

MEMORIAL DAY SERVICE – May 26, 2008
Sunrise Gardens / Douglasville

I feel very privileged to speak at this Memorial Day Service because for my wife Peggy and me, it is an honor to be among the greatest benefactors of our nation – men and women who sacrificed –at a minimum, years away from their homes and families and at a maximum, their very lives...here at rest, and in graves elsewhere – known and unknown.

Memorial Day has traditionally been one of the most solemn and patriotic days for Americans as it should be. Memorial Day is a day when all Americans, regardless of artificial barriers that divide us, join together to remember the sacrifices of those who answered their nation's call and served since 1775.

The significance of this day is sometimes confused or misunderstood, as our children and grandchildren learn less and less about American History. We must take that task upon ourselves – to explain how our country was built upon challenge, risk, upheaval and sacrifice...not abundance, complacency and apathy. We should bring our children and grandchildren to these memorial services. We are bound by an awesome responsibility to educate our young about the courage of those who birthed this nation in 1776 and to tell them about the sacrifice of the unknown heroes of 1812, of 1846, of 1861, of 1898, of 1917, of 1941, of 1950, of 1961, of 1991 and of 2001 and 2003. Over these many years, our predecessors were vigilant, fought and sacrificed when called on preserve this land of freedom, where hopes and dreams can come true like few places on this Earth.

The meaning of Memorial Day becomes at times, distant or vague, devalued to Memorial Day car sales and “blowout bargains” on furniture, televisions and tires. Too often there is a failure to recognize the magnitude of the deeds of the men and women who held true to the notion that there is real good and real evil in this world and that tyranny must not prevail. Men and women are serving this very minute in far away places with the same ideals of 1775. It is **our** sacred duty to keep the knowledge of our nation's patriots' sacrifice and legacy imbedded in the memories of future generations.

Going back to our county's origin over 230 years ago, it's difficult for us to understand or appreciate the courage, fortitude and optimism that drove our country's founders to face-off against the world's most powerful army and navy. It's hard for us to imagine the risk those first Americans took. It is even more difficult for our children and grandchildren, distracted by MTV, iPods, xBoxes and YouTube.

We rightfully have tremendous reverence for the famous group of men labeled “Founding Fathers” by esteemed historians...you know the names. But this great country did not have a mere handful of founding fathers. The nameless farmers, the shopkeepers, the ministers, the blacksmiths, the sheep herders, the fishermen, the bakers, the teachers, and yes – even slaves - who took up arms as this country's first defenders of freedom and liberty in 1775 counted in the tens-of-thousands.... and are truly our founding mothers and fathers...the first to muster to the cause, and to answer a call to arms to defend liberty before we were even a sovereign nation.

Our freedom did not come cheaply. It was paid for with the flesh and blood of American servicemen and women, and with the tears of those whose lives

were changed forever by the loss of loved ones. Many family lines have died by their sacrifices.

Memorial Day is very much a day of opportunity to give thanks for all that we are blessed with. It should also be a day that we rededicate ourselves to our country and to America's living veterans and their families in memory of the sacrifices they and their families have made. Peggy and I have been to the American Cemetery in Normandy twice and I have been to the Viet Nam memorial. One can not possibly be at those places without strong emotion overtaking them. Those experiences are still vivid and stirring to this day for Peggy and me.

Veterans will gather to honor fallen comrades on this day -- friends with whom they shared a foxhole, a POW camp, a patrol or "C" rations, boredom or firefight. Their time together may have been brief, but the bonds were deeply formed. Life and feelings are intensified when there is sharing of hardship and laughter; fear and loss.

As we Americans pay tribute to those who have served and to those who have died in that service, we must be determined to assure that those who serve now and are returning receive proper honor. It is an ongoing responsibility which we all share -- to do our best to repay the debt that is owed to those who have presented us with our most precious gift ... freedom... and have sacrificed much for over 230 years in preserving that freedom.

.....I would like to close with a poem by Cmdr. Strong of the Coast Guard

(...and incidentally, this is a branch of our military that is often overlooked in observances, but they served valiantly at places like Guadalcanal and Iwo Jima...and one was even awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously in WW2)

Cmdr. Strong wrote this poem as an ROTC cadet to honor his father who is a Viet Nam vet....

I watched the flag pass by one day, it fluttered in the breeze;
a young Marine saluted it, and then he stood at ease.

I looked at him in uniform, so young, so tall, so proud.
With hair cut square and eyes alert, he'd stand out in any crowd.

I thought... how many men like him had fallen through the years?
How many died on foreign soil? How many mothers' and fathers' tears?

How many pilots' planes shot down; how many died at sea?
How many foxholes were soldiers' graves? No, Freedom is not Free.

I heard the sound of Taps one night, when everything was still;
I listened to the bugler play, and felt a sudden chill;

I wondered just how many times that Taps had meant "Amen"
When a flag had draped a coffin of a brother or a friend;

I thought of all the children, of the mothers and the wives,
Of fathers, sons and husbands, with interrupted lives.

I thought about a graveyard at the bottom of the sea,
Of unmarked graves in Arlington. No. Freedom is not Free!

Thank You – Mike Mulcare / 3rd District Commissioner – Douglas County