

November 2004 - A New Generation of Veterans

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By Congressman Jerry Moran

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Two Kansans exemplify the changing face of the American veteran. The first is a man who graduated from McPherson High School in 1941. The second is a young woman who graduated from the Military Academy at West Point in 2000. One served in the Navy during World War II, the other pilots Blackhawk helicopters for the Army in the War on Terror.

World War II veteran Udie Grant is a man who will be forever revered. Although he died in 2004, he left a legacy of service-both in the military and in his community. Udie came of age in the Great Depression and like so many of his generation, his life was forever changed by the attack on Pearl Harbor. He had just graduated from high school, but felt the need to answer his country's call. The world was changing before Udie's eyes. Gone were the days of an isolated America, replaced with the understanding that our country has a greater responsibility to help our world escape cruelty and oppression.

On September 11, 2001, our world changed again. On that day feelings were awakened in the heart of America. There was bewilderment mixed with anger. People like Hutchinson native Katrina Gier-Lewis felt the need to bring justice to those guilty of the horrific attack. The West Point graduate wanted to ensure that terror would never again grip our nation. Sixty years had passed since Udie's generation took up the cause of freedom, but the passage of time did not dampen America's determination to defend our country and protect our way of life.

If you put their biographies side-by-side, Udie and Katrina's lives are very different. But their values are not. Respect of country, love of freedom and sense of duty. Katrina, and so many others of today's generation have stepped forward to answer the call to serve.

In June, I joined many invasion-day veterans at Normandy for the 60th anniversary of D-Day. On the sands of the Normandy beaches, I tried to imagine what it must have been like for those young men, so many years ago, to disembark from their ships and charge out across the sand. Once again, young men and women are charging across sands, but instead of a beach, it is a desert. At Normandy, many young people gave up their chance to grow old, and instead sacrificed their lives. The same thing is happening today in Iraq and Afghanistan. I thank God for the men and women who sacrifice the precious gift of life to protect the rights of others; their families, neighbors, and folks they never knew. I hope today that our reasons for living are as good as theirs were for dying.

Across Kansas, we gather on this Veterans Day to honor all soldiers: those of World War II, those of today, and those of the wars and conflicts in between. We gather to send the message that we remember, we are grateful and that we will never forget their sacrifice. May God bless them and the country they served.