

DENNIS JOYNER'S REMARKS AT THE AMERICAN VETERANS DISABLED FOR LIFE MEMORIAL DEDICATION

Today We Come Together To Dedicate The American Veterans Disabled For Life Memorial.

I Would Like To Share The Journey That Brings Me And My Family Here.

I Was In Vietnam Only 32 Days When I Was Wounded. Being Assigned To A Recon Unit With The United States Army 9th Infantry Division In The Mekong Delta, We Were On Patrol When We Came To A Canal That We Needed To Cross.

With The Tide Coming In Causing A Strong Undercurrent, Those Of Us Who Had Already Crossed Went Back To Help The Non-Swimmers Across.

After Getting Back Into Single File Formation, Little Did I Know That I Would Walk The Last Three Steps Of My Life.

For After That Third Step, My Life Was Going To Start Over.

I Never Heard The Explosian That Day, June 26, 1969. Never Losing Consciousness, I Could See Exactly What Happened To My Legs And Left Arm And My Immediate Reaction Was ---Let Me Die! Knowing That He Must Keep Me From Going Into Shock, Sgt. Reynolds Slapped Me Across The Face And Screamed At Me, "Joyner, You Have A Lot To Live For. You Have A Wife And Son Back Home Waiting For You And You Want To Die. "

Seargent Reynolds, I Would Never Have Survived Without You On The Battlefield That Day Or For The Last 45 Years Without Your Assurance That I Had A Lot To Live For. I Owe You My Life.

And I Know That Saving My Life Has Had A Profound Effect On You

And Your Family---As The Visions And Memories From That Day Are Forever Etched In Your Mind....

And I Am So Blessed That Ed Reynolds And His Family Are Today To Share In This Historic Event.

I Was Sent Back To Valley Forge Army Hospital To Recover Under A Young Army Surgeon, Dr. Craig Roberts, Who Was Not Yet 30 Years Old.

My Wounds Eventually Healed Cleanly, And Although Fitted With Prosthetic Legs, I Opted For A Wheelchair.

For Me, I Have Been Blessed With An Ability To Pick Up The Pieces From That Day In Vietnam And Live A Life Of Fulfillment.

Although We Disabled Veterans Live A Life Different Than Most, We Have Been Fortunate We Don't Have To Go It Alone.

We've Had Our Family And Friends With Us For The Entire Journey, Through The Good Times And The Difficult Times.

Our Families And Friends Have Also Had To Deal With The Effects Caused By Our Injuries.

I Can't Imagine The Fear...The Terror..... That Must Have Been In My Family's Hearts And Minds That Day They Received The TelegramExplaining The Severity Of My Injuries....With No Way To Contact The Hospital Or Even Know Where I Was.....12,000 Miles Away In A War Torn Country.

And Probably More Difficult Than That, Having To Walk Those Long Halls At Valley Forge Army Hospital For The First Time, Not Knowing What To Expect.....What I Was Going To Look Like.....What My Attitude Would Be....Trying To Think Of What To Say...Seeing Me The First Time....Minus Three Limbs.

A Walk My Mother Would Often Say Was The Longest Walk Of Her

Life.
(Pause)

And How Difficult Must It Have Been For My Wife To Hear The Words, "Her Daddy Doesn't Have Any Legs" -----

Said By One Of My Daughter's Kindergarten Classmates---

And The Laughter That Filled The Room. All The Children Laughing Except For One, My Daughter.....

As Tears Filled Her Eyes, She Said, "Why Are They Laughing At My Daddy?"

Or The Life Long Impression That Was Formed In A 14 Year Old Girl's Young Mind As She Visited Us Wounded Soldiers On Ward 4cd At Valley Forge Army Hospital, An All Amputee Ward, For Four Years..... Helping To Lift Our Spirits And Encourage Us On.

Diane, Thank You And We Will Forever Remember And Love You For All That You Have Done For Us.

*****Pause*****

To My Family, My Sister And Brother Who Were There The Day My Parents Received That Telegram From Vietnam.....

To My Sons And Daughter Who Have Had To Live Their Lives As Children Of A Disabled Veteran, With A Father Who At Times Was Unable To Be As Normal As Their Friend's Dads...

And To My Wife Donna, Who Came Into My Life During A Very Difficult Time For Me, And Who Has Always Accepted Me For The Man That I Am...

I Want You All To Know That A Part Of Me Wants To Say I'm Sorry You Have Had To Share In My Lifetime Sacrifices As A Disabled Veteran. But Down Deep In My Heart, I Can't Apologize. I Can Only Thank You For Showing Your Love For This Great

Country Of Ours By Being Beside Me Throughout My Journey.
(Pause)

I've Been Honored To Share A Small Part Of My Life As A Disabled Veteran And The Impact It Has Had On My Family And Friends.
We Are Not Unique In Our Story.

We Are Just An Example Of The Thousands Of Lives Affected By Life Long Disabilities That Are The Terrifying Consequences Of War.
Although I've Been Blessed With Many Achievements In Life, The Achievement I Am Most Proud Of Is This Memorial.

A Memorial That Gives Me, And The Many Thousands Of Other Disabled Veterans Like Me, A Sense Of Contentment Knowing That What We Gave.....

What Our Families Gave....

And What We Continue To Give Will Be Forever Remembered Here In Our Nations Capital.

God Bless The Nation's Disabled Veterans.....And God Bless The United States Of America.