

## Memorial Day 2026 Springfield, PA Script and Remarks – Rich Debany

Good morning neighbors, veterans, Commissioners, and honored guests. I am Rich Debany, your master of ceremonies today.

On behalf of American Legion Post 227, the Springfield Township management and its Board of Commissioners, welcome to Springfield's Memorial Day remembrance. Thank you for being here despite the weather — for choosing to gather as a community to honor those who became missing and who gave their lives in service to our nation.

We will begin with a playing of the National Anthem, the laying of the memorial wreath by Police Chief **Jeff Shull** and United States Army veteran **Bill Smeck**, the rifle salute, the playing of Taps, and the invocation by Post 227's chaplain and United States Navy veteran **Art Gutzler**.

If you are seated, please rise and remain standing.

---

*(National anthem, wreath laying, rifle salute, playing of Taps, invocation)*

---

Please take your seat if you are fortunate enough to have one. A few thank yous –

- Memorial Day planning committee members — Gold Star sisters **Susie and Maureen McHugh** and Army veterans **Dom Basile, Art Sweisfurth, Bill Clark** and of course the Chair and overall remembrance director, **Bill Smeck**.
- **Post Chaplain Gutzler**, our rifle squad led by **Kurt Sellers**, United States Army Retired, and our United States flag bearer, Army veteran **Al Filipone**.
- The Springfield **Police and Fire Departments** and the **Ambulance Corps**.
- Members of American Legion **Post 227** and **VFW Post 7390** who joined us – to include Post 7390's HMMWV and crew.
- The **Springfield management and employees** for the tremendous and various support.
- **Matt Radico** for the video production
- Thank you Springfield **High School Marching Band** for the marching, the music, and the wonderful renditions of The Star-Spangled Banner. A shout out to the drum majors **Ben Gillin** and **Ray Mulato**. Also, buglers **Dan Stevens** and **Logan Campbell** for the beautiful playing of Taps. You sharing your talent to play those 24 notes is a truly meaningful and impactful way to honor our fallen.
- Finally, to band director **Mark Stanford** for cultivating the love of music, encouraging participation today of your student band members, and for faithfully supporting our Memorial Day remembrance each year.

We have Gold Star family members here today. We specially recognize you and honor you and your family's personal loss and sacrifice.

Memorial Day asks something specific of us. Not to celebrate military power, nationalism, or glory in any of its forms; but simply to remember and honor. It is a reminder of the **true cost of war**, not measured in dollars or territory, but in **blood**, in **sons and daughters**, in lives forever changed or cut short.

Here in Springfield, that cost is not in abstract. It has names; names you'll soon hear. It has faces; faces you see on our webpage, on these banners here and along our streets. It has addresses, schools, churches, legacies that touch us, and families who carried, **and still carry**, the weight of loss across generations. These were young people shaped by this township long before they wore the uniform of our nation.

Across the country today, communities are remembering their own lost sons and daughters. Since last Memorial Day, many, perhaps hundreds, died to non-combat causes and 16 died related to hostilities — two Iowa Guardsman in Syria last December and 14 related to our war with Iran.

While we honor *all* our nation's missing and killed, here in Springfield, we especially remember our own. Since 1943, our little community has lost 43 of its sons to war. Today, we focus our remembrance on just three of them that were a part of a special generation that answered the call at a moment when the survival of our allies and the fate of the world was truly uncertain.

Staff Sergeant **William Bathgate**.

Second Lieutenant **William McKenna**.

And Sergeant **Stanley Smith**.

They were not distant figures in history books. They were three young men who once stood where we stand now, shaped by this community, and who carried Springfield and Delaware County with them into the most dangerous places on earth.

Today we will hear their stories told by three veterans. As we listen, let us do so with intention, remembering that the freedoms we enjoy were preserved by ordinary young neighbors who did something extraordinary when asked.

It is now my honor to introduce our first reader, **Bill Spence**.

Long before his arrival to Springfield in 2008, Bill served as a communications technician in the United States Navy from 1963 to 1967. Bill will share the remembrance of Springfield native **Staff Sergeant William Hughes Bathgate**, United States Army Air Forces, who gave his life in North Africa in 1943.

Bill will help us remember a young man who once walked these same streets, and who carried Springfield with him halfway around the world to become both a hero and the community's first loss of the war.

Please welcome **Bill Spence**.

---

(Staff Sergeant William Bathgate remembrance delivered)

---

Thank you, Bill.

