

“At Your Service” Article - May 30th, 2005
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“A Tribute To Our Soldiers”

On the last Monday of the month of May, we honor those who have bravely served in our military’s armed forces. As we observe Memorial Day, our hearts are filled with gratitude for those brave Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and women, Reservists and Marines who have sacrificed their lives for this great country.

On this hallowed day, we must all remember that freedom, and the blessings it brings, often exact the ultimate sacrifice. Yet from the first days of this nation’s history, Americans have been willing to step forward and stand in defense of our nation. On this Memorial Day, the voices of those who have fallen echo in our memories and we are comforted by the heritage of courage they have established for us.

For over two centuries, our military has provided a bastion against our enemies and the enemies of our friends. In that time, our world has changed and our armed forces have changed with it, but the valor, dignity, and courage of the men and women in uniform remain strong. From Valley Forge to Desert Storm, from San Juan Hill to Operation Enduring Freedom, the fighting spirit of the American soldier permeates throughout history.

Tragically, the elemental freedoms that were bravely fought for and won are now being challenged by individuals who seek to bring fear not only to our nation’s shores, but into our daily lives. We live in a new world now, where those who hate and despise freedom have made their face known. And once again, as is our great tradition, America’s sons and daughters have met the challenge head on. Armed with weapons of might and the eternal hope of democracy, Americans are fighting, and dying, in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other foreign lands alongside those whom we are their to help, because they seek what we have... freedom. They look to us, at our “Shining City upon a Hill,” as an example of what a country can achieve when freedom, peace and equality are cherished above all else.

As President Ronald Reagan prophetically stated during his Second Inaugural Address, “We must look to the fortitude and bravery of our nation’s veterans as we combat the fear of terrorism both at home and abroad. Today, we utter no prayer more fervently than the ancient prayer for peace on Earth. Yet history has shown that peace will not come, nor will our freedom be preserved, by good will alone. There are those in the world who scorn our vision of human dignity and freedom.” President Reagan’s words, though spoken in 1985, still resonate today.

Our courageous men and women, each different in heritage and background, share the common bonds of the armed forces – duty and sacrifice. In this time of war, they have all reached a moment in their lives when race and religion, creed and color make no

difference. What remains is the essence of America – the fighting spirit of a proud, valorous people.

As we give our thanks and pay homage to America’s veterans, let us not forget the origins of their bravery and valor. Indeed, our founding fathers understood that the military would be the rampart from which America would guard its freedom. President George Washington once stated, “By keeping up in peace a well-regulated and disciplined militia, we shall take the fairest and best method to preserve for a long time to come the happiness, dignity and independence of our country.” The prophecy of those words has been fulfilled time and again.

Now is the time to honor all of those who have fought for the freedoms that we, as Americans, know and cherish. Without the courage, valor and singleness of purpose of our nation’s veterans, the values that have always made it possible for us to meet new challenges and move forward as a nation would have been lost. In the words of John Stuart Mill, “War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things.” Let us never forget those who heeded the call of their country when she needed them most, when there was no way but war to remedy those things that are indeed uglier than war itself: tyranny, oppression, suffering, and the will of mad men.

In closing, I would like to encourage you to do your part, because we all have a role to play if our country is to continue on as a shining city upon a hill. Tie a yellow ribbon outside your home, volunteer with your local Veterans group, send a letter to a soldier overseas, go out of your way to say a kind word to a service member or proudly wave ‘Old Glory.’

If nothing else, take a moment to reflect upon the sacrifices made over the past 200 years, and that are still being made today, by men and women who gave so freely to their country. Memorial Day is an opportune occasion to do this, but our fallen heroes deserve our memory every day. As Moina Michael wrote in 1915, upon being inspired by the poem “In Flanders Fields”:

We cherish too, the Poppy red
That grows on fields where valor led,
It seems to signal to the skies
That blood of heroes never dies.

Let us never let die the memory of those who died for our country. God bless you and God bless America.