

Honor Flight Banquet  
BWI Hilton Hotel  
14 September 2014  
Henry J. Hatch, LTG(R)

Thank you Stan. Distinguished veterans, ladies and gentlemen, I feel very privileged to be with you for this Honor Flight Banquet to salute a very special group of Americans -- World War II, Korean War and Vietnam veterans -- all from Northern Colorado. I can think of no place I'd rather be right now than to share a few moments with you who have given so much to make it possible to gather in the freedom you preserved for us. Of all the wars in recent memory it was World War II that truly threatened our very existence as a nation and as a free society.

Before continuing, let me take a moment to congratulate and thank all who have, are, and will in the future, support these Honor Flights in any way -- as corporate sponsors, with personal donations, in-kind support and with volunteer help. Tonight we particularly recognize Nobel Energy, US Airways, and Hilton.

I am member of a veteran's glee club that includes among its activities welcoming Honor Flights at Reagan National Airport in Washington. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of May we sang for your predecessors from Northern Colorado here in this room. We include a mix of patriotic and service songs and I must say that it's a thrill to welcome your colleagues to our Nation's capital and see their eyes brighten (and some moisten) and some give a "fist pump" when they hear their song whether it's "The Army Goes Rolling Along" (an adaptation of the old Artillery Song "The Caissons Go Rolling along"), the Navy's "Anchors Away", The Marine Hymn "From the Halls of Montezuma", the Air Force's "Off We Go into the Wild Blue Yonder" (although I confess, in deference to the brave flyers of World War II, we modify the last line from "nothing can stop the US Air Force" to "nothing can stop the Army Air Corps"). We end with the Coast Guard's stirring "Semper Paratus -- We're Always Ready".

In the dark days of 1940 prior to America's entry into WW-II, those we honor today were young -- with rippling muscles, full heads of hair and flat stomachs... their minds full of dreams... and their whole lives ahead of them. You were barely more than boys, and girls too.

Coming on the heels of the Great Depression of the 1930's you watched the unfolding events across two oceans with justifiable concern.

To the east across the Atlantic Ocean, in mere months, the German's Blitzkrieg attack had crushed and occupied the "low countries" of Holland and Belgium... totally defeated the vaunted French Army and had literally driven the resolute British Army into the sea at Dunkirk.

Beyond our western shore, an increasingly hostile Imperial Japan had wreaked havoc in the Southwest Pacific and East Asia.

When on September 27th, 1940 Japan signed the Tripartite Pact in Berlin, The Axis was born. That pact was a pledge among Germany, Italy and Japan, in which they agreed to jointly oppose any country joining the Allies at war - by which they meant the United States. Although America was not prepared for war and sought to avoid her involvement . . . the die was cast.

But all conjecture and uncertainty changed forever on December 7th, 1941 when carrier based aircraft operating from the Japanese Imperial Fleet launched a sneak attack on our Pacific fleet in Hawaii. The raid dealt a devastating blow which left the majority of our capital warships at the bottom of Pearl Harbor.

But by sheer luck and the grace of God, our fast carriers were at sea and escaped destruction.

Aboard the flag ship of the Imperial Japanese Fleet, there was universal jubilation at Japan's apparent success -- but for one notable exception... that being Admiral Esoroku Yamomoto, the architect of the attack. As a young naval officer, Yamomoto had lived in the United States and earned a degree from Harvard. When asked by his staff why he was not sharing in their celebration, he said words to the effect:

"I can think of nothing that will infuriate the American people more than this attack. I fear all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve."

Truer words were never spoken, for across the fruited plain, patriots like those seated before us stepped immediately forward without reservation.

In doing so, they effectively signed a blank check made payable to The United States of America for an amount up to and including their lives. Their term of enlistment was simply, "the duration."

They served in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and Merchant Marines and oh, yes, the Army Air Corps.

They were paid handsomely -- the salary of a corporal was \$54/month... that's \$1.80/day.

Those boys and girls fought and won a war, became men and women, and returned home heroes. When you who had dedicated your lives to defending this country came home, some chose a career of military service, most chose to trade one uniform and set of responsibilities for another -- tradesman, doctor, engineer, teacher, mom, dad. You bought homes, raised families, and built businesses. You built the greatest middle class that the world has ever known.

Throughout the course of American history, courageous men and women have taken up arms to secure, defend, and maintain the democratic principles of justice, fairness, and

equality upon which our Nation's freedoms depend. By their service, they kept America free and strong, and they have protected our way of life from tyranny's reach for over two centuries.

Our nation owes a great debt to its veterans, whose service spans every decade of our country's existence. Through untold courage and sacrifice, you have secured the liberty which the founding fathers sought to establish here in the new world. Whenever and wherever the nation has called -- in times of darkness and danger as well as in times of peace and prosperity -- you, America's veterans have been there. Veterans have proudly carried the torch of liberty for all to see not only here at home, but around the world.

When the Cold War ended, President Bush quickly reminded us that lasting peace would not suddenly break out everywhere. Unfortunately he was absolutely right -- today our nation is still at war. We continue to fight to defend our freedoms and combat terrorism. Pope Francis said a week ago Saturday that the spate of conflicts around the globe today were effectively a "piecemeal" Third World War. This makes it more imperative that we honor and celebrate both those veterans whose service is recorded in the history of past conflicts, and recognize our current warriors who add to our nation's rich history every day and some of whom have been at war for over a decade with repeated deployments away from their families. Men and women of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard are stationed around the world standing in harm's way to protect us as we speak. They represent our resolute dedication to achieving a lasting peace out of the new challenges and threats of the 21st century. I believe they are the next Greatest Generation and you should be proud of them.

