

Anderson, IN – U.S. Congressman Mike Pence delivered the following remarks at Crown Hill Cemetery's 143rd Annual Memorial Day Ceremony Monday, May 30, 2011:

"Thank you, Major Barnthouse for that embarrassingly excessive introduction. I am very humbled to be here again for the 143rd annual ceremony on this most momentous of days for the American people. I want to thank the staff and faculty of Crown Hill National Cemetery for their devotion to the soldiers who served the United States of America lo these last 143 years.

"To all the members of the military who are here it is an honor to be able to be with you today. To the members of the gold star families who are here: it is a greater honor still. Members of the 38th infantry division band, to the chaplain, to neighbors and friends, distinguished guests, active duty military - greetings.

"There is a day in November when we remember those who put on the uniform and came home. In May, we remember those who put on the uniform and did not come home. It is Memorial Day once again. The Bible tells us to, 'mourn with those who mourn and grieve with those who grieve.'

"And today, in the midst of a thankfully, sunny early summer day, everyone gathered here represents the best of that tradition. And I commend each and every one of you for taking the time to stand with those, and to stand for those, who stood for us.

"Today we gather as Americans have done since the 30th of May, 1868, when flowers were first placed on graves of both Union and Confederate soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery. It was an effort then and it is today to make one more installment on a debt of gratitude to fallen heroes and their families, but it is a debt that we will never be able to fully repay. It is a debt of honor; it is a debt of respect. And each of us have gathered here today, and many thousands gathered in Henry County earlier today, and in ceremonies like this across the Hoosier State to do just that.

"It is a high honor for me to stand before you again today, but it is also a humbling one. For while I am a public servant, I am not a soldier. I am a soldier's son. My father saw combat in Korea; my brother enlisted and was in Beirut wearing the uniform of a Marine in 1983; and I am the proud father of a Navy shipman in training, who is with me today.

"But as I look out at this somber gathering of America's silent strength, I feel perhaps like the smallest man here. I identify with words spoken by our 40th President on such an occasion where he said, 'Words are feeble on Memorial Day.' For the sight before us is that of a strong and good nation that stands in silence and remembers those who were loved and in return loved their countrymen enough to die for them. But as I think about it in a very real sense it may be altogether fitting that someone like me should address people like you today. To stand among the families of the fallen; to stand among heroes whose uniforms are in the closet and medals are in the drawer, to simply say words of a grateful state and a grateful nation, of thanks. So maybe I do belong here among some of you whose grief is fresh and others who this day return to a flood of memories from decades past. To stand at this podium before the silent sentinels who lie here buried, for their duty was to serve and our duty is to remember.

"We are here to remember the cost of war, and to never forget the incalculable price that has been paid and by our actions to pay an ongoing tribute to the service and sacrifice of those who went and did not come home. Now the families and the veterans in this crowd know the cost of war better than I ever will. While it is written in the names and the faces of every hero that fell on every battlefield from Valley Forge to Saratoga to Yorktown to Antietam to the Marne, to Guadalcanal to the Chosin Reservoir and Khe Sanh, to Baghdad and Kabul to Jalalabad and Ramadi. The cost of war, as many gathered here know better, is more carved on the hearts of those who waited and prayed at home and on the countrymen who served and came home without some of the best friends they would ever know.

"I don't know what exactly brought you here today, but I know why you came...a name, a face, a voice, a faded photograph gone maybe months, maybe years. These memories are still as important and as loved as the day word came. This morning in New Castle, I looked out into the crowd, and I saw Scott's mom. Scott Sibowsky was born in New Castle, Indiana, but he grew up in Manchester. I met his mom after he fell in Iraq in the Al Anbar Province on 12 November 2005. He was with the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, 1st Marine Expeditionary Force and Lance Corporal Scott Sibowsky, was a remarkable young man. His mom walked up to me after the ceremony this morning, now 5 and a half years later. She said, 'Mike, I let myself cry three days a year, and this is one of them.' My advice to those of you who can relate to her thought is to cry all your tears today. Heaven smiles when we cry for heroes.

