

MEMORIAL DAY - GAITHERSBURG
30 May 2008

With special appreciation, I thank you for being invited to share in this day of recognition to warriors and citizens, past and present.

It is most appropriate to meet in this park dedicated to Navy Cross recipient Marine Lieutenant William Christman. I know everyone here has had a chance to read the citation that is displayed on the plaque and many probably know it by heart. However, for two reasons I would like to read it aloud: first to recognize a great warrior; second, to examine the specific acts of his contribution and how they relate to an entire legacy.

The citation reads as follows:

"For extraordinary heroism while serving as a Platoon Commander with Company A, First Battalion, Ninth Marines, Third Marine Division, in connection with operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. Early on the afternoon of 22 February 1969, Company A was patrolling north of Ashau Valley in Quang Tri Province when its lead element was pinned down in a heavy fortified bunker complex. Reacting instantly, Second Lieutenant Christman deployed his platoon to the right flank of the lead platoon and skillfully maneuvered his men forward in a coordinated attack until halted and pinned down by the extremely heavy volume of cross fire from the North Vietnamese emplacements and numerous sniper positions in trees. He directed the fire of his machine guns and light antitank weapons against the North Vietnamese emplacements and mounted such an aggressive assault that his platoon moved through the forward enemy positions. Undaunted by the enemy rounds impacting around him, he fired his light antitank assault weapon, and fearlessly charging across the fire swept terrain hurled hand grenades into a hostile emplacement, killing seven North Vietnamese soldiers and silencing their machine guns. Coming under fire from an adjacent bunker, he was mortally wounded while attempting to fire his light antitank assault weapon against the emplacement. With his remaining strength, he resolutely propped himself up on one arm to direct his men in outflanking and destroying the enemy bunker. His heroic actions inspired his men to such aggressive action in a coordinated company attack that 105 North Vietnamese soldiers were killed and a large bunker complex was destroyed. By his courage, bold initiative, and unwavering devotion to duty, Second Lieutenant Christman upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country."

A warrior serves the Nation, defends the Constitution, rallies to the Flag, and fights for the one on the left and on the right. When the front element became pinned down under fire, Lieutenant Christman lead his men into a mission to relieve the pressure and shift the focus of the fight. He and his men were not hindered by personal fear. They knew they had a responsibility. Fighting for the one on the left and right is not just an individual commitment, it is also a commitment of squads, platoons, companies and every level of command. The spirit of American warriors is greatly enhanced by the knowledge that "We are in this fight together."

Lieutenant Christman's citation well captures his great feat. However, he didn't suddenly transform himself like a character of literature and suddenly rise to the occasion. He was already

a great person with unwavering dedication and commitment. When the challenge arose, he was already morally and mentally ready. His final fight serves as testimony to this fact.

This leaves us with a question: from where did this dedication and commitment originate. You don't have to look very far for the answer. It originates throughout America, in the communities built by the citizens. Our ancestors, who we honor this day, built the most powerful nation in the world. At the same time, they put into this nation a control where no one person or organization would have a monopoly on that power.

The founding fathers identified the citizenry, represented by the Legislative Branch of government, as being the most important. That is why in the Constitution the Legislative Branch is written first, followed by the Executive, then the Judicial. While on my first tour, I compared the affects of the people who set our nation in motion with the people who had controlled the motion, or lack of motion, of Iraq. My intention was to write an article analyzing the difference between George Washington and Saddam Hussein. As a starter I wrote out these words: "Washington gave of himself, to build a nation, centered on the people. Saddam took from the people, to build an empire, centered on himself." For days I could not write anything more and came to realize there was nothing more of value to add. Everything that needed to be said - was there. The difference between the two men cast two different nations on two totally different courses. Saddam insisted on monuments built in his honor throughout a broken nation. Washington's monument is the nation - the most progressive and successful in the history of humanity.

The challenge was passed on from our founding fathers to the citizens. The stage was set for either success or failure and our ancestors went to work building upon freedom's legacy. There is a price with that legacy. As we all have stated many times, freedom is not free. It's maintenance and progression requires hard work. It also requires, in times of peril, for our warrior force to come forward. Our nation has seen many painful wars, even one within itself. Each time the citizens have answered the call. The commitment and dedication that flowed through the veins of our ancestors, and citizens like William Christman, continues to this day.