Our second reader is **Neil Dougherty** who will share the remembrance of **Second Lieutenant William Francis McKenna**, United States Army Air Forces — a bombardier whose B-17 was lost during a mission over Europe in 1943.

Neil, a 51-year Springfield resident, served as a munitions officer in the United States Air Force from 1964 to 1968 then in the NJ Air National Guard from 1970 to 1973. Neil and his wife Arlene bring a deeply personal connection to military service – their **son Bryan** is a United States Military Academy graduate, class of 2004, who served in the United States Army and the CT National Guard for 20-years.

Please welcome **Neil Dougherty**.

---

(Second Lieutenant William McKenna remembrance delivered)

---

Thank you, Neil.

Our third reader is **Brian Mack**, a resident of Springfield since 1990 and a serving quality assurance specialist with the Defense Contract Management Agency. Brian served as an aircraft maintainer in the United States Air Force from 1979 to 1987 then in the PA Air National Guard from 1988 until his retirement in 2016. Brian will honor

**Sergeant Stanley Stephen Smith**, United States Army, a paratrooper with the **505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division**, who died in France on D-Day.

Brian's connection to Sergeant Smith's story is especially meaningful. His **father Joseph** also jumped with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division on D-Day as a member the **507th Parachute Infantry Regiment**, a sister regiment to Sergeant Smith's unit. After jumping into France, his father was captured in Normandy and remained a prisoner of war until his liberation in 1945. Though Joseph Mack and Stanely Smith served in different regiments and had sharply different destinies, they shared the same calling and the same willingness to jump into harm's way on that fateful June day in 1944.

Please welcome **Brian Mack**.

---

*(Sergeant Stanley Stephen Smith remembrance delivered)*

---

Thank you to all our readers for honoring these men with such respect. Also, thank you to the families — past and present — who have carried their memory for more than eight decades.

Gold Star sister **Maureen McHugh**, United States Air Force veteran **Rick Henshey**, and United States Army and Vietnam veteran **Bill Clark** will now speak the names of the 43 sons Springfield lost to war since World War II. After each name, United States Army veteran **Bill Smeck** will ring the bell. Each name read and bell sounded honors the person and marks loss and respect. I ask you to listen to each and know that they were real – a son, a husband, a father, a neighbor, a friend. They were loved and they were, and still are, missed. The tolling will be followed by a moment of silence.

---

*(Tolling, followed by a moment of silence)*

---

## **Closing Remarks**

I want to leave you with a final thought.

War is sometimes necessary and even unavoidable. I spent 30 years in uniform preparing for or, at times, participating in wars. But that does not qualify me to judge whether any past war was right or just. I leave it to historians, the wounded, and the families of the fallen to fully weigh that question.

But Memorial Day is not *only* about the past — it is also about the present and the future.

The **true cost of war** must be measured in any decision to resolve disagreements between nations through violence.

Memorial Day reminds us that the decision to go to war is not something we as a society can take lightly or a decision we can pass-off to others - not to news commentators, not to loud voices on social media. In a democracy, that responsibility belongs to **us**, the citizens.

We cannot, must not, abdicate that responsibility.

Justifications are always complex but my years of life, my decades leading Soldiers, and most importantly fatherhood have given me this simple threshold:

- Is this war worth my children? Am I willing to sacrifice my sons, not faceless people from unknown families, for this cause?
- Am I willing to offer-up my neighbors' sons and daughters to go into harm's way — including the young people who stand here with us today?

Memorial Day, in addition to honoring those we lost, provides that perspective — because the true cost of war is paid by the young, borne by families and communities like ours...

Staff Sergeant Bathgate.  
Second Lieutenant McKenna.  
Sergeant Smith.

They paid that cost in full.

May we honor them not only with remembrance but with responsibility and accountability.

I will be followed by Post Chaplain Art Gutzler who will offer our closing prayer.

---

*(Benediction delivered)*

---

Thank you Chaplain Gutzler. Once again, I thank all of you for coming today to honor our nation's and community's fallen and missing heroes. Our national moment of remembrance is at 3pm. If you listen carefully, you may again hear the solemn melody of Taps in the wind - perhaps imagined but maybe real. This concludes the remembrance. Please join us in the schoolhouse for refreshments generously donated by the Wawa Foundation and Mission Barbeque.

God bless the memory of the fallen and our missing.

And God bless the United States of America.