

MEMORIAL DAY 2010

“THERE WILL BE BLUE BIRDS OVER THE WHITE CLIFFS OF DOVER, TOMORROW JUST YOU WAIT AND SEE; THERE WILL BE LOVE AND LAUGHTER AND TEARS EVER AFTER WHEN THE WORLD IS FREE.”

THE GREAT VICTORY IN WWII SEEMED TO BE A BLESSING, AND AUGURED WELL OUR HOPES AND DREAMS OF THE GOOD LIFE FREE OF WAR’S TERRIBLE MEMORIES. MY TRIP ACROSS THE ENGLISH CHANNEL AND ARRIVAL ON OMAHA BEACH AS A YOUNG REPLACEMENT WAS BOTH A TONIC AND REPRIEVE AND LEFT ME IN AWE OF THOSE WHO LANDED ON D-DAY, AND NEVER SURVIVED. COLLEVILLE LOOKING DOWN OVER THE INVASION BEACHES IS TESTAMENT TO THOSE THOUSANDS IN REPOSE –A MEMORIAL TO THEIR SACRIFICE.

AS A RETIRED PROFESSIONAL SOLDIER, I PREPARE A RITUAL OF SILENCE, REMEMBRANCE AND A SALUTE TO MY FLAG DISPLAYED ON THE FRONT LAWN OF MY HOME. MY CREDO REMAINS ‘DUTY, HONOR AND COUNTRY’ AND SALVES THE MEMORY OF MANY BUT SPECIFICALLY THE ONES I SOLDIERED WITH IN MY THREE WARS:

-SERGEANTS PAUL SMITH AND JOHN VAN OOYEN KILLED IN ACTION AT HAVERT, GERMANY AND ALONG THE RHINE, RESPECTIVELY; BRAVE PLATOON LEADERS OF THE 113TH CAVALRY, AN IOWA NATIONAL GUARD UNIT.(WWII)1944-5

-LIEUTENANT JOHN WASSON, CO, ITEM COMPANY 65TH INF, 3RD DIVISION, KOREA, 1953. (SELECTED TO GO TO REGIMENT, HE WAS KILLED WHILE CONSUMATING A RELIEF OF A BELGIQUE UNIT BY HIS COMPANY; IRONY WAS I WOULD BE HIS REPLACEMENT, DID SO WITH HONOR AND SADNESS). WASSON WAS INSPIRATIONAL.

-COLONELS HARVEY SHORT AND JOHN CLELAND THE FORMER OUR LEADER OF THE CAPITAL ROK LIAISON GROUP AND LATTER WHO LED TASK FORCE SOUTH, A COMBINATION OF TWO US AIRBORNE BATTALIONS AND THE 23RD ARVN DIVISION, VIETNAM 1967-8.

SOLDIERING IS UNIQUE, NOT A SCIENCE OR AN ART FORM, BUT RATHER A CALLING. THERE IS A GREAT BOND OF CAMARADERIE BETWEEN SOLDIERS, MARINES, OTHER MILITARY MEN IN WAR THAT DEFIES DESCRIPTION AND PERPLEXES PYSCHOLOGISTS. I WAS NEVER IMBUED WITH 'SACRIFICING MYSELF FOR OTHERS' YET DID NOT HESITATE TO RUN TO THE VAN OOYEN TANK WHEN IT WAS AFIRE, OR ATTEND OTHERS WHEN WOUNDED. INSTINCT WAS THERE AND WHAT WE ARE ABOUT. WE CARE. AS JOHN MCCAIN OFTEN SAID, "I BELIEVE IN THESE THINGS THAT ARE GREATER THAN MYSELF."

I RETURNED TO EUROPE IN 1994 AS A GUEST OF THE FRENCH IN A TOWN ALONG THE OISE RIVER, L'ISLE-ADAM, A LITTLE NORTHEAST OF PARIS. WE HONORED THEIR FIGHT ON THE RIVER, THE MAQUIS (FRENCH RESISTANCE) CHURCHILL AND THE BRITISH AND OUR LIBERATION OF THEIR TOWN ON 30 AUGUST, 1944. SPEAKING IN FRENCH I HONORED LAFAYETTE AND HIS AID IN THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR, AND OUR COMMITMENT TO FRANCE IN WWI AND II. COLLEVILLE BROUGHT TEARS TO MY EYES AS I WANDERED THE GREAT ARRAY OF FALLEN SOLDIERS, MOST FROM OMAHA. IN REPOSE I FOUND TEDDY ROOSEVELT JR (DIED ON UTAH BEACH) AND HIS YOUNGER BROTHER, QUENTIN, WHO WAS SHOT DOWN IN WWI. THE OLD LION AND THEIR MOTHER CREATED SOME FIGHTING SONS.

REMEMBER MEMORIAL DAY GOT ITS FIRST INSPIRATION AND COMMITMENT FROM SOUTHERN LADIES – LIFE-LONG EXAMPLES TO THIS DAY-WHO DISPLAYED CONCERN AND LAID FLOWERS ON THE GRAVES OF BOTH THE CONFEDERATE AND UNION SOLDIER GRAVES.

MEMORIALS RECALLED TODAY CAUTION US WITH THE THOUGHT OF CONTINUING CONFLICT IN THE GUISE OF A 'WAR AGAINST TERROR', NOW DISCARDED WITH EVEN A VAGUER RATIONALE. AL-QAEDA AND TALIBAN ARE EXAMPLES OF TRUE AND TOTAL ISLAM WITH NO COMPROMISE A PART OF THEIR LEXICON. A TRUE BELIEVER VIEWS ISLAM AS STATE, IDEOLOGY AND RELIGION. THE FIST SEEMS TO BE STILL TIGHTLY CLENCHED, MR.

PRESIDENT!

