While serving as a young platoon leader in Iraq, I had the privilege to serve with an international coalition of our allies. We performed joint operations, joint planning and even mandatory fun together. During the planning for particularly complex mission north of Baghdad, my platoon was assigned as security for movement and QRF as needed. After our operations brief, a Major from the British army approached me and said, “I’m glad its you.” Puzzled, I replied, “Sir?” He looked at me and said, “If we ever need back up or help, we always want the Americans.” While I stood a little taller, I asked the Major, “Why?” He looked at me straight in the eye and with bewilderment said sternly, “Because you’re American.” I then realized that his comments had nothing to do with me as a soldier or my individual talents.

That interaction taught me something, something that a lot of us don’t realize, and that is that July 4th may be known as a US holiday on the world stage, but it has far more significance to the world than any other celebration of nationality. July 4th, 1776 signaled an evolutionary change in human nature and philosophy by inspiring and spawning a new specimen of citizen the world has never experienced… The American. My words today are only designed as a reminder, and nothing more, of what we do, and who we are as Americans.

As Americans we embrace our rugged individualism because we recognize that the smallest minority in the world is the individual. We believe that the spirit of America is a mosaic of individual experiences, ethnicity and views with unique colors, shapes, and shades held together by our belief in the republic and our reverence for the Constitution.

After all, it was the individual who chose to stand up against British subjugation and sign that document that hot July day, it was the individual who marched for civil rights, who marched for suffrage and shared opportunity, and it will be the individual who works to ensure their individual prosperity leading to the prosperity of this nation.

In the face of overwhelming odds, Americans prove and show grit, and while grit, is not uniquely American, no one does it better.

As Americans we view obstacles as opportunities and reach beyond our confinements to transcend ourselves. We reject the old, fragmented views of community and country for one of unity and liberty.

In the wilderness of our new nation, those first Americans were inexperienced at war, but building an army from farmers and colonists they achieved success on the battlefield. They defeated the strongest and most technologically advanced enemy the world had seen up to that point. It should have been impossible, and to any other citizen, it would be. Through bullets, bayonets and bandages, the Americans secured victory and took their first steps on the path to global might. To echo president Roosevelt, we began to walk softly with a big stick.

As Americans we know when to draw a line in the sand. In our relatively short history, we have seen other countries and their citizens “Bargain with the Devil” to gain their grail only to find out too late they lost their way and themselves.

To quote a wise philosopher, “What good will it be for a person to gain the world, yet forfeit their soul.” We ask ourselves, “What lines will we never cross, what costs are too high, and what moral boundaries will we not break?”

We ask ourselves these questions because we know definitively that our country’s survival depends on how we answer those questions every day in word and deed. Americans have always answered these questions with voting, marching and debate but no more devastatingly proven as when we chose the colors of blue and gray.

We fight. We cherish our ideas and values. As Americans we will not back down when what we know to be right is challenged and our liberties threatened by foreign or domestic actors.

In my travels all over this earth there is only one citizen that flies their flag year-round and, on every corner, not for celebration or even pride, but as solemn reminder of duty to ourselves and all those who look to us for safety and security. We cherish peace. We negotiate for it; we search for it. We will not subjugate for it. We embrace the reality of conflict as a human trait and derive both the cross and the sword from it. We stand ready as our founding fathers knew we needed to by remembering the words Thomas Jefferson, “The people…are the only sure reliance for the preservation of liberty.”

Americans endure. We see foreign actors discuss our current political climate as a punchline. They do this because they hear people from inside our borders cry out for every perceived injustice. They suggest that the land of opportunity is a whisp of history and it is time to wake up from that dream. We find ourselves in a sea of discontent and confusion. Loud and malicious voices continually act as swells creating doubt and fear. But Americans do not let the dangerous siren songs of socialism, communism and self-indulgence lead us to the reef. Like Odysseus, we lash ourselves to the constitution and remain secure and steadfast and if necessary, we are prepared to bleed on our flag to keep those strips red.

Americans embrace the individual, Americans cherish peace, Americans fight and draw lines in the sand but most importantly, We endure. And if our legacy is endurance, our future, our children will have liberty. And in the words of Benjamin Franklin, “…where liberty dwells, there is my country.’

The modern world rightly distinguishes July 4th as reserved for the United States. Our allies view it as a beacon of hope and comfort while our enemies experience it in shock and awe as they take their final steps into oblivion.

I see a field of great Americans in front of me, and it is because of fields like this dotted all over this country today that liberty will prevail, that freedom will be preserved, and that God will continue to bless this great nation.

Thank you.