

“THE TROOPSHIPS ON THE TIDE AGAIN”

MEMORIAL DAY SPEECH MAY 26, 2014

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, FELLOW VETERANS, AND NEIGHBORS:

I am deeply honored to stand here with you on this Memorial Day --which is part of our community's valued long tradition, to remember and honor our fallen veterans and those still missing in action.

As you can tell from my accent I grew up in New England --just outside of Boston. As young school kids we were surrounded by historic war memorials and monuments going back to the founding of our country.-- the famous Minuteman statue was just a few miles from my home.

WWII had just ended and we were all enthusiastically patriotic --the WWII returning troops had replaced Superman and Dick Tracy as our heroes.

My first remembrance of Memorial Day was as a young boy scout when we would plant flags on the graves of revolutionary war veterans. Back in those days it was called Decoration Day.

Weeks leading up to Decoration Day, our teachers would read to us and have us memorize various patriotic writings. We learned Longfellow's "Midnight Ride of Paul Revere", as well as the history leading up to it.

Emerson's "Concord Hymn" was not just about the first battle of our Revolutionary War, to us it was also about the men who fell that day and whose graves we decorated.

One year we visited the famous "Minuteman Statue" --and I still remember reading those words cast in bronze -- "By This Rude Bridge The Embattled Farmer Once Stood And Fired The Shot Heard Round The World". The echoes of that shot are still reverberating today for freedom.

But what I remember most was one day in the 6th grade, our teacher, Miss Johnson, brought a guest to school. He was RAF Flight Lieutenant Smith-Jones, one of the heroes of the Battle of Britain. And yes-- in his uniform he looked like a movie star --and the girls got giggly and he mesmerized us all with his war stories about his fallen pilot comrades and how they saved England.

Later he read to us his favorite patriotic poem, by one of his countrymen, RUDYARD KIPPLING, written in the late 1800's, titled "**Tommy**" now "Tommy" was Tommy akin the common British foot soldier, the "Red Coat", the equivalent of our WWII G.I. Joe.

Years later I learned that Kipling wrote this poem at a time when there was much discontent in the British Empire:

1. Their military was spread thin all over the world in many unpopular engagements.
2. At home there was much political and economic upheaval
3. And it was a time when many of their countrymen had a dismissive attitude toward the military and those who had died for "king and country".

The words of that poem are as pertinent today as they were a century ago.

I am not going to recite the entire poem but the first few lines I have long remembered because I feel they capture the essence and spirit of why we are here today.

“I WALKS INTO THE PUBLIC HOUSE TO GET A PINT OF BEER. THE PUBLICAN HE UPS AN SEZ, “WE SERVE NO RED-COATS HERE” THE GIRLS BEHIND THE BAR THEY LAUGHED AND GIGGLED FIT TO DIE. AND OUT INTO THE STREET AGAIN AND TO MYSELF SEZ I. OH ITS TOMMY THIS AND TOMMY THAT--AND TOMMY GO AWAY. BUT IT’S “THANK YOU MR. ATKINS SIR WHEN THE TROOPSHIP’S ON THE TIDE. OH THE TROOPSHIP’S ON THE TIDE, MY BOYS, THE TROOPSHIPS ON THE TIDE. BUT IT’S THANK YOU MR. ATKINS SIR, WHEN THE TROOPSHIP’S ON THE TIDE”

Yes, there are a lot of similarities between 19th century England and today here in America:

1. Today our military is spread thin across this globe in several, what some feel, are unpopular and frustrating conflicts -- “ the War on Terror”
2. And yes, this is a time in our history of major political upheaval and great economic uncertainty.

But in one important respect, particularly here in our community, we differ from 19th century England. We have always remembered and honored our men and women in uniform and most of all, our fallen veterans. --and not just on one day a year.

A good example of this is the magnificent “Faces of Freedom Veterans Memorial” behind me--you know-- there is nothing quite like this West of Washington D.C. --

Also about a mile east of here is the recently dedicated “ Your American Heritage Monument” and a little way on is the newly renovated City Hall some times called the Rotunda Building -- which back in 1952 was rededicated as “the Veterans Memorial Building”.

Perhaps one of the most highly visible reminder of our commitment of honoring our veterans is the dedicated section of our Nation’s National Purple Heart Trail--out on Highway 101.

Each day, of, the tens of 1000’s that view these Purple Heart Trail signs (as they pass through Atascadero) many will be continually reminded of who these fallen veterans were that we assemble here today to honor.

Now many of these motorists might well ask -were they some type of super hero? The simple answer is no, at least not in the Hollywood meaning of hero.--- they were just ordinary folks. Many now rest-in-peace in the Hallowed Grounds around us. Over in Pine Mountain Cemetery --also, over 223 and still counting, have their names forever engraved in the black granite behind me.

So---the simple answer would be --they were our neighbors,-- they grew up here,-- went to school here,-- and when their nation called-- they put on the uniform of our country -- and they went off to war

Many never returned including those still missing-in-action--and many more who came home returned with broken bodies and shattered minds -- yes they have given up a lot for our country--

And of the many who fell and drew in their last breath in foreign lands--and spilled their final drop of blood on the dry ground of places forgotten by time---

YES--THEY GAVE UP EVERYTHING-----

1. They will never get to see their son grow up and sit in the stands at his little league game. Like the ball field over there.
2. They will never get to watch with pride as their teenage daughter shows off her first prom dress.
3. And they will never grow old with dignity and take pictures at their grand children's birthday parties as many of us still do.

There is a simple phrase that so eloquently expresses this --- many of you are familiar with it as it engraved in the "Faces of Freedom" monument's dedication plaque--over to the right of me.

ALL GAVE SOME, SOME GAVE ALL

So it is therefore fitting that we gather here on this memorial day to join our fellow countrymen, --to remember and honor those ---**who never came home again** -- yes these were our neighbors--but more than that--these were and are the men and women of our armed services --who, going back to the time of George Washington ,

TRULY DID GIVE ALL, --

For they were our Purple Heart veterans whose sacrifice have helped weave the fabric of our National character and forged the history of our great nation and whose continued sacrifice have helped keep our nation free, united and strong.

If old Rudyard Kipling were to come down and be with us on this Memorial Day and speak into this microphone-- he might well say:

"WELL DONE YOU CITIZENS OF ATASCADERO --YOU HAVE KEPT THE FIRES BURNING AND YOU HAVE KEPT THE LAMPS LIT"

And if I could take the liberty to paraphrase and bring current the final lines of Kipling's poem, it would read

YES THE TROOPSHIP'S ON THE TIDE AGAIN, THE TROOPSHIP'S ON THE TIDE

GOD BLESS OUR FALLEN VETERANS, FOR THEY ARE OUR NATION'S PRIDE

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