

NEWS

Intergenerational Military Voices: How President Trump's Comments about Deceased Marines are Resonating Today

BY MARYKATE FENSTERMAKER

PUBLISHED ONE MONTH AGO, *The Atlantic* released a report claiming that President Trump called deceased U.S. marines buried in the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery "losers" and "suckers for dying." The comments sparked outrage, not only by officials, but also many people who have served our country. One former member of the Navy describes the President's remarks as "terrible" saying that although the President "is supposed to be a commander," he instead "runs down on respected individuals" such as deceased American heroes. In contrast, a cadet at Virginia Tech feels "skeptical" of the report. He suspects that "the comment was taken out of context" and the media were "maybe trying to twist his [Trump's] words."

According to the *Atlantic* report, the President's alleged remark was made in 2018 after he rejected a visit to the Aisne-Marne Cemetery and instead made a speech only 60 miles away at Suresnes American Cemetery and Memorial. At 95 years old, Bud Fitzsimmons, a Navy veteran, responds to Trump's comments saying by always "running people down," the President suggests that people "are wasting their time by being in the service." Although Fitzsimmons did not see much combat in 1943, he was drafted into school for three years at Wabash College of Indiana, Cornell University, and Harvard University. According to Fitzsimmons, Trump has displayed a pattern of disrespect towards the military. He recalls Trump's widely criticized comment in



Photo Credit: MaryKate Fenstermaker

2015 about the late Senator John McCain at an Iowa Family Leadership Summit. After McCain spent over five years as a North Vietnamese prisoner of war in 1967, Trump said McCain was only a "War Hero because he was captured," followed by "I like people that weren't captured." Ben Lewis, a biochemistry student also in the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets, addressed the fact that "just because you went through a terrible experience," referring to McCain's time as a prisoner of war "doesn't mean that everyone has to agree with you politically. If he [Trump] wants to disagree, it's fine with me."

Trump denies *The Atlantic's* claims saying, "There is nobody that respects them more" and that he "never called our great fallen soldiers anything other than HEROES." Lewis identifies that he "flat out said they were heroes" and that it "sounds like they [the media] were trying to twist his [Trump's] words" when writing the report. Following the report, various rumors claim that former General John Kelly is the source for the report. The retired Marine Corps General and former White House Chief of Staff has yet to make a statement although records confirm that Kelly was on the trip at the time of the alleged comment in 2018. According to White House officials, Kelly ended his career at the White House on an unpleasant note. If the source were Kelly, Trump claims that it would have been because Kelly "was too tired and couldn't handle the pressure of the job," and ultimately "puckered out."

Going forward, Fitzsimmons wishes as it relates to the 2020 election, "Biden would talk more" about the issues. He also desires a stronger social media coverage. He hopes the Republican party will speak out against Trump's behavior and "there would be enough people who would be against him cutting back on Veteran's benefits." In contrast, Lewis is optimistic about a future with Trump re-elected. He believes that the President will pull more troops out of the Middle East, overall creating a safer future for the military. Nonetheless, it is essential that our next elected president holds our past, present, and future U.S. service members in the highest regard both publicly and privately.

Prison Inmates on the Frontlines of CA Wildfires

BY RYAN SKILLE

ACCORDING TO THE California Fire Department, there have been almost 6,000 wildfires across the entire state in 2020 that have damaged more than 1,000,000 acres of land in total. Five of those fires have made it into the list of top 20 largest fires in California's entire history. Clearly, the fire department has their hands full and are struggling to keep up with the destruction. Who better to turn to than prison inmates?

The State Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation runs 43 "conservation camps" throughout the state, according to the corrections department. Inmates considered to be a very low security risk are allowed to volunteer there. Those who are selected for the program are then permanently assigned to one of the camps and live there for the entire year. "The inmates are all doing some form of conservation work every day that are

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not on a fire line," Bill Sessa, a spokesman for the corrections department, told CNN. Conservation work includes maintaining hiking trails, clearing flood channels, and cutting brush or large stands of trees. But this year, there hasn't been much conservation work. "It's been quite a while since I can remember that we have had this many fires moving this fast," Sessa admits. "Crews often work 24 straight hours and then get 24 hours of rest. This firestorm – we had crews that worked 72 straight hours." Although it's hard work, it also has rehabilitative value. The rate of those in the program who reoffend is 10% lower than the general prison population.

Unfortunately, this appears to be yet another beneficial project that the pandemic has touched with its mighty hand of destruction.

Even with the conservation camps, there are still not nearly enough firefighters to control the current situation. One of the reasons for this shortage is because of inmates being released from their sentence early due to COVID-19 measures. Inmate firefighters "are an integral part of our firefighting operations," California Fire spokeswoman Christine McMorro told CNN. Fewer individuals in prison means fewer firefighters to help fight the raging flames.

Although the orange haze covering the entire state of California seems unstoppable, there is hope. If individuals in prison can do their part to help fight the fires, then the general public can too. Listen to the government orders and regulations, evacuate when you are told to, don't use fire irresponsibly, and, for goodness sake, stop throwing gender reveal parties.