

God * Duty * Honor * Country
Memorial Day 2010 Chaplain's Epistle

HQs. TXSG
Chaplain [COL] Farrar Bentley, Command Chaplain

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Fellow Guardsmen:

The following articles appeared in the May 2010 Issue of **ARMY Magazine**. Rather than addressing Memorial Day from a purely historical perspective, these writers confront us with a contemporary Memorial Day.

Please take the time to read and reflect on each article. Remember, especially this year, when America is involved in three wars: Afghanistan, Iraq, and on America's homeland, the observance of Memorial Day must be more than a three-day carefree weekend. These are our fellow countrymen at war; I doubt that there is a family anywhere that is not touched by a soldier, airman, sailor, Marine, or Coast Guardsman – serving somewhere. Pray for them; pray for our civilian and military leadership; pray for our nation.

Memorial Day

General Frederick J. Kroesen, USA (Ret)

Two thousand years ago, in a book of the Apocrypha, Ecclesiasticus wrote: "Honor and praise your famous men...those who have led and ruled wisely. They are deserving and have left names that their praises may be reported." He continued, "But remember also those who have no memorial, who are perished as though never born, righteous men whose labors and sacrifices made possible the fame of their leaders."

Today we would say men and women, but the thoughts Ecclesiasticus expressed so long ago are equally appropriate now. Famous and infamous names are known, honored, or despised, while millions of others have come and gone with little regard for their contributions and sacrifices.

Memorial Day is our guarantee that those made famous in our history are remembered only along with all who have spent their lives in the service of our country. They have been, collectively, the guarantors of our legacy of freedom. They will never be among those not remembered, never among those who passed through as though "never born."

Many certainly did not willingly give up their lives, but they committed themselves to a cause that their moral code accepted as truth and justice. The ideals of our nation's founders have sustained in all succeeding generations a belief that what is right, true, and noble is worth fighting for, defending, and even extending to our friends and allies. Millions of people

around the world enjoy freedom from despots and totalitarian control because Americans believe in truth and justice.

Our cause has been forever under attack by those who would undermine our commitments – naysayers who deplored our revolution in 1776 or fled to Canada to escape the draft in the 1960s. Thus far they have been unsuccessful at changing our policies during times of stress, but they are unrelenting, determined to exploit any crisis and lament any resort to military action. They are a continuing threat, and proving them wrong is a continuing demand that leaders must combat and soldiers must tolerate.

Memorial Day is also a day to remember and pray for the men and women now engaged on the frontiers of freedom. First pray that they, too, are convinced of the righteousness and justice of what they are doing, that they are protecting and promoting the legacy that they plan to bestow upon their children and grandchildren. Inevitably, all will join the ranks of those we honor today – some too soon – and so we pray also that their mission justifies the sacrifice we ask of them.

Across our nation are thousands of memorials, some massive works of marble and granite, others simple markers on single graves, each a tribute to lives lost to our nation. They are all attempts by the living to express thanks and the hope that we remain worthy of the sacrifices of those we honor. They are also reminders that the future will demand more markers, for threats have not subsided, war is not yet abolished and freedom isn't free.

ARMY Magazine, May 2010

Bear up Triumphant

By Colonel Rich Hooker, USA

Last Sunday I sat in the Old Falls Church with my wife and children. On the wall hung a plaque memorializing George Washington, an original vestryman. In the Churchyard lay worn tombstones of soldiers, both blue and gray, who died on the church grounds as the tide of the Civil War swayed back and forth. In the choir loft above, what seemed like a chorus of angels sang an old moving hymn, **“Bear it up, Triumphant.”**

For a moment my thoughts wandered. I thought of my ancestors in our greatest and most terrible war. They did not think it a particular honor to fight and die in that war. Most of them fought and died, or were crippled. They were no different from their neighbors and friends. Victory was their hope, but it was shame they dreaded more than death. Shame was something to be feared, then.

“Bear it up, Triumphant”

I thought of my father, and his years spent fighting in America's most unpopular war. I remembered pictures of his friends that hung in our home,

all bronzed, all close-cropped, all dead. I remembered the fear we children carried around each day he was gone, and the last, best moments before sleep: No harbinger had come that day, and morning was far off. For those few minutes we were free.

“Bear it up, Triumphant”

I thought of my lieutenant, his mother’s only son, and smiled. He always made us smile. He was the best in us. He died in Tikrit, in a ball of fire, and that day something in all of us died, too. I don’t think that little piece will ever come back.

“Bear it up, Triumphant”

I thought of my sergeant, and his shattered leg, and how he kept going back out, again and again. Why “You will not cheat death forever,” I tell him. He always answers the same way: “But someone has to go boss, Who, if not me?”

“Bear it up, Triumphant”

I looked at my wife and daughter. I remembered their strength and how I had longed for their voices and their hugs in the long, dark nights. In that moment, I thought they were worth anything. Everything.

“Bear it up, Triumphant”

I looked at my sons, They want to fight. They long to be tested, just as I did a long time ago. They will be soldiers, too, I think, whatever I may say or wish for them. They saw the towers fall. They saw my building burn. They saw me board the plane, too many times. They say, “We are not afraid. Who will do it, Dad, if not us?” In that moment I felt a father’s pride. In that moment, I sensed a mother’s sudden, awful fear.

