

War on Terror

Good Morning,

There are a lot of people to thank today and I truly hope they all get recognized because this project could not have happened without every one of them. First I need to thank the memorial committee, all of them. Its been a long road. Thank you to my staff at the Monroe County Veterans Service Agency, Dale, Matt, Fawn, Jeff, Kevin, Mitchell, and Scott, as they took on a burden that they did not expect, Im sure if you ask them they will tell you it was an honor to work on but considering how difficult their jobs are already, it was no easy task for them to pick this up as well. There were also a few key people that put more hours into this than they would have you know. Director of Monroe County Parks Pat Meredtih, Mark Quinn, Bill Daly, Joe Vankerhove, and the rest of parks who made sure the project got finished. The last four gentlemen I named were out here almost everyday making sure everything was up to standard. I also need to thank our photographer who also happens to be my father-in-law for being ready at a moments notice. Thank you to Cam and his crew at Camco, Tom Robinson at Barton and Leguidace, Tom Weeks at Fred's Flags and Todd at Lakelands for pushing your companies to the limits so that we could celebrate the opening of this on 9/11. Thank you to all of our community supporters who helped over the years to make this a reality. Thank you to Bob Lonsberry for your support. Thank you to my friend Brother Wease and Doreen for everything you've done for us. There has been a lot of fundraising needed to make this happen and we had a few big names from our community step up to do that. Jay Speranza from Tony Ds, and another person who asked me not mention him were the leaders in this along with our Vietnam Veterans of

America Chapter 20. Speaking of our Vietnam Veterans I have to mention the originals here in Monroe County, the legacy of Tom Cray lives on here, Wease, the widow of Tom Cook, Maria is here, we thank Tom for all he did for these memorials, Chuck Macaluso, and one who unfortunately could not be with us today Gary Beikirch. Of course all of our thanks goes to those elected, and appointed officials that made sure we had the support to make this happen, County Executive Adam Bello, Former County Executive Cheryl Dinolfo, Corinda Crossdale, and Senator Joe Robach. And most significantly we thank the Gold Star families seated here before us for allowing us to build this great memorial in honor of your children.

This project has been a long time in the making. Im not sure how I can adequately convey the meaning of this endeavor in a few minutes but I suppose I should start with some names. These are not names that you will find on this memorial because the men I went to war with are not from this area. My names are Daniel Mcklenny, Norman Anderson, John Stalvey, and Juston Thacker. These are the Marines that I failed to bring home, and they are who I will think about when I visit this place. There will be many who will visit this place and most who do will have their own names. Its what this is for. I also have two step children, Samantha and Ethan. Ive been in their lives since they were small children and now they are teenagers and I have not spoken to them about this war, Ive not said those names to them, and I don't really know why. Perhaps this will serve as an opportunity for me to teach them about the most significant thing that ever happened to me and the most significant men Ive ever known. This year on the 20th anniversary of 9/11 our community is experiencing something different. There is a stirring of

emotion out there, anger, sorrow, confusion, some might feel relief, and some of us feel like the walls are closing in. We ask ourselves what we did it for, was it worth it? Our Gold Star families have been reported to have asked these questions, some of our leadership has failed to assure them that their sacrifice was worthy, failed to understand that if we can't respect the parents who gave their children to this country then we ultimately have no respect for this country itself. One of the reasons I am thankful that I spent so much time in Afghanistan is because it allows me to stand here and confidently say it was worth it. Every one of those lives was worth it. An entire generation of children grew up free from oppression, and entire generation of young adults have been able to vote for their leaders, and an entire generation of women were freed from being slaves. One second of freedom is worth dying for because the moment we value it any less than that we have resigned ourselves to an eternity of oppression. Our world has lived the past 20 years free from the threat of the Taliban and Al Qaeda, but only because those whose names you see behind me had the courage to take the fight to them. Our country came face to face with evil on September 11th 2001, it's easy for Americans to forget what evil looks like. We should be reminded. Evil looks like the purposeful targeting of innocent men women and children, noncombatants. Evil looks like enslaving women who are beaten if they so much as appear in the street without a man because they are seen as being temptations, evil is destroying the educational system and history of an entire nation so that its people only know those who are in power, evil is executing a pregnant woman because she was an Afghan police officer, and evil is literally taking real whips to the brave women protesting Taliban rule in the streets in Kabul. I will never forget the face of evil, I see it every night when I

close my eyes. Its all worth it because in the wise words of Edmund Burke, and I paraphrase

“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing”.