

Vincent Tedesco, The Love That I Have For You
NDQSA Reunion, Cleveland, Ohio. July 1, 2023

Colonel Vincent Tedesco addresses members and families of the National Dusters, Quads & Searchlights Association, Inc. In the speech, he addresses John "Tank" Huelsenbeck who was one of the founders of NDQSA.

I have had love, not only as a child but as a man. I have had 59 years with just a wonderful, wonderful wife. I have a great family. I have two boys who have told me how much they hated me being in the Army and being an Army brat, and then went ahead and did the same thing to their families. I had a good college life at Penn State. I couldn't have asked for more fun. You guys who went to college have experienced that too.

Probably the next best thing that happened was going into the Army because it gave me a wonderful life. It gave me you guys, and you guys have fun. I can't tell you how many wonderful, wonderful, wonderful people I served with. Everywhere I went in the Army there were wonderful people, and of course, it came out best in combat. But time after time I learned that being a soldier and working with soldiers was the best life that I could ever have. It just worked out that way. All of that was going great, and then in 1980 I heard this thing about these hillbillies somewhere in the middle of the country who had come together. They had served together in Duster and Quad 50 units. They were putting together reunions, and last of all they were farmers. Now who the hell wants to go eat with a farmer? And where are you going to live? I'm not going back to living in a tent.

Tank. Look what you have accomplished. It started out drinking and smoking and a memorial service every day. That's the way it was in the beginning, but over time it wasn't like that any more as we got older and smarter. The smoking disappeared. Hell! You guys don't even drink as much as I like to drink. You are very disappointing when it comes to that. But what did you do? You brought in families. If you look around today, one of the things with which I am disappointed is we don't have half of the families that we used to have. We are missing the sons, the daughters and their husbands, and the little kids that used to be such a great part of us coming together. So, let's bring them back next year because we love our families. Just seeing you guys with your families was terrific. Having your families hear the stories about when you were young who served your country with such valor. I love that. I just love seeing you coming with your families to the reunions. It is just so beautiful.

The other thing you realize is that we learned so much about what each of us did, and it just made us prouder. I can't tell you how proud I am of every damn Searchlight guy who sits in this room. Little did I know what you endured and what you made possible. Then there all of these damn machine gun people. I love every damn one of you, and you know that. For me, having machine guns and having Dusters together was the ultimate weapon. It really was, and when the three of us came together, we made the birth of our branch. The Air Defense Artillery was formed in 1968. What greater way for our branch to form than on the shoulders of the valor of what you guys were doing. The pride you were showing was just totally unbelievable. It was just an outstanding history.

We gave the branch a wonderful beginning. We learned to love and lead those we had been around. I learned a lot commanding you guys. If I had my way there would be a draft today. Not because the Army needs a draft, but because I learned living with Black people, white people, Jewish people, Asian people. All of these are my brothers. We were Americans together. One of the hardest jobs I had was to send out a reaction force was kicking all the guys off the tracks who weren't supposed to be

there. They wanted to go because Americans were being shot at. Not white guys, not Black guys, not Asian guys---Americans were being shot at. That was an army. That was a draft army that we fought in together with our Korean predecessors and World War II predecessors. That was the thing that made our country great because we learned how important it was to be an American and that all things about race and religion, we could give a you-know-what less about. We cared about each other because we were Americans.

What do we do every year when we meet together? It all comes out again, John. It's wonderful. We laugh a lot. We don't curse so much or have a drink or two like we used to. But we have learned so much from each other. For many years, the group has grown bigger and stronger. Now we are starting to grow a little smaller each time we get together. But we continue to have new guys. When I saw the new guys we had this year I felt great. I was starting to worry that we were not going to have new guys. And it's wonderful that you guys decided to join us. And I hope that you feel as you should that we are a band of brothers. When I watch that program on television, what do I think about? I think about you because the same thing those guys in the 101st Airborne experienced is the same thing we have experienced. We are a band of brothers that love each other.

So, I have been blessed in many ways in my life, but without a doubt, one of the ways I have been blessed is getting to eat the shitty white people food with you guys. I have to drive to god knows where in the middle of America to spend four nights in a goddamn hotel to put up with people from the South or from the West Coast! Even White Sox fans! I love every damn one of you. All I want is for you to have a happy life.

You know I just turned 80. The best part about turning 80 is hopefully you will never have another birthday that ends with a zero. So, I am hoping for nine more years maybe, and then I am going to drop dead. Please pray for that. Okay? I don't want to go on forever, but my intent is to make sure that for as long as I can in any way that when you get together that Suzann and I will be here with you. I will bring scotch. I will bring cigars. But more importantly than anything else is that I will bring the love that I have for all of you wonderful, wonderful American patriots that have made your country great and have made us all so proud. And guess what, Tank? You started it, and I thank you, Tank. And that's all I got.