It has been 44 years since General Douglas MacArthur gave his farewell speech at West Point. In this speech the words "Duty, Honor, Country" became immortalized in the hearts of Americans. MacArthur reflected on the warriors he had the honor of witnessing in combat operations. He recalled the murky foxholes, the dripping dugouts, the boiling suns of relentless heat, the torrential rains, the bitterness of long separation from those they loved and cherished, and the horror of stricken areas of war. At a different place, at a later time, like General MacArthur, I have been honored to witness the American warrior of the battlefield. Above the blazing heat rising to 140 degrees, above the mud season that almost glues ones boots to the ground, and above constant pain inflicted on humanity I have continually seen the rising figure of hope, commitment, and integrity. That rising figure is the American servicemember.

MacArthur recognized the American warrior as belonging "to history as furnishing one of the greatest examples of successful patriotism." He further stated the warriors "belong to history as furnishing one of the greatest examples of successful patriotism" and belonging "to posterity as the instructor of future generations in the principles of liberty and freedom" belonging "to the

present, to us, by ... virtues and ... achievements." In turn, I offer personal witness that the warriors of today have received the instruction. They have not only received it, they have applied it and built upon it. In short, they are living up to the legacy that was passed down to them. Furthermore, they will pass on that legacy to their children who will one day look to today's warriors with the same pride that we have for our ancestors. This witnessing includes members of the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines. Likewise, it includes both genders, as well as multiple ethnic backgrounds, races, and religions. The commitment of American warriors of every generation always returns to those three words - Duty, Honor, Country.

If we were to look where this commitment comes from, the answer is here. It comes from the citizens and their communities. Our sons and daughters are a reflection from where they came. The search for an example is with us. Citizens of Gaithersburg - you serve as excellent testimony. Research for today revealed a program titled "Character Counts." Using your own words, I quote: "Individuals are not born with good character. Good character is learned through direct teaching from those around us and by watching how others behave. It's an ethics program that people of all cultures, races, and religious affiliations can embrace. It is based on six pillars: responsibility, respect, caring, fairness, trustworthiness, and citizenship. It is conducted with a unified approach, which, in and of itself, strengthens the program. Character Counts has been incorporated into the City's mission statement and vision." Ladies and gentlemen - you have captured the same spirit and commitment that we have in the United States military. There is little doubt as to where Lieutenant Christman gained his values. Likewise, there is little doubt as to where the Gaithersburg's service members of today gained their values.

There is another program that further testifies to your commitment. The City of Gaithersburg is once again supporting the efforts of the Veterans of Foreign Wars which adopts various units deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq. Today you will be collecting items. This is a very worthy effort for three reasons: First, is the supplies themselves, especially items like silly string that can be used to save lives or flypaper that helps eliminate an always present nuisance. Second, is the silent message that comes with the gifts - a continuing reminder to our servicemembers that they have not been forgotten and that people back home care about them. I can't emphasize enough the importance of this. Third, is the warm feeling achieved by the people who contribute. The personal satisfaction of knowing that you are doing something for someone who is deployed far away serving national security provides a warm feeling deep inside. Acts of kindness and caring promotes further acts of the same. It also keeps alive understanding and appreciation. Please keep this going. It reminds all of us, those on the front and those at home, that we are all in this fight together.

In closing, let us recognize two special groups:

First, are those who have gone before us, military and civilian. They built this nation and left us the legacy. They also left us the responsibility to pass it on to our children. Harry Truman once reflected: "All power is temporary, leave it in the best condition possible." That is our challenge.

The second group is another set of warriors. Our families, wives, husbands, mothers, fathers, daughters, and sons of deployed servicemembers. They share the sacrifices and the burdens. Often the burdens are heavier. They live moment by moment with uncertainty. Warfighters

generally know their exact situation. They know whether or not they are in eminent danger. Family members don't have that same knowledge. While operating the home front they live with the fear of looking out the window and seeing an officer and a chaplain walking up the sidewalk. Yet, like the serving warrior, they keep up the fight.

Now comes the servicemembers chance to recognize the Citizens of Gaithersburg. You have received from your ancestors, and enhanced, a great community. You have maintained your commitment to national security and held close to your hearts your love of American servicemembers. On behalf of those servicemembers, you are presented this American flag that flew over the Pentagon on May 26, 2008. In this presentation, a special member of your community has accepted the request to read the certificate to you.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you and for the certificate reading present Andy Sanchez.

The certificate reads:

United in Honor
May 26, 2008

The flag of the United States of America flies as the symbol of our nation, our people and our freedom. On this day, our flag flies to reaffirm that we are united in honor for our comrades in arms whose sacrifices ensure our freedom for future generations of Americans.

The Army Operations Center, Headquarters, Department of the Army, is privileged with the distinct honor to fly our national colors over the Pentagon, and to dedicate this flag to the citizens of Gaithersburg.

It is signed by Brian A. Critchett, Flag Bearer, Special Honor Guard, Army Operations Center, the Pentagon.