

**ANREF "Polar Bears" Memorial Day 2018**

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Thank you for being here today. I am deeply honored to stand with you, commemorating the sacrifices of those men and women who have laid down their lives in service to this nation. I would like to take a moment and acknowledge any who have lost a loved one in service of this country. It doesn't matter how much time has passed—no words of condolence can even begin to adequately console a survivor's grief. And while grief from loss may change throughout the years—it never, never leaves us.

The global environment today is volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. The collapse of the former Soviet Union in 1993 ended a 40 year period of relative global stability. In the years that followed, the bi-polar hegemony of the US and USSR was replaced with the emergence of numerous regional threats and conflicts anchored by a few nation-states that possessed the ability to conduct war against the US with near-peer capabilities in military strength and technology. These conditions that we face today are no different to the period of time when President Wilson deemed it to be in the national interest to commit US forces to a regional conflict in North Russia. A conflict that had the ability to influence global events. The military force President Wilson committed, commonly referred to as the "Polar Bears", was a mix of army volunteers and draftees who represented the values of the United States. The Polar Bears faced many challenges over the nearly year-long year deployment: minimal training, the Spanish flu, an unclear and undefined purpose, an ideologically motivated threat, and information isolation from the homeland. Each of these issues on their own can be tough enough to work through. However, when

compiled together, as it was for the Polar Bears, it can test a person's limits to remain faithful to their values. Being composed of 90% Michiganders and 70% of that being from the Detroit area, this was also a test of our Michigan values and character.

Values, which are fundamental to helping people discern right from wrong in any situation, are a key factor that distinguishes the American servicemen from his global counterparts. The US Army has seven values to that are reflective of our military profession and what American society deems important. They are loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage.

By the end of WWI, 4 million American Men and Women were in uniform out of a national population of 103 million or about 3.8%. In 1945 during World War II, the percent of the population in service was over 10%. Today, that number in service is less than 1%. And while the numbers in service have fluctuated since 1918, the values and character of the American Serviceman have not. The Michigan Army National Guard and the National Guard as a whole are composed of Units formed within geographic and even cultural communities within a State. The Polar Bears, were very similar to the National Guard in that they too were formed in the same fashion - from local Michigan communities. And when the National Guard goes to war, the communities they are from also go with them.

Today's National Guard is a distant relative of those units in 1918 and our Army National Guard is constantly evolving. The first major evolution started with "ARNG version 1.0" circa the creation of the All-Volunteer Force in 1973/74. It was a force with a significant number of members who

predominantly were only there to get a draft deferment. It was a force with few standards that relied heavily upon on-the-job-training to build skills.

ARNG version 2.0 was defined by a military build-up in the 80's and an increase the overall total strength for the Guard. Built on a model of tiered readiness that created units that were the "haves & have-nots" across the force.

ARNG version 2.5 in 1993 saw the restructuring America's Army and the Army Guard "from a Cold War Army to a Power Projection Army." It was an agreement that "focused on fighting and winning wars... while simultaneously acknowledged the domestic needs of governors."

Post-9/11, resources were abundant. This begat ARNG 3.0 which was, and is, the best-manned, best trained, best-equipped, best-led and most experienced force in the long history of the militia.

The next evolution for the National Guard is ARNG 4.0. Today, our Army has been and continues to be faced declining resources while continuing the COIN / Counterterrorism battle while simultaneously meeting the challenges of potential conflict with a near-peer adversary. ARNG 4.0 is the full realization of the ARNG to meet increasing operational demands, not just that of a strategic reserve.

This is not just increased readiness for one or two units, it is about a change in our culture; a change in our organization and institutions; This is about a change in how we do business for preparing for the possibility of direct action with a near-peer adversaries while still be accessible by State Governors for domestic emergencies. The ARNG 4.0 is characterized by Improved personal readiness; Developed leaders; Increased combat readiness for every unit over phases; Additional training days/events for select units; Partnering with Active Army and Army Reserve units (Total Force Concept); Leveraging ARNG training facilities/installations like Camp Grayling and Fort Custer – the basic training location for the Polar Bears; Increased CTC rotations like those at the National Training Center in California or the

Joint Readiness Training Center in Louisiana; Over-manned Units; and Long-term Modernization of unit equipment.

For some Michigan Army National Guard Units, ARNG 4.0 means an increase in readiness that comes from a narrowed training focus, additional training time, and knowledge that if they are needed like the Polar Bears were needed in 1918, they will be ready to accomplish their limited notice assigned task. In the last two years of my command of the First Battalion 125th Infantry Regiment, we had several limited notice events ranging from the supporting the Flint Water Crisis to conducted an exercise above the Arctic Circle in Greenland. Today, members of the First Battalion 125th Infantry Regiment are in Greenland, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia conducting exercises. All of this was enabled by volunteer Soldiers who possessed the values of their hometown communities and a belief they could make a difference regardless of the challenges they may face.

An American Servicemen does not enlist with the intent to make the ultimate sacrifice for their nation. They enlisted with the sober knowledge, however, that that is a possibility. This mortal risk is outweighed by other intrinsic and extrinsic factors that their values and beliefs help define. Values born in families and local communities throughout the country. Today we remember the sacrifices of the 234 men of the polar bears died in Russia and the thousands of others who have given their lives in the service of our country. Their sacrifice embodies these values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. They helped ensure our freedom to be who we are as individuals and as members of something greater than ourselves – to live the values we hold so dear. So in closing, I would ask as you leave here and go about the rest of your day, to keep the fallen in your minds and their families and friends in your heart—for it is their immense collective sacrifices that have

helped keep our country safe and free. And as long as we continue to honor them with our actions and remember their sacrifices, they will never be forgotten.

Thank you.