

May 2007

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That blood of heroes never dies

*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. --Moina Michael, 1915*

No serious candidate for president or member of Congress professes less than full support for our soldiers in Iraq, but a few are working aggressively to strip from appropriations, funding for their operations. One party thinks it a cowardly vote of no confidence in the military and the commander-in-chief. The other considers it a practical expression of concern for the soldier and hate for the war.

While it has long been held that partisanship should stop at the water's edge—especially when America is at war, both Republicans and Democrats understand the short-term political realities. Success in Iraq: Good for some candidates in November 2008—bad for others. That our brave “boots on the ground,” hear and accept that many do not believe their cause is just, makes even more remarkable, their readiness to sacrifice all. Yet, such is the tradition of the American patriot.

Many have heard of the deprivations endured by Washington and his army at Valley Forge, but few know that the wretched sufferings were even worse during the winter of 1779-80 in Morristown. New York harbor froze over and howling blizzards swept down on the desperate soldiers, blowing their ragged tents away, leaving them buried deep in drifts of snow. Some died for want of tent, blankets—even rags for their bare feet.

Perhaps the greater tragedy was that while soldiers starved and died at Morristown, not a few in the colonies were prospering under a booming wartime economy. Nearby farmers preferred to sell to the British for hard currency and many merchants would not move clothing off their shelves at profits less than 1,000-to-1,800 percent. Congress, too, passed the buck that winter by authorizing Washington to “commandeer” supplies, which he was loathe to do. Alexander Hamilton, Washington's aide, wrote, “We begin to hate the country for its neglect of us. The country begins to hate us for our oppression of them.”

Memorial Day, originally called *Decoration Day*, is a day of remembrance for those who have died in service to our country. Proclaimed by General John Logan, national commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, Decoration Day was first observed officially on May 30, 1868 when flowers were placed on the graves of Union and Confederate soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery. General Logan thought it worthwhile to provide for a day of reconciliation and honoring those who gave their all.

America also has a tradition of lifting up our armies during times of national emergency. President Franklin Roosevelt, for instance, called the nation to prayer during the largest sea-borne invasion in history—D-Day. Some three million troops, 6,900 vessels and 12,000 aircraft were involved in the campaign. Beforehand, the British had employed *Operation Jael*, a whispering campaign in diplomatic posts around the world to keep German eyes focused anywhere but on the northwest coast of France. *Jael* is the courageous housewife who lured evil Sisera to her tent and then drove a ten peg into his temple (Judges 4).

Speaking to a national audience by radio on June 6, 1944, President Roosevelt said:

“My Fellow Americans: “Last night, when I spoke with you about the fall of Rome, I knew at that moment that troops of the United States and our Allies were crossing the Channel in another and greater operation. It has come to pass with success thus far.

“And so, in this poignant hour, I ask you to join with me in prayer:

“Almighty God: Our sons, pride of our nation, this day have set upon a mighty endeavor, a struggle to preserve our Republic, our religion, and our civilization, and to set free a suffering humanity. Lead them straight and true; give strength to their arms, stoutness to their hearts, steadfastness in their faith.

“They will need Thy blessings. Their road will be long and hard. For the enemy is strong. He may hurl back our forces. Success may not come with rushing speed, but we shall return again and again; and we know that by Thy grace, and by the righteousness of our cause, our sons will triumph.

“They will be sore tried, by night and by day, without rest—until the victory is won. The darkness will be rent by noise and flame. Men's souls will be shaken with the violences of war.

“For these men are lately drawn from the ways of peace. They fight not for the lust of conquest. They fight to end conquest. They fight to liberate. They fight to let justice arise, and tolerance and goodwill among all Thy people. They yearn but for the end of battle, for their return to the haven of home.

“Some will never return. Embrace these, Father, and receive them, Thy heroic servants, into Thy kingdom.

“And for us at home—fathers, mothers, children, wives, sisters, and brothers of brave men overseas, whose thoughts and prayers are ever with them—help us, Almighty God, to rededicate ourselves in renewed faith in Thee in this hour of great sacrifice.

“Many people have urged that I call the nation into a single day of special prayer. But because the road is long and the desire is great, I ask that our people devote themselves in a continuance of prayer. As we rise to each new day, and again when each day is spent, let words of prayer be on our lips, invoking Thy help to our efforts.

“Give us strength, too—strength in our daily tasks, to redouble the contributions we make in the physical and the material support of our armed forces. And let our hearts be stout, to wait out the long travail, to bear sorrows that may come, to impart our courage unto our sons wheresoever they may be.

“And, O Lord, give us faith. Give us faith in Thee; faith in our sons; faith in each other; faith in our united crusade. Let not the keenness of our spirit ever be dulled. Let not the impacts of temporary events, of temporal matters of but fleeting moment... deter us in our unconquerable purpose.

“With Thy blessing, we shall prevail over the unholy forces of our enemy. Help us to conquer the apostles of greed and racial arrogances. Lead us to the saving of our country, and with our sister nations into a world unity that will spell a sure peace—a peace invulnerable to the schemings of unworthy men. And a peace that will let all of men live in freedom, reaping the just rewards of their honest toil.

“Thy will be done, Almighty God. Amen.”

We join the millions who pause this day to remember those who have paid the ultimate price for our freedoms, and we pledge a continuance of prayer for others who are prepared to do the same.

Rick Forcier

Executive Director