

Veterans Day, November 11, 2017

THIS, we'll defend!

These are the stirring words of the US Army's motto. Defense of our homeland and system of Government is their mission, and the mission of all our military services. As military veterans we have all taken the oath to "support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic. That we would bear true faith and allegiance to the same, and would well and faithfully discharge the duties of our office." That is quite a load of responsibility to shoulder. When our Nation called, we answered with the words found in the Old Testament book of Isaiah..."here I am, send me!"

When we entered the world of the military we all learned discipline, team work, dedication to mission, and service to something greater than one's self. We were physically and mentally challenged. We learned to set goals and achieve them. Whether you served for two years or forty-two years like myself, we all served. We all made a difference. Our grateful Nation takes Veterans Day to say THANK YOU for this service.

Our history has shown just how important our Nation's military has been in shaping history. Our country was formed amidst the Revolutionary War, where thirteen colonies spread over our eastern seaboard had the audacity to challenge and declare independence from greatest military power in the world at the time. It was the American Army that won our Independence! We fought a long and bloody Civil War to end the immoral practice of slavery and preserve our country as a union of states. It was the US Army and US Navy that gave the power to Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and forced the Confederate's surrender.

In the 20th and 21st centuries, we have found ourselves thrust on the world stage fighting for our own freedoms as well as millions of others around the globe. Hiding behind the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans was no longer a safe practice! It fell to our nations' military to step into the breach once again and win the peace.

So, when and why must we fight? We who have studied and trained in the profession of arms know better than anyone that war is a terrible thing. This reality weighs heaviest on our National leaders in times of crises. One hundred years ago, President Woodrow Wilson explained this dilemma in his speech to Congress on 2 April, 1917 where he asked Congress to declare war on Germany and the Central Powers. These countries had been waging a brutal war mainly in central Europe for two and a half years that had killed millions. They had just reinstated unrestricted submarine warfare that was clearly aimed at the US.

Wilson said..."It is a terrible thing to lead this peaceful people into the most terrible and disastrous of all wars, civilization itself seeming to be in the balance. But, THE RIGHT IS MORE PRECIOUS THAN PEACE, AND WE WILL FIGHT FOR THE THINGS WHICH WE HAVE ALWAYS CARRIED NEAREST OUR HEARTS. For democracy, the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments, for the rights of small nations, for the universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free. To such a task we devote our lives and our fortunes, everything we are and everything we have. With the pride of those that know THAT THE DAY HAS COME WHERE AMERICA IS PRIVILEGED TO SPEND HER BLOOD AND HER MIGHT, FOR THE PRINCIPLES THAT GAVE HER BIRTH AND HAPPINESS, AND THE PEACE WHICH SHE HAS TREASURED. God helping her, she can do no other".

This is a remarkable speech from a president that had done much to stay out of war. Wilson clearly stated that it was up to America to make the world safe for democracy, to intervene and bring this ghastly conflict to an end. An end that would lead to a brighter future for all of Europe. He saw this was one of those times that the world needed our leadership and power.

The impact of our intervention into WW1 was remarkable. In a short nineteen months starting in April, 1917, a small US Army of less than 140,000 soldiers that was scattered throughout the west, in Panama and the Philippines, expanded into a huge force of 4M soldiers! Half of these troops had been organized, equipped, trained and shipped overseas to Europe. Well over one million soldiers were fighting in frontline combat duties by the end of the war in November 1918. This accomplishment astonished the Germans who thought it would take until 1919 for the US to mobilize and ship this size force. The American Army ended the war with their relentless attacks in the crucial sector of the Meuse Argonne. This area had been in German hands for four years and was considered impregnable by the French Army. It defended the vital rail resupply lines that supplied most of the German Army in France. When the US Army broke through the multi layered defenses after six weeks of continuous combat, the Germans sued for peace. The horror of trench warfare ended on 1100 November 11, 1918.

In the 1920's and 1930's we demobilized to enjoy the "peace dividend" and later, to recover from the Great Depression. We withdrew from the world stage, allowing the rise of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. Then, suddenly, on December 7, 1941, the ..."day that will live in infamy, we were suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan. We were at peace with that country..." three days later, Germany declared war on us as well.

We raised a huge military machine of close to 20M troops. We fought and decisively defeated the Axis powers of Germany, Italy and Japan. Did our intervention make a difference? Absolutely YES!

Proof to this statement can be found in thousands of accounts of WW2, one of my favorites can be found in the recollections of Charles MacDonald in his book "Company Commander". CPT MacDonald was an infantry company commander in the Us Army's famed 2nd Infantry Division in the fight across central Europe, 1944-1945. Near the end of the war, he vividly recounts his unit's reception as they crossed from Germany into Czechoslovakia in May 1945 after a year of intense close combat.

He relates..." the houses everywhere were a riot of color with red, white and blue Czech flags everywhere. Civilians lined the streets ten deep, cheering and waving their flags as if their lives depended on it...Our column was forced to slow down as happy civilians pushed into the street and showered us with flowers, cookies and cakes. Women stood by with tears of joy streaming down their faces. Children were wild with joy...than I realized that some of them had never known anything but six years of Nazi occupation.

I looked up and down my column, at the soldiers in my company. Brilliant smiles wreathed their faces, they waved cheerfully as if they had won an election campaign and this was a personal triumph. Battle hardened, stubble faced veterans had unashamed tears in their eyes. The unleashed joy of these oppressed people knew no bounds and it was too much for us. Suddenly I realized what no one had this far been able to explain and put into words. THIS was what we were fighting for. I found I had a lump in my throat that I could not swallow".

These grateful Czechs were some of the millions upon millions of people that our troops freed during WW2, in Europe, Asia, and

throughout the Pacific area. My wife and I have personally witnessed this gratitude. We have walked the immaculate grounds of ABMC in the Meuse Argonne, Normandy, Henri Chappel and Luxembourg. We have seen hundreds of monuments erected all over northern France, Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg dedicated to the American soldiers whom liberated them from the Germans in WW1 then again from the Nazis in WW2. American flags are everywhere. Their children are still taught the history of what our soldier accomplished under extremely difficult circumstances. They have not forgotten, they are still very grateful.

If you visit any of these ABMC or view these many unit monuments, you will come away with a renewed and strengthened respect for your fellow Americans who have worn their nation's uniform, made the sacrifices that have ensure our and other's freedoms. You will reflect deeply on our nation's role in the world. Whatever our flaws have been in the past and still may be today, you will realize, standing there, that in the sweep of history, ours is a grand nation of which you can and should be proud. It is the service of our veterans that has made the difference.

I know that the world will little note nor long remember what we say here today, but it can never forget what all of you veterans have done for our nation and other nations throughout the world. For the past 2 ½ centuries, the American Service member has been the protector of freedom and liberty. So today, Veterans Day, is the day our nation says thank you for your service! I echo that statement. Whether you served in Ww2, Korea, Vietnam, the Cold war, or current conflicts, you have done your part.

Thank you for your service in your day. Our current day military takes inspiration from your accomplishments. Our everyday civilians are in your debt. Millions more around the world thank you as well!

“THIS, we’ll defend!’ rings through our history. THIS, our nation, our Constitution, our liberty, is what YOU defended when you were called upon. Well done!

Thank you for allowing me to come and talk with you today. May God bless all of you and our Nation in this time of trial.