**National Wreaths Across America Day Ceremony**

***Optional Script***

*Updated: January 18, 2023*

Welcome! Thank you for joining us today as we celebrate the mission to Remember the fallen, Honor those that serve and their families, and Teach the next generation the value of freedom.

We ask that to start the event, you all please join me in a moment of silence to remember the fallen, prisoners of war, and those missing in action and honor those who have served and are serving this great nation’s armed services.

**:30 seconds of silence recommended**

***OPTIONAL Color Guard:***

Please stand while we post the colors.

“Color Guard, post/present the Colors.” *(Where Honor Guards are present and participating, they too will come forward and place themselves on both sides of the memorial).*

**Location Coordinator to set this up in advance**.

*Note of clarity, posting vs. presenting the flags: If flags are put into stands, the command should be “post the colors,” if the color guard is to remain standing with the flags, they should be directed to “present the colors.” The emcee should direct the audience to stand while the flag is moving. When outside, you should either salute or place your hand over your heart when the American flag passes.*

***Opening Remarks:***

Thank you all for joining us here today. This year, across the country at more than <<INSERT #>> participating locations like this one, there are millions of Americans gathering safely as one nation to Remember, Honor and Teach. We are all proud to be Americans that live in a free society made up of many people, from many walks of life. The freedoms we enjoy today have not come without a price. Lying here before us and in cemeteries throughout this nation are men and women who gave their lives so that we can live in freedom and without fear. We can worship as we see fit. We can raise our children to believe as we do. We are free to vote for the leaders of our choosing. And, we have the right to succeed, and we have the right to fail at whatever endeavor we wish to pursue.

The United States of America was founded on the ideals of Freedom, Justice, and Equality. Our Nation stands as a shining beacon of liberty and freedom to the world. We thank those who gave their lives to keep us free, and we shall not forget you. We shall remember. (Short Pause)

Today, more than ever, we reflect on our nation’s veterans and active duty service members who have had and continue to fight to protect the innocent and oppressed. This nation has always been the first to stand up for the freedom of people from around the world. Many of you here today have answered that call and served your country well. For this, we say, “Thank you,” and we are honored to know you.

There are many men and women serving today in all branches of the military, here at home and in places far away, that most of us have never heard of. These men and women are part of the best-trained, best-equipped force in the world. We honor them and their families for the sacrifices they make each day to keep our country safe from terrorism, hatred, and injustice.

Quoting our 40th United States President Ronald Reagan (short pause), “Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn’t pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children’s children what it was once like in the United States, where men were free.”

Today, we show a united front of gratitude and respect across the United States of America as we REMEMBER the Fallen, HONOR those who serve and their families, and TEACH the next generation the value of freedom.

***Wreath Laying: Color Guard and, if present, Honor Guard will present arms at the laying of each ceremonial wreath.***

Now [Person’s Name] will lay a veteran’s wreath in memory of those who served and are serving in the United States Army.

Now [Person’s Name] will lay a veteran’s wreath in memory of those who served and are serving in the United States Marine Corps.

Now [Person’s Name] will lay a veteran’s wreath in memory of those who served and are serving in the United States Navy.

Now [Person’s Name] will lay a veteran’s wreath in memory of those who served and are serving in the United States Air Force.

Now [Person’s Name] will lay a veteran’s wreath in honor of those serving in the United States Space Force. *Note, if the Space Force is unable to provide a service member, a Veteran of Air Force Space Command or U.S. Space Command is also appropriate.*

Now [Person’s Name] will lay a veteran’s wreath in memory of those who served and are serving in the United States Coast Guard.

Now [Person’s Name] will lay a veteran’s wreath in memory of those who served and are serving in the United States Merchant Marines.

Now [Person’s Name] will lay a veteran’s wreath in honor of the 93,129 United States Servicemen from all branches of the service whose last known status was either Prisoners of War or Missing in Action. These individuals have never returned to their families and homes. We shall not forget you.

**[OPTIONAL]** At this time, we would also like to honor all the uniformed service members who serve in The United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps (USPHS) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Commissioned Officer Corps.

