for the opportunity to honor you, and all the men and women who

have answered this country's call. It feels good to be acknowledged and valued. I currently have three of my grandchildren on active duty with the United States Marine Corps. The oldest is in Iraq on his second tour with the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment as an Infantry scout sniper. His younger sister and brother will be in Iraq soon.

19. Let me leave you with an idea. If you truly desire to honor veterans, don't stop with this assembly. Seek out those who serve or have served (perhaps your father, mother, Grandfather, Grandmother, uncle, aunt, teacher, neighbor, children or grandchildren). Thank them for their service; ask them to share their feelings and memories. That will bring them real honor, because in so doing you are telling them you understand and value their experiences and contribution. Again, from my heart, I thank you for the privilege of speaking to you.

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Please let me know which version you like! Thanks

Sergeant Major Larry E. Gugle, USMC, Retired (C19kraut)

Things "borrowed" from Randell in blue

Things "borrowed" from Doug Todd red.

Other borrowed stuff in green found by Casey