

Veterans Day Remarks 11-11-23 by Councilor Lisle Baker, President Emeritus, Newton City Council

Thank you, Mayor Fuller, and Director of Veterans' Services and fellow Marine, Seth Bai.

It is an honor to be here among so many Veterans as well as their friends, families, and colleagues in Newton Government.

While many of us have official titles, the unofficial one which we recognize today is the status of Veteran.

I am informed that the term itself is derived from Latin, and as originally used referred to an "old, experienced soldier." (While I am not as experienced as the others here assembled, I think I can qualify as old.)

However, with time the term veteran has been broadened to include not only soldiers but also those on active military duty at any age. The common element, however, is service in the armed forces of the United States.

What does that mean? Foundational is that members of our armed forces take an oath "to defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic...."

It is this willingness to put oneself in harm's way to defend democracy that we honor today, as much as we honor those individuals who have served their country, several of whom you will hear about later this morning.

We can learn much from their individual positive examples. We can also learn much from their service in general.

Let me highlight three of them: respect, teamwork, and values.

First, respect.

Aside from wearing a uniform, veterans command and give respect. This is a scarce commodity these days, as we are often drawn to interacting with our gadgets more than with each other.

Veterans know what it means to salute someone. It is a gesture that acknowledges the other person and the status that individual has earned.

The origin of the military salute is not clear, but I understand it may have begun when knights raised their visors to see and be seen – also taking one of their fighting arms out of service in the process.

While as civilians we may not salute each other, we can offer each other the respect that each of us deserve as fellow human beings. When we do, we honor our veterans.

Second, teamwork.

We often hear about the rugged individual. However, veterans know that to prevail, and indeed sometimes to survive, they need to work together and to be responsible for each other.

The rolls of those who have won the Congressional Medal of Honor are full of stories of comrades-in-arms - people from all walks of life, places, and circumstances - who shared one thing in common: a willingness to put the welfare of the members of their squad, their platoon, their vessel, or their flight crew ahead of their own.

It is this willingness to depend upon, and to be dependable, that made the phrase “band of brothers” one that speaks to all veterans, whatever their gender identity.

As civilians, we may not be part of a fighting unit, but we can watch out for each other, rather than just go our own way. When we do, we honor our veterans.

Third, values.

These can often be found in the mottos of the armed forces of the United States. Consider the mottos of the four services whose members are on the program today. (My apologies if there are those from the Coast Guard or Space Force here.)

First, the Army: "This we'll defend."

Our army is not about aggression but preventing and responding to it, a good idea for us individually as well as for our nation. When we do, we honor our Army veterans.

Then the Navy: Its motto is "Non Sibi sed Patriae" or "Not for Self, but for Country."

When we join together, even if just to vote, we honor our Navy veterans.

Third, the Air Force: "Aim high." This motto invites us to do our best, not just what will get us by. When we do, we honor our Air Force veterans.

Finally, the Marine Corps: "Always faithful". How many of us are willing to be faithful to our democratic ideals, even at our peril? When we do so, we honor our Marine veterans.

So, as we gather from all the villages of Newton, let us take this opportunity to honor our veterans by respecting each other, looking out for each other, and living the values they displayed.

We owe our veterans our enduring gratitude because it is their service and their sacrifice that has enabled all of us to be free.

Thank you.