“Bear it up, Triumphant”

I thought of the many – my countrymen – talking, laughing, enjoying a life given to them by others. It seemed to me that they did not notice. It seemed to me they did not know.

“Bear it up, Triumphant”

I thought of the few, who sit and wait and pray, who suffer and fear. They dread the phone and the knock on the door. They wish only for their children to return, nothing more. You cannot know their fear.

“Bear it up, Triumphant”

I thought of my country, divided, conflicted, doubting. In that moment, it seemed to me that we stand at a great crossroads. One road leads to a future of greatness, a greatness to match our past. The other leads to a

great fading – of purpose, of confidence, of endurance, of faith – the fading of a nation Lincoln once called “the last, best hope of Earth.”

I don't know which road we will take. I can only pray that we choose the right one. Otherwise, what will all that we have lost mean?

But I know which road I will take.

I will bear it up, Triumphant. As long as I can.

ARMY Magazine, May 2010

Requiem for a Sergeant

Colonel Rich Hooker, USA

Recently I learned that Sergeant Andrew McConnell was killed fighting in southern Afghanistan in September. I didn't know Andrew, or his family, but I do know that his father is a graduate of the U. S. Military Academy at West Point and is still serving. Anguished friends e.mailed me, asking for confirmation, details, and perhaps a small measure of comfort. There's not much we can offer each other except, perhaps – in the midst of our grief – a fierce pride that goes with service to our country. I'm well aware that, to some, that may sound trite or cloying. This is why I am writing.

Samuel Johnson once said, “Every man thinks meanly of himself for not having been a soldier...” He meant that while most people have no interest in military service, they nevertheless feel a pang of guilt when contemplating those who do. That may explain, at least in part, the strange uneasiness many Americans seem to feel about soldiers. A general aversion to the military is often identified with liberal bias, but it's more than that. The soldiers I've led for almost 30 years were among America's very best people, but, for the most part, they were not the children of wealthy businessmen, doctors, lawyers, or college professors, and politicians. The officers I've served with did not go to Ivy League universities. Our generals and admirals are at the top of their profession, but you will not find them on the Washington cocktail circuit or at summer gatherings in the Hamptons. In America today, military service has heavy class overtones. That should worry all Americans.

The military's notion of selfless service in war and peace – not to a particular administration or point of view, but to the nation and to society – is not posturing or flag waving. It is the bedrock underlying all military service, and it often exacts a fearful price. It is largely and increasingly confined, however, to a narrow slice of America's demographics that bears the cruel cost of persistent and seemingly unending conflict. That cost falls even more heavily on military families such as the McDonnells, who serve across generations. Though intellectuals sometimes complain about a

military “caste,” these service families are the glue and the granite of American military power around the world. They serve an idea and an ideal – that the nation matters more than the individual, that our laws and our Constitution are worth sacrifice, and that America’s greatness must come at a cost.

I write from Afghanistan. Before I left the United States, I shared a beer with my father, a veteran of three tours in Vietnam. My son Christopher, a paratrooper in the 173rd Airborne Brigade, is here with me, fighting in Wardak Province. I am proud of our service, but we are in no way unique in this Army or in this war.

On the contrary, we are surrounded by families of warriors. My commanding general is the son of an Army first sergeant, and his son-in-law is today fighting in Iraq; his boss, a three-star, has a son and daughter in uniform. Our theater commander, a four-star, has a brother who is a career Army officer – and his four-star boss has a son in the infantry. In fact more than 130 Army generals have children in the service (many of them enlisted), some whom have been killed in action or badly wounded. The children of our senior enlisted leaders serve as well. (The command sergeant major of the 173rd Airborne lost his son in Afghanistan last year.) America should know that its military, like no other institution or part of society, has real skin in the game. We give all we have to give, and then we send our kids.

So the next time you watch CNN and think Afghanistan is too hard, think again. Think about an America inexorably weakened because deep down, too many Americans think everything is too hard and that nothing is worthy of sacrifice. A foreign policy that is built on somebody else’s pain and sacrifice cannot endure or prevail. Out here, America is kept safe by young men and women who really do believe that ideals matter – that America’s greatness is worth the risk. They cannot do this alone.

I won’t presume to speak for Sergeant McConnell or his grieving parents. I wish I’d known him. I’ve been privileged to know hundreds like him, however, and I honor their courage and that of their parents, who have given America literally all they have. Better than any, they know the great truth. They know the price that must be paid to keep America safe, free, and great.

Do not forget them. A nation that forgets its heroes will not itself be long remembered.

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The Young Dead Soldiers Do Not Speak

----**Archibald MacLeish**

Nevertheless, they are heard in the still houses.

Who has not heard them?

They have a silence that speaks for them at night

And when the clock counts.

They say? We were young. We have died.

Remember us.

They say: We have done what we could

But until it is finished it is not done.

They say: We have given our lives but until it is finished

No one can know what our lives gave.

They say: Our deaths are not ours. They are yours.

They will mean what you make them.

They say: Whether our lives and deaths were for peace

And a new hope or for nothing we cannot say;

It is you who must say this

They say: We leave you our deaths. Give them their meaning.

We were young, they say. We have died. Remember us.