

Commander & Chief
NATIONAL COMMANDER

File

VFW MID-WINTER CONFERENCE

Thank you... I would first like to say what an honor and privilege it is to be in the presence of this distinguished body, at your annual mid-winter conference. As well, I would like to thank State Adjutant John Neeves and State Commander Al Thomas for their personal invitation here today.

As was stated, my name is Paul Semmel and I am a member of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. In particular, I represent the 187th Legislative District which encompasses parts of Lehigh and Berks Counties.

As well, I was recently appointed by Speaker Ryan to serve as the Majority Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee for the 1999-2000 legislative session. In view of this appointment, I think that your mid-winter conference lends itself as a perfect opportunity

to meet with your membership and become more familiar with your needs and goals as we head into the new millennium.

In essence, I am here today to open up the channels of communication as we begin a new legislative session. A channel of communication between your organization, my office, Senator Robbins' Office and the entire veteran community... along with the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and the Governor's Office.

As you all know, due to your military backgrounds, communication is a vital tool which every organization must properly utilize in order to become successful. In terms of the VFW, your organization did not make the headway which it has made, these past 100 years, without proper focus on your mission and efficient communication of your goals.

When I think of proper communication, I often reflect upon an incident which happened during the Crimean War in 1854. I am sure that many of you are familiar with the infamous “Charge of the Light Brigade” which has now become immortalized in Alfred Lord Tennyson’s epic poem of that same name. **(PAUSE)** A short paraphrase... “Half a league, half a league, half a league onward, all in the valley of death rode the six hundred... forward the light brigade... charge the guns!”

In terms of the legacy of this famous and courageous portion of this battle... one historical perspective is that this charge was unintended and really was the result of miscommunications between the general officer staff and the field commanders.

In short, Lord Raglan, the overall commander of the British troops, was perched upon a tall hill overlooking the various

valleys of the battlefield. He noticed enemy troops in the vicinity of one of his “prized” and unprotected gun batteries. Worried that these guns would be captured, he summoned Captain Nolan and gave him a sketchy note... with orders to proceed down the southern valley and wheel around the battery, thus protecting it from capture.

Well, when the cryptic message was delivered to Lord’s Lucan and Cardigan... they both scratched their heads in dismay and confusion.

At this point, Captain Nolan was asked to interpret the intent of this order... and he then told the field commanders that the order was to... “take the guns.” Without clarification of “which” guns were to be taken... the ill fated 600 rode into the opposite valley... directly into the enemies gun batteries which were located on all sides of the valley. In the end,

hundreds were killed or wounded. Ergo, the charge of the light brigade became famous, and to this day, many still question why such an order was given, and why an entire brigade was directed into this meat grinder. As was stated in my previous remarks, one school of thought is the lack of proper communications.

(PAUSE)

Overall, I think that we can all see, through a story such as this, just how important it is for an organization to get its message across in a clear and concise manner. Your organization does this on a routine basis... through forums such as this event today. You have learned the importance of communicating your message to your membership, veterans at large, the communities in which you live and work, and as always, to the membership of the Pennsylvania legislature.

I applaud your organization's diligence over the past 100 years, and I challenge you to keep up the good work that you do for the veteran community in our great Commonwealth.

In terms of the Pennsylvania legislature, and our commitment to you, I can assure you that I will work closely with your leadership, and I will make every effort to assist your organization, as well as all veterans of our Commonwealth. As well, I look forward to working with Senator Robbins and his staff in the upcoming session.

Pennsylvania, on the whole, has developed numerous veterans programs and policies which other states can only hope to emulate. The creation of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs has given the veteran community a proper home where they can have their voices heard, within the proper communication channels of a bona fide state agency.

As for Scotland School for Veterans Children, which is now under the direction of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, this is yet another example of a successful program which other states are now attempting to duplicate.

The success of this school does in fact speak the message that Pennsylvania is committed to veterans... and their families and children.

(PAUSE)

As the new millennium approaches, I know that there are still many issues to address, in terms of assisting those veterans that have assisted their country in its time of need. Therefore, as the new chairman of this committee, I welcome the highest level of interaction and communication between the various entities in the veteran community, thus leading to plausible solutions for the greater welfare of all veterans.

In closing, I would be in remiss if I did not wish you congratulations on the 100th anniversary of your organization's existence. You men and women have a considerable amount of accomplishments to be proud of... and I wish you great success in the next 100 years. As well, I wish you God's speed in your annual membership drive. The strength of an organization truly rests in the strength of its numbers.

Once again, thank you for inviting me here today to greet your organization. On behalf of the House of Representatives, I also would like to personally thank you for all of your honored duty to both the Commonwealth and your Country. We, the citizens of Pennsylvania, truly are the benefactors of your great sacrifices.

Have a great conference!