



**Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet
Veterans Day Ceremony
National Cemetery of the Pacific
Honolulu, Hawaii
Admiral Harry B. Harris Jr.
11 November 2014
*As prepared for delivery***

The timing of this national holiday, being in mid-November, has always seemed fitting to me. Deep in the autumn season, it seems a solemn time of year. Even here in Hawaii I sense a change, where the days are shorter, the shadows are longer, the vibrant colors of Hawaii are a little muted. Autumn days seem to invite contemplation and reflection.

So as we gather today, on this hallowed ground – these 112 acres of sacred soil – at this, the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, the final resting place of so many of our nation’s veterans – our heroes – we contemplate their many sacrifices and reflect on their many achievements.

As I stand here at the base of the Honolulu Memorial, beneath the watchful gaze of Lady Columbia, I stand at a place seemingly designed for witness and testimony, for talking story of our heroes past and present, to remember them and what they did for our nation.

I am reminded of the high price Hawaii paid in the conflicts honored by this memorial – the price paid by those who fought in World War II, Korea and Vietnam – a price paid not only because of Hawaii’s proximity to the front lines, but because of the willingness of Hawaii’s sons and daughters to serve in our Armed Forces.

It’s a privilege for me to be here: a Sailor, an American and a veteran. I can think of no place I would rather be today than with each of you, a community of veterans, of supporters, of loyal patriots – and with each of them.

For 239 years, the men and women of our nation have stepped forward to serve in our armed forces and to defend our freedoms. They have risked their lives for the land, for the people, and for the ideals that we all cherish.

Our battles, our victories, indeed our very way of life, are owed not to great moments or important dates. They are owed to the actions and sacrifices of these men and women, who were willing to step into the breach for their country and for the cause of freedom.

It’s oft been said that this nation will remain the land of the free, for only as long as it remains the home of the brave. And that’s because of America’s brave sons and daughters who have worn the cloth of our nation, to step forward to defend our nation.

From our nation’s fiery birth in 1776 to our more recent fiery conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, America’s warriors have always answered the call, often putting their own lives on hold, so that they could defend our nation’s interests at home and abroad.

Our veterans proudly fought two world wars, hot wars in Korea and Vietnam, the Cold War, plus the fights in Iraq, the Balkans, Somalia, Afghanistan, Libya, and Iraq again.

And today, in Northern Iraq, they are there yet again, working with a broad coalition to stamp out ISIL, an evil that threatens all nations.

There's no doubt America thrives today because of our veterans – those who served – and those who are still serving.

And I'm reminded of their sacrifice every day. As I look west from my headquarters toward the Arizona Memorial, I'm reminded of the more than one thousand Sailors and Marines who stand eternal watch, and the high cost to our nation when we were strategically surprised that day, December 7th, 1941.

In the aftermath of the attack on Pearl Harbor and in the face of certain danger and an uncertain outcome, brave men and women all across America, stepped forward to march into harm's way and into history.

Who would have ever dreamed that 60 years later our nation would again be strategically surprised? On September 11th, 2001, on an otherwise beautiful fall morning, as the sun rose above the glistening skyline of New York City, and chased away the shadows in the courtyard of our Pentagon, our nation was again attacked.

Now, I'm obviously no preacher – I prefer to leave the sermonizing to the pro's – but there's a passage in the Good Book which for me defines the spirit that lives in each and every citizen who has ever stepped forward to wear the cloth of our nation.

In Isaiah, God was searching for the right man – a man with the right stuff, if you will – a man to embark on a dangerous mission and go into a dangerous land.

“Whom shall I send? Who shall go for us?”

And the prophet responded, “Here am I, Lord, send me.”

“Here am I, send me.” Powerful words.

When our nation was attacked on December 7th and again on 9-11, 13 years ago, Lady Liberty cried out in her pain and anguish, “Whom shall I send? Who shall go for me?”

And everywhere, Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen and civilians called out, “Here I am, America, send me.”

From the Atlantic seaboard to the middle of the Pacific and beyond, America's brave sons and daughters answered that clarion call. And they continue to answer that call today, serving with great flair and greater distinction, demonstrating a tangible and actionable love for our country, for our way of life and for each other.

After Pearl Harbor and after 9-11, in the face of certain danger and an uncertain outcome, brave men and women all across our country stepped forward defend America at a time of great peril and greater uncertainty.

President Coolidge said long ago that, “The nation which forgets its defenders will itself be forgotten.” Well, we’ll never forget what our defenders have done for us, and our people will never forget. Because it’s our duty to pass on that memory to our future generations, to our children and grandchildren, so that they will know the debt our nation owes its veterans.

So, as we gather today to honor our veterans on this, a nationally recognized holiday, this is very much a day on, not a day off, for those of us who serve. Today, all around the world, there are members of our armed forces standing the watch, protecting and defending American interests in every corner of the globe.

Your Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard are there now. They will be there when we are sleeping tonight. They will be there every Saturday, Sunday and holiday this year. They are there around the clock, far from our shores, defending America, always and forever more amen.

Our nation draws her strength from these brave warriors who willingly give of themselves – as it has been for 239 years. And our nation will continue to draw her strength from those brave Americans who will serve in the future, an unbroken chain, linking Americans, generation to generation.

I also know that America draws its strength from loyal citizens and patriots who are aware of the challenges, opportunities, and dangers we face around the world – people like you who support us, who make us who we are.

Ladies and gentlemen, as I conclude my remarks, my tribute today would simply not be complete if I didn’t recognize the families of our veterans who have also sacrificed so much for our nation: mothers and fathers; sisters and brothers; wives and husbands; daughters and sons; close friends and loved ones. Theirs has never been an easy burden.

May God bless our veterans, our brave men and women of our armed forces, each and every one of our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and Coastguardsmen – past and present – who have stepped forward to defend our nation.

May God bless the families of those who serve.

May God bless this beautiful state of Hawaii.

And may God bless America.

Thank you.