

**The
American
Legion**



For God and Country

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“Was it worth it?”

This is a question, sometimes politically-loaded, that is often asked of family members and war buddies of our Fallen Heroes.

Marine Corps General John Kelly recently offered a unique perspective. A veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan himself, General Kelly lost his youngest son, First Lieutenant Robert Kelly, while conducting combat operations in Helmand Province in 2010.

General Kelly was asked if the loss was worth it by a reporter with National Public Radio. He said, quote:

“I think what I tell families now is the only person really that has a right to answer that question – was it worth it? – is the young man or woman that lost their life. And I believe what they would say is that they were doing what they wanted to do. They were where they wanted to be. So that’s the answer, I think, to that question. It’s not for us that survived to answer it. I think it’s for those young people to answer. And I think they do answer it with their actions and obviously their lives.” – Unquote.

Who can deny the heartfelt wisdom and logic of General Kelly’s words? But just as we should not presume to speak for the Fallen, we can make the country for which they have died a better place – one that honors their sacrifice and epitomizes the ideals enshrined in our Constitution.

In 2003 Army Private First Class Diego Rincon of Conyers, Georgia, wrote to his mother from Iraq: “Whether I make it or not, it’s all part of the plan. It can’t be changed, only completed. Mother will be the last word I’ll say. Your face will be the last picture that goes through my eyes...I just hope that you’re proud of what I’m doing and have faith in my decisions.”

PFC Rincon died soon after writing the letter.

The American Legion will always be proud of the selfless service of Robert Kelly, Diego Rincon and the more than one million men and women who have made the Supreme Sacrifice for the United States since our nation’s founding.

General Kelly is right. ‘Was it worth it?’ is the wrong question for us to answer. Instead, we should commit ourselves to “Make it Worth It.”

We should insist that America remain the land of the free. A land where patriotism trumps politics, where the American Flag is displayed proudly and frequently and where military veterans are society's true celebrities. We must NEVER forget the families of our fallen. Long after the battlefield guns have been silenced and the bombs stop exploding, the children of our fallen warriors will still be missing a parent. Spouses will be without their life partners. Parents will continue to grieve for their heroic sons and daughters that died way too early.

We need to be there for them, not just as members of The American Legion family – but as American citizens. Nobody can replace these fallen heroes – especially in the eyes of their families – but we can offer shoulders to cry on, assistance with educational expenses and assurances that their loved one's sacrifice will not be forgotten.

While there is nothing unpatriotic about an auto race, a trip to the beach or a barbecue, we are here today to reflect on the true meaning of Memorial Day. Let us remember that tyrannical regimes have been toppled and genocides stopped because Americans sacrificed life and limb. Let us remember that terrorist plots were foiled and killers brought to justice because Americans were willing to pay a high price. Let us remember that without a U.S. military, the world would be a far more oppressive and darker place. Let us remember that freedom never had a greater friend than the American soldier, sailor, airman, Marine and Coast Guardsman.

The Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion charges our organization to “Preserve the memories and incidents of our association in the Great Wars.”

It serves as a reminder that while some gave their all, we should more willingly give much to help keep our nation worthy of their sacrifices.

Lydia Bixby, a Boston widow, was believed to have lost five sons in service to the Union during the Civil War. President Lincoln's letter to the grieving mother was read on-screen by the actor portraying General George Marshall in the film *Saving Private Ryan*. The letter reads:

Dear Madam,
I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any word of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the republic they died to save. I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon that altar of freedom.
Yours very sincerely and respectfully,
A. Lincoln

To us, the sacrifice made by Mrs. Bixby – the loss of her sons in a war to preserve our great Union and end slavery – was certainly worth it. But the answer is infinitely more complex if it is *your* son, daughter, wife or husband that will be sacrificed on freedom’s altar. Some veterans have said that it is more difficult to send your family to war than to go yourself.

So while the “Was-It-Worth-It” question can only truly be answered by those who made the sacrifice, it is up to all of us to *make it worth it*.

Thank you for being here. God Bless America and God Bless our Fallen Heroes.

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