"There is another cost of war; it is an ongoing price that is paid particularly by our servicemen and women. It is a special burden that they bear.

"Having seen the face of war and lived to tell about it, it bears some remembrance today.

"Days like today make me think of my dad. He's gone 23 years now; like his third son, he was a very ordinary man. Grew up in a big city, had big dreams, but when the time came, he put on the uniform and he went to Korea. He came home with medals on his chest to put in the drawer never to talk about them again and he raised a family, built a church, built a business, and left a legacy twenty-three years ago that echoes in my heart to this day.

"But it would be after my father passed away that I felt like I came to know a little more about him than I knew when he was alive. I met his second cousin down in Evansville a few years after dad had passed and he spoke about the young man my dad was before he went to war. Said he was a happy-go-lucky guy, not a care in the world. He stepped up, served his country. But he said that when he came back he was different. Then he paused and said words that opened my eyes into my father's heart and experience as nothing else. He said, 'I don't think your dad got over the guilt of coming home.'

"In those words, every faraway look that my father had when we brought up his military service, the way his voice would trail off when he would speak of his men, suddenly made sense to me. Today belongs to the families of the fallen. Let me say from my heart, it also belongs to you who served in the uniform of the United States and who bear a special burden of the heroes who come home. I know you're here. I know you're here standing post, paying tribute to those you left behind.

"My dad used to say he didn't understand why he got to come home and marry his sweetheart and have kids who drove him crazy, work a job, bounce grandkids on his knee. He never understood that. And I know some of you feel that way too. Just know this Memorial Day you are in our hearts as well for the special burden that you bear.

"Lastly we pay our debt of gratitude and respect on Memorial Day by insuring the survival of all for which they fought. President Reagan also said, 'Words cannot repay the debt we owe these men. Surely with our actions we must strive to keep faith with them and with the vision that led them to battle and to final sacrifice.'

"Winston Churchill said, 'We sleep soundly in our beds because rough men stand ready in the night to visit violence on those who would do us harm.' As we stand today and remember the fallen, as we pull their families close, and their comrades close, I believe we should also do what those who have gone before would perhaps most wish us to do. And that is stand with those who on this day stand on that wall for our freedom. Stand with those who at this very hour are standing in the middle of the night, flying in a Black Hawk helicopter, possibly sliding down a wire, or standing a lonely post at some far-out outpost in the world. Those who are ready to visit violence on those who would do us harm must be on our hearts today. "And we must ever dedicate ourselves to ensuring that this nation whatever her economic circumstances, provides our soldiers with the resources they need to get the job done and come home safe.

"We gather today because of what Lincoln in his first inaugural called, 'The mystic chords of memory stretching from every patriot grave.' They bind us to the great and the humble, the known and the unknown. Who did great things, who suffered more than we suffer. Who gave more than we give, and pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor for us whom they did not know. For we drink from wells we did not dig, and we're warmed by fires we did not build, in this, the freest and most prosperous nation in the history of the world. They were faithful in their time. And so we must be in ours.

"They are silent, now and forever, but the eternal silence of every patriot grave echoes with the words. Believe in freedom. Believe in America. And believe in Him who placed this miracle of democracy on these wilderness shores. For surely He is not done with America yet.

"Their duty was to serve. Our duty is to remember. Thank you for the honor of standing with you today. As fellow Hoosiers and fellow Americans, doing our duty, most needful on this annual day of Memorial. And may we ever do our duty. And may we never cease to pay our debt of honor and respect to our honored dead, their cherished families, their beloved comrades, and in so doing, do our part to ensure the ongoing vitality of the last best hope of earth, the United States of America, so help us God.

"Thank you all. Thank you for being here this Memorial Day. God bless you."