

# VFW Remembers the End of the Afghanistan War

## The following is a message from VFW National Commander Al Lipphardt

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**WASHINGTON** — It has been three years since the United States finally left Afghanistan in a calamitous and deadly withdrawal of our troops after almost two decades of war. Whether it is the footage of Afghan civilians clinging to the side of a C-17 Globemaster III and falling to their deaths or photos of the aftermath of the deadly attack at Abbey Gate which took the lives of 13 service men and women and more than 100 Afghans, these images from the chaos in Kabul at that time are seared into our collective memory. It is especially painful for those who fought so hard and for so long there. The frustration, the anger, the sadness, the sense of helplessness and hopelessness, and the never-ending question of “how could this of happened” all pile on to the moral injury many Afghanistan War veterans experience as we observe the anniversary of the end of the conflict. As a veteran of the Vietnam war, I say to all of you struggling – you are not alone. I know exactly how you feel.

As I watched the video of the CH-47 Chinook helicopter landing on the roof of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul to evacuate diplomats and staff, it brought me right back to April 1975 and the images of evacuees boarding a helicopter just outside the U.S. Embassy in Saigon as the city fell to communist forces. After leaving my family behind, being wounded, losing friends, and fighting so hard for the Vietnamese people to maintain their freedom during my two tours of combat there, it felt like all of that was for nothing. That sinking feeling like you let your country down is a hard one to shake.

I’m here to tell you that like me and my fellow Vietnam War veterans, you have nothing to be ashamed of. You upheld the warrior ethos – you always placed the mission first, you never accepted defeat, you never quit, and you never left a fallen comrade. You took the fight to the enemy right where they were and for 20 years, you kept those terrorists from attacking our country like they did on 9/11. You successfully executed the largest non-combatant evacuation airlift in U.S. history. You did exactly what your country asked you to do and did it courageously with honor and dignity. Because of all of this, you can hold your

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head high. We are all so proud of you.

The question of why everything went down the way it did still needs to be answered and of course this will take time. I'm glad that Congress saw to it to form a commission to do a deep dive into the Afghanistan War and get the answers we all deserve. I'm honored that the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Memorial Building was selected as the location for the inaugural meeting and that VFW Washington Office staff were able to host the commissioners and witnesses for the hearing. You can read the Afghanistan War Commission first interim report [here](#). Never again should we go to war without a clear path to victory and without our political leaders making the same sacrifices that they ask us to make.

On behalf the of more than 1.4 million members of the VFW and its Auxiliary, we ask all Americans in joining us in honoring the memory and sacrifice of the 2,459 brave Americans who died in service to a grateful nation, prosecuting Operations Enduring Freedom and Freedom's Sentinel for nearly 20 years in Afghanistan for each one of us. To those who came back, we say, "thank you," "welcome home" and "job well done."