

AMERICAN LEGION SPEECH

Thank you ... (Stan/Commander Nietz) once again, it is indeed an honor to be before your ranks today. It was only a few short weeks ago that I had the privilege of addressing your organization at your annual flag day celebration, which was coupled with your annual membership drive picnic.

(PAUSE)

I must say, ... when I was invited to attend your state convention today ... I first had some reservations ... due to the fact that I was one of the few individuals who ... at your membership drive picnic, ... went unscathed in regard to not “catching a pie in the face!”

Thus, I thought that today's event might just be a ploy to get all of us "unscathed" individuals back into Stan and Bill's sights.

Adjutant Rhinehard and Commander Nietz, nonetheless, have assured me they will indeed not be throwing pies today. However (PAUSE), ... they would not guarantee that a stray banana cream pie would not find its way out of the audience ... toward the podium. Thus, they recommended that my remarks be informative ... yet brief! Therefore, I will do just that.

(PAUSE)

As was stated, I am the Majority Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee. In essence, I am here today to provide you with a brief legislative update, ... but more importantly, I am here to introduce myself to your organization's statewide membership. It is through

meetings such as this one today, that we can become more familiar with one another and further strengthen the avenues of communication between the Pennsylvania Department of the American Legion and the Pennsylvania State Legislature.

As you all know, due to your military background, communication is a vital tool which every organization must properly utilize in order to become successful. In terms of the American Legion, your organization did not make the headway which it has made, these past 80 years, without properly focusing on your mission and the 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 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 the battle... one historical perspective is that this charge was unintended and really was the result of miscommunication between the general officer staff and the field commanders.

In short, Lord Raglan, the overall commander of the British forces, 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 gun 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 enemy's 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 based on the lack of proper communication.

(PAUSE)

Overall, I think 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, to veterans-at-large, to 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 80 years, and I challenge you to keep up the good work 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 I will work closely with your new leadership, and will make every effort to assist your organization, as well as all veterans of our Commonwealth. As well, I assure you I will continue to work steadfastly with Senator Robbins and his staff in the upcoming session this fall.

(PAUSE)

In the way of a legislative update, 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.

Another piece of legislation which was passed into law last month is Act 14 of 1999, which was prime-sponsored by Senator Robbins. This legislation increased the monthly stipend for the state-administered paralyzed and blinded veterans pension programs. The \$100 pension was increased to \$150 per month.

In terms of the Pennsylvania Veterans Memorial, the State Legislature included a \$2 million line item in this year's final

budget for this long-overdue tribute to our Commonwealth's veteran community. Your organization's fundraising efforts and unbridled enthusiasm for this memorial have not gone unnoticed in Harrisburg. For all you have done in this regard, I would like to personally thank each and every one of you ... for your diligent efforts which have now made this memorial a reality. A reality which will hopefully be dedicated on Veterans Day, 2000.

Along these same lines, the legislature, through Act 33 of 1999, recently extended the expiration date of the Pennsylvania Veterans Memorial Commission to June 30, 2003. The Commission was due to "sunset" out of existence this past June. This extension period will facilitate the spending and construction phase of the Pennsylvania Memorial project. In terms of communications, in regard to this expiration matter, I

would like to point out how impressed I was with your organization's swift "call-to-arms" on this issue.

A few weeks ago, the legislature was preparing to adjourn for the summer. Senator Robbins and I knew this matter needed to be resolved before the break, so as not to impede the beginning of the construction phase of this project. Now ... we all know how items and issues can fall between the cracks in the 11th hour on the final day of session. Therefore, your organization's many phone calls and, in some instances, personal visits to members' offices, ensured the passage of this legislation in the wee morning hours. Stan and Commander Nietz ... your leadership is to be commended for these efforts.

(PAUSE)

As the new millennium approaches, I know there are still many issues to address, in terms of assisting those veterans who

have assisted their country in its time of need. Therefore, as the Chairman of this committee, I welcome the highest level of interaction and communication among the various entities in the veteran community, thus leading to plausible solutions for the greater welfare of all veterans.

In closing, I would just like to simply say that my door is always open to your organization, as well as to all veterans of this great Commonwealth. I look forward to the continuation of a solid partnership, which remains committed to the betterment of the lives of our heroic veteran community.

As well, I wish you godspeed in your upcoming membership drive, and I also would like to personally congratulate your newly elected leadership team on their election to their new positions of responsibility in your fine organization. I also look forward to meeting with your new

state commander in the near future, thus ensuring that your legislative agenda will be successfully communicated to me and the entire Veterans Affairs Committee.

Once again, thank you for inviting me here today to address your membership at your 81st annual state convention.

On behalf of myself, the committee and the entire House of Representatives ... I would like to simply say ... thank you.

Thank you for all your organization has done and will continue to do for our Commonwealth's veteran community. Your past military service, and your present service and commitment to veterans are indeed very much appreciated.

Have a great convention!