***NOTE: If you would like to include another group in this part of the ceremony, such as Gold Star or Blue Star Families, First Responders, etc., now is the time to recognize these groups. You may use wreaths that have been sponsored to add to this piece of the ceremony, as you deem appropriate.***

***If possible, an active-duty service person should lay the wreath of the armed services they represent. After the last wreath is laid, the Color Guard and Honor Guard will Order Arms.***

**Closing Remarks:**

We encourage every volunteer here today, who places a wreath on a veteran's grave, to say that veteran’s name aloud and take a moment to thank them for their service to our country. It's a small act that goes a long way toward keeping the memory of our veterans alive.

Remember, we are not here today to “decorate graves.” We are here to remember not their *deaths,* but their *lives.* Each wreath is a gift of appreciation from a grateful America.

These live balsam fir wreaths symbolize our honor to those who have served and are serving in the armed forces of our great nation and to their families who endure sacrifices every day on our behalf. To our children, we want you to understand that the freedoms you enjoy today have not been free but have come with a cost that someday, you may have to pay yourself.

As a nation standing together, we can defeat terrorism, hatred and injustice. Thanks to our Veterans, we have the freedom to do just that.

***This is where the scripted ceremony ends, and the Leader or other Designated person turns it over to the Veterans Groups.***

**Tips:**

Where there are high-ranking officials present (Governor, State Elected Officials, etc.) and who wish to make a statement (short) this is a good time to let them speak.

**Veterans’ Groups:** Coordinators, please make sure you accommodate all groups that want to participate in the ceremony after the scripted ceremony. Try to lead them to keep it short and to the point.

**Ending:** At the conclusion, where possible, have TAPS played. Retire the Colors and thank everyone for coming.

**Location Coordinators:** As Coordinators, you are in charge of everything else that takes place at this ceremonial event. How your Color Guard is placed (and/or Honor Guard is placed) is entirely up to you. Ceremonies throughout the country are all different and we cannot script, nor do we want to script, the entire ceremony. You are capable and a better judge of your command than we are. We will support you with ideas, if asked, to provide them to you or your other leaders in your group. Have fun with this project!

**Additional Ideas:** Before the beginning of the ceremony, some groups have the participants recite the Pledge of Allegiance and play the National Anthem. This is your choice to do, if desired.

If you have families there that want to place wreaths on their loved one’s grave, you can either flag the grave ahead of time or have some of the local groups get involved by standing near the headstone to make sure no one else, other than the family member, places the grave specific wreath. **All of this would need to be coordinated prior to the service and they would need to pre-register with whomever is organizing.**

You should also encourage groups and volunteers to only take one wreath, or two, depending on the number sponsored for your location, so that everyone has a chance to lay a wreath.

If for any reason you need to skip a grave, please encourage people to take a moment and stop at the grave to pay respects and honor that veteran, thanking them for their service.

Please make sure that if you have multiple groups, that you recognize all of them to not discourage anyone from participation.

**Suggested words to read at the ceremony, from Morrill Worcester, founder of Wreaths Across America:**

To all WAA Volunteers:

Thank you for being here today…

Before you get started, there are some items to be brought to your attention, to make your experience even better.

1) Each wreath you’ll be placing is handmade and unique. They are made of balsam fir grown in the Downeast region of Maine, USA, with pride.

2) Some of the needles do become detached during the making, packing, and transportation of the wreaths. Please keep in mind that every wreath has tens of thousands of needles and it is normal for this to happen.

3) Because the wreaths are packed tightly in boxes, it will take 2-3 hours for them to fully relax to their natural circular shape.

4) Before placing a wreath on a headstone, take a minute to re-fluff the greens and rearrange the bow. When the wreath is finally laid at the headstone, please make sure the bow is at the 12:00 position.

It is important to have that intimate moment with the hero you are honoring, but please remember to take a step back and look at the complete picture of what all of us have accomplished through the mission to REMEMBER, HONOR, and TEACH.