

# THE HUFFINGTON POST



## [Aloysius Boyle](#)

Captain, USMC

### **A Call to Serve**

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"It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us-that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion-that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain." - Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address

I stood numb as the helicopter approached. I rubbed his chest and consoled him as he lay in the street. He squeezed my hand acknowledging that I was there with him at this final moment and that I would not give up on him. We left his helmet on as it was the only thing keeping his skull intact. We had already stripped his cammies, only to find more wounds that soon stained the dirt and sand around him. We continued to tend to his wounds, but it was futile. Where was the helicopter? His pupils moved like a pendulum, but I know he could hear me. I knew he was in pain, and I whispered through clenched teeth, "Keep fighting, don't give up, wait for the helicopter, allow us a chance to save your life." He softly squeezed my hand, as his pupil movement slowed. Minutes passed like hours, 19 years of life slipping away on the Iraq soil, as the distant WHOOMP of the helicopter neared. He squeezed my hand again, and I jolted back to reality. I rushed with a team of Marines toward the landing zone. We gently loaded him and everyone pulled back, but as his commander, I stood there one final moment with my Marine. I touched his head for what I knew would be the last time, and thanked him. The clarity in his eyes was waning as I whispered a final prayer, and tied my scapular to his helmet. He was in such pain, but he kept fighting. I assured him we would meet again, and as fast as the helicopter descended, it soared back into the heavens, gone from sight.

Soon after, I would receive news supporting my fear. He passed away. I climbed into the bed of the humvee destined toward base. My mind raced, yet I wasn't really thinking. All I remember is asking God to never, ever let me forget how I felt that day. I vowed then to live my life for the fallen, and dedicate my days to honor them and their sacrifice.

When people find out I am in the military, they respond by thanking me for my service. I am humbled at this gesture and grateful for their intent, but I always think of those who didn't come home. I think of their spouses, parents, siblings, and children. Those still here, who go about their lives, striving for the normalcy of what their life once was, but stricken with the deep loss only others who have experienced it can understand. Please, thank them, not me.

Our fallen will always remain with us. I think every veteran understands this. The challenge is how to live our lives accordingly to adequately honor them. I have stumbled over this thought for a few years, and regularly question if I am doing all I can. Recently, it seems I've had numerous conversations with friends and peers who are debating the deep personal choice of entering the military. They are hungry to serve and looking to "do their part." In these conversations, I recognized that the desire to serve your country can be accomplished in myriad ways. I realized that, like any great endeavor, I need help in promulgating this information and what better time to enlist the support of our nation than Memorial Day.

My challenge to each of us is to not forget the sacrifices of our fallen. Serve this weekend by honoring a deceased service member. There are many ways to achieve this end: You could visit the graves of the fallen, learn their names, find their stories and echo it to a loved one. A starting point for this would be the website <http://militarytimes.com/valor>, which lists the names, ranks, and branches of military of our deceased service members. A separate way would be to seek out families in your community and voice the name of their lost service member. For some, it has been years since their loved one was mentioned or spoken of. Honoring fallen service members and recognizing their families can be done through non-profit organizations like the [Travis Manion Foundation](#) or [Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund](#). Both provide support for the families of military personnel lost in service to our nation. If your desire is to participate in a sustained role, then explore the recent [Joining Forces Commitments](#) announced by our First Lady and Dr. Biden. This is a national call to serve and enlist the help of our great citizens to honor and give back to our veteran community. It is through these initiatives I am reminded of our unwavering commitment on behalf of a grateful nation.

This Memorial Day, we will pause as a nation to commemorate the lives of those who died in military service; those who have given the last full measure. This September will mark 10 years since the unforgettable day from which so many of our spouses, parents, siblings, and children have sacrificed their lives never to return home. The great task remaining before us is to not let this Memorial Day pass without observing it and honoring the sacrifices of our fallen. There are opportunities all around us to remember, to honor, and to serve so that these heroes will not have died in vain.

*The views presented are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Defense, the Department of the Navy or the United States Marine Corps.*