Our men and women in the military today have superb training, the best equipment and able commanders.

And they have another great advantage -- they have the example of American veterans like you who came before. From the very day George Washington took command, the uniform of the United States has always stood for courage and decency and shining hope in a world of darkness. And all who have worn that uniform have won the thanks of the American people and many beyond our shores.

We honor every Soldier, Sailor, Airman, Marine and Coastguardsman who gave some of the best years of their lives to the service of the United States and stood ready to give life, itself, on our behalf. Twenty-five million military veterans are among us, and our nation salutes them all. Twelve million served in World War II. More than a million have died in service to America, over five hundred thousand in World War II. Our Nation will always be grateful for the noble sacrifices made by these veterans and their families. We can never adequately repay you, but we can honor and respect you for your service.

President John F. Kennedy once said that "a nation reveals itself not only by the people it produces, but also by the people it honors, the people it remembers".

Ladies and gentlemen, you are, simply put, all ordinary people who accomplished extraordinary things and you have the eternal gratitude of a very grateful nation.

In his book "The Greatest Generation", Tom Brokaw wrote that "they stayed true to their values of personal responsibility, duty, honor, and faith". By writing that "they stayed true to their values", Brokaw establishes that these men and women were dependable and sincere in their actions. His usage of the words "personal responsibility" alludes to the obligation each individual felt towards helping his country during times of need; the selfless nature of these people is repeated in the word "duty". The word "honor" refers to their perennial virtue and integrity, and their seemingly endless optimism. Firm belief in their cause is implied in the word "faith". These words: "personal responsibility", "duty", "honor", and "faith" - convey an ethic marking this generation as ideal Americans – a generation that is and will always be remembered as truly great.

Tonight we honor you -- living veterans from that Greatest Generation. We owe you a debt we can never repay, however we must remember you and what you did. We must honor you with deeds, not just words.

So how do Americans properly thank their veterans? Americans can thank them by living their lives to the fullest and enjoying and celebrating America's greatness. Americans can thank veterans by taking full advantage of all our rights that they defended by taking an active role as citizens – vote, volunteer, and be engaged in and contribute to our communities.

I belong to a small group of retirees who started something we call "The Code of Support". Less than 1% of Americans serve in the Armed forces today and they all abide by a strict Code of Conduct for military personnel. What about the other 99% of us?

The Code of Support Campaign focuses on three immediate objectives:

- 1) Creating an increased awareness among Americans of the sacrifices made by our troops and their families, and the continuing need for meaningful support;
- 2) Moving Americans from "caring" to "commitment" through signing the Code and joining the Corps of Support; and,
- 3) Encouraging and facilitating real involvement of Corps members by identifying and endorsing quality organizations that provide direct support in categories such as *Supporting the Troops, Supporting Military Families, Supporting Wounded Warriors, and Supporting Veterans.*

The 6 Article Military Code of Conduct includes as its first article "***I am an American, fighting in the forces which guard my country and our way of life. I am prepared to give my life in their defense.***" We believe the rest of us should pledge our support of them with a parallel 6 Article Code of Support which includes as its first parallel article "***I am an American. I know that the men and women in our Armed Forces are prepared to give their lives to defend my country, my way of life and the blessings of liberty throughout the world. I am committed to their perpetual***

**recognition, appreciation and support.”** The Code of Support also includes as its 4<sup>th</sup> article **“For our military veterans, I pledge unfailing recognition and appreciation for their contributions to our national defense and our welfare. I will not forget my nation’s responsibility to provide for their continued well-being, and meaningful compensation for their sacrifice.”**

I urge you all to visit the web site [www.codeofsupport.org](http://www.codeofsupport.org) to find out more about this way of expressing your support and putting your name on record thus performing a small, but meaningful deed to back up the expression “support our troops”.

War is by far the most brutal of all human endeavors. For those who have experienced its horrors first hand, certain events will remain indelibly seared into their memories for the remainder of their lives. When you look back on your experiences in uniform, you may see pain and those unspeakable horrors, but it wasn’t all that. You see the memorable and lasting friendships built on shared hardships, shared moments of joy along with moments of sadness. But please, above all, see the enduring thanks of a grateful people and the satisfaction that you did your part to insure we could be together tonight in this great and free nation – a nation with all of its challenges and foibles is still the best nation on earth.

We remember you who demonstrated the courage to go in harm's way, who put service before self and were willing to pay with your lives.

I leave you with these words by a famous marine, father Denis Edward O'brien:

***“IT IS THE SOLDIER, NOT THE REPORTER, WHO HAS GIVEN US FREEDOM OF THE PRESS. IT IS THE SOLDIER, NOT THE POET, WHO HAS GIVEN US FREEDOM OF SPEECH. IT IS THE SOLDIER, NOT THE CAMPUS ORGANIZER, WHO HAS GIVEN US FREEDOM TO DEMONSTRATE. IT IS THE SOLDIER, NOT THE LAWYER, WHO HAS GIVEN US THE RIGHT TO A FAIR TRIAL. IT IS THE SOLDIER, WHO SALUTES THE FLAG, WHO SERVES BENEATH THE FLAG AND WHOSE COFFIN IS DRAPED BY THE FLAG.”***

Thank you for this unique and memorable privilege. On behalf of a grateful nation, it is my privilege and honor to salute you. God Bless you and God Bless America!

