



**Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet
64th Korean War Commemoration
National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific
Honolulu, Hawaii
Admiral Harry B. Harris, Jr., USN
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As prepared for delivery**

Thank you Gene for that introduction. I know that you retired as director here just a few short weeks before I took command of the Pacific Fleet. So for me to have an opportunity to be introduced by you, such a legendary hero, diplomat and patriot, I'm very honored.

Consul General Paik, thank you for all of your hard work in organizing this event, thank you for your friendship and thank you for inviting me to speak today.

And Governor Abercrombie, it's always an honor to follow you to the podium. Intimidating, too.

Admiral Macke, Senate President D. M. Kim, State and City leaders, know it is not easy for any of you to get away from the hustle and bustle of your daily life, especially during the workweek. Your presence here is a testament to the importance you place on honoring our Korean War Veterans. Thank you all for being here.

And to the new director of this magnificent and hallowed ground, our sacred soil, Colonel Horton and your great team, thank you for all that you do every day to honor our veterans.

And most importantly, I want to extend a special welcome to each and every one of our veterans of the Korean War here today. Thank you for coming, and thank you for your unselfish and heroic service six decades ago.

Fellow Flag and General Officers, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it's great to be here with all of you in this idyllic setting, to acknowledge the achievements and sacrifices of some true American heroes. Thank you for coming.

Folks, for me, when it comes to public speaking, I've always been inspired by two great speakers.

The first is Abraham Lincoln. When he gave his Gettysburg address he spoke for only two and a half minutes. Yet his words inspire us still.

Then there's Julius Caesar. He spoke for two and a half hours and his closest friends stabbed him to death.

So I've always been inspired to keep my remarks on the short side.

As we gather at this holy ground, I come as you do to pay tribute to those who fought to defend a nation, to defend a way of life some 64 years ago in a faraway land.

On this the anniversary of the beginning of the Korean War, let us never forget those brave men and women who answered the call of duty to serve and fight in a place called Korea.

Korea reminds us that freedom is an idea worth fighting for, and if need be, an idea worth dying for.

Korea must never be forgotten. For me, the Korean War is always with me. I learned of the war from my father, a Korean War veteran. He was stationed in Japan, a Navy chief petty officer when the North invaded the South and caught the world by surprise. He saw plenty of time at sea as he sailed in support of operations ashore.

From him, history was revealed to me as he spoke of the Pusan Perimeter, the Inchon Landing, the "Frozen Chosin," and mysterious places like Heartbreak Ridge and Pork Chop Hill. After the war, he served in Chinhae as a trainer for South Korean navy sailors.

The Korean War was a war that would be the opening struggle in the long and difficult campaign of the Cold War. A struggle that culminated in the victory of democracy over communism, of freedom over oppression, of thoroughfares and gateways over walls and barricades. Today, Seoul is a 'global city' of opportunity and Pyongyang struggles to feed its inhabitants.

Today, South Korea is a free country with a robust economy, a vibrant culture and a powerful military – a close bilateral ally and treaty partner, a close friend to the United States and a key anchor in a free Asia. To all who fought in Korea, this is your legacy.

The storied role that some of you in this audience played in Korea is the stuff of legend. Like the Victory Division and Tropic Lightning, the 24th and 25th Infantry Divisions, who proudly displayed their ties to Hawaii with their shoulder patches, in the shape of a taro leaf.

Fighting alongside the 5th Regimental Combat Team, these units represented Hawaii, and our nation, as they bolstered the besieged 8th Army in the Pusan Perimeter. They were part of the breakout and counteroffensive that drove the enemy north, pushing them all the way to the Yalu River.

And there are the Thunderbirds, the 45th Infantry Division, who joined the frontline forces in the second half of the war and remained on the front, fighting in the trenches, in engagements like Old Baldy Hill and Hill Eerie.

And there were the unsung warriors of the MIS, the Military Intelligence Service, offering their unique Japanese language skills. Often they were the only means of communicating with our Republic of Korea allies, and with the enemy.

As I've learned about your achievements in the war, I am thankful for the efforts of each of you who served, and who so proudly represented Hawaii.

When I was in high school, the father of one of my classmates had been a Navy helicopter pilot in Korea. I was inspired and influenced by the story of Captain John W. Thornton. He was shot down in Korea and captured by the north. He was held as a prisoner of war and was the last living POW to be released from that war. He was one of the founders of S.E.R.E. school and he believed in fraternity and accountability and preparation and in God. I consider him one of my earliest mentors.

I hold in greatest respect the sacrifice of those who were held in captivity as prisoners of war. And there remain more than 8,000 still missing from the Korean War. Let us endeavor to always remember them.

We remember that 456 military men from Hawaii were killed in the Korean War, a higher death rate per capita than from any of the 48 states in the Union at that time.

They are part of the 36,516 who gave their last full measure in Korea. These mighty men and women of valor created a lasting legacy that is the world we know today.

Will Rogers used to say that “We can’t all be heroes. Some of us have to stand by on the curb and clap as they go by.”

And today all of America is standing on the curb as we honor the veterans, living and dead, of the Korean War.

For those of you who served, and for all of you who supported them, thank you.

As I arrived today, and I looked upon the memorial behind me, I was reminded that since time immemorial, stone has been the central metaphor for all things eternal, those things lasting and unconquerable. We believe that a stone wall is impenetrable, that a foundation set on bedrock is assured, to inscribe on stone means that words will last forever.

There is something in the human spirit that inspires us to set important historical events in stone, to be immortalized and remembered, forever.

Here at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, we stand at the base of the Honolulu Memorial, where the honor, the sacrifice, and the final achievements of our American Armed Forces in the Pacific during World War II and in the Korean War and later the Vietnam War, are chiseled into stone, a final statement to memorialize their achievements, forever.

Today as we gather beneath this impressive and humbling memorial, we lift our eyes to meet the gaze of Lady Columbia, who forever wears on her face the pain and anguish of our nation’s grieving mothers, who have lost their sons and their daughters in war, and who have laid such a costly sacrifice on the altar of freedom.

Our nation’s sons and daughters answered the call 64 years ago to defend a country they likely never knew and to defend a people they likely had never met, and they did so courageously, and with great honor.

President John F. Kennedy once said, that “Everyone admires courage and the greenest garlands are for those who possess it.” And it is for them that we present our wreaths today, our greenest garlands.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me conclude my remarks with the following thought. While the thundering sound of the guns of war in Korea ended with the signing of the armistice 61 years ago this July 27th, our nation continues to draw its strength from those who fought for freedom in that war. And our Nation draws strength from those who are serving in our armed forces today, and from those who will serve tomorrow, and from those who will serve far, far into the future – an unbroken chain, linking Americans, generation to generation.

Our strength as a nation also comes from loyal citizens like each of you in the audience today. Americans who are aware of the challenges, the opportunities, the dangers we face. Those of us who serve are

grateful for patriots like you, who help make us what we are today, the world's strongest force for good on the face of the Earth.

May God bless those who served in the Korean War, to defend freedom and liberty.

May God bless each and every one of our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and Coastguardsmen, past and present, who courageously defends our nation.

May God bless the Republic of Korea.

And may God bless the United States of America, land of the free, and home of the brave.

Thank you.