

BASIC TEXT OF REMARKS

BY

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LIEUTENANT GENERAL
U S MARINE CORPS, RETIRED**

AT THE

**TALLAHASSEE PATRIOTIC PROGRAM
SALUTING VIETNAM VETERANS AND THE
TRAVELING EXHIBIT OF THE
VIETNAM MEMORIAL WALL**

**CULLEY'S MEMORIAL GARDENS
TIMBERLANE ROAD
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA**

SATURDAY, 14 OCTOBER 2006

THANK YOU COMMANDER MCIVER. DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, VETERANS, ESPECIALLY THE PURPLE HEART AND VIETNAM VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.

IT IS MY PERSONAL PRIVILEGE TO BE A PART OF THE CEREMONIES RELATED TO THE WALL OF REMEMBRANCE, THE WALL OF HEALING OR YOUR CHOICE OF TITLE FOR THE TRAVELING EXHIBIT WE SHARE HERE IN TALLAHASSE THIS WEEKEND.

IT WAS A MAGNIFICENT EXPERIENCE TO COMMAND A MARINE REGIMENT OF 3000 PLUS MARINES AND NAVY MEN IN VIETNAM, A PRIVILEGE SOUGHT BY MANY BUT ATTAINED BY ONLY A FEW. MOSTLY VERY YOUNG MEN, THEY CARRIED THE BURDENS OF THAT WAR AS YOUNGER GENERATIONS HAVE DONE IN THE WARS BEFORE VIETNAM.

TO THOSE OF US WHO SERVED IN VIETNAM, THE NAMES ENGRAVED ON THAT WALL HAVE SPECIAL MEMORIES. THEIR LIVES WERE LOST UNDER SORROWFUL CIRCUMSTANCES BUT SINCE THOSE SAD DAYS WE HAVE SOUGHT TO CELEBRATE THEIR LIVES AND WHAT THEY DID FOR THEIR COUNTRY IN THE NAME OF PATRIOTISM AND THAT WHAT THIS WEEKEND HAS BEEN ALL ABOUT. FOR SOME, THEIR NAME ON THE WALL IS THE ONLY RECOGNITION THEY RECEIVED FOR SERVICE IN A COUNTRY THEY DIDN'T KNOW EXISTED UNTIL THEY WERE SENT THERE TO FIGHT.

VIETNAM---VIETNAM- NAM—NAM, TAKE YOUR CHOICE. THE TWO DIFFERENT PRONUNCIATIONS USED BY AMERICANS AND BY THE VETERANS OF THAT WAR ARE REMINDERS THAT AMERICAN CITIZENS, TO INCLUDE THE VETERANS, WERE DIVIDED ON ALMOST ALL MATTERS RELATED TO THE VIETNAM WAR, THE SECOND WAR WHICH THE MILITARY WAS NOT PERMITTED TO WIN, KOREA BEING THE FIRST.

IT IS NOT MY USUAL PRACTICE TO USE A PUBLIC OPPORTUNITY TO CRITICIZE OUR CIVILIAN LEADERSHIP BECAUSE IN OUR DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM, OUR CIVILIAN AUTHORITIES HAVE BEEN ELECTED BY THE PEOPLE AND CIVILIAN AUTHORITIES HAVE THE FINAL SAY OVER THE MILITARY AND I STRONGLY SUPPORT THAT ARRANGEMENT. WE MAY HAVE OUR DIFFERENCES WITH OUR GOVERNMENT AND OUR LEADERS, BUT NO OTHER GOVERNMENTAL SYSTEM AROUND THE WORLD HAS BEEN AS SUCCESSFUL AS OURS NOR HAS ANY OTHER SYSTEM DONE SO MUCH FOR ALL OF ITS CITIZENS.

OVER THE LAST COUPLE OF DAYS WE HAVE BEEN PRIVILEGED TO VIEW THE TRAVELING EXHIBIT OF THE VIETNAM WALL, KNOWN TO MANY AS THE WALL THAT HEALS. AS WE HAVE VIEWED THAT WALL, AND AS WE LOOK BACK

TO THE VIETNAM ERA, IT IS IMPORTANT TO ME THAT ALL AMERICANS BE CLEAR ON ONE POINT.

I WOULD NOT BE FAITHFUL TO THOSE 58,290 NAMES ON THE WALL IF I DID NOT MAKE IT CLEAR TO ALL PRESENT HERE TODAY THAT OUR FAILURE TO WIN A MILITARY VICTORY IN VIETNAM WAS NOT THE FAULT OF OUR ARMED FORCES. THE MEN AND WOMEN OF OUR MILITARY SERVICES WHO SERVED IN VIETNAM DID WHAT THEY WERE SENT THERE TO DO. OUR TROOPS WERE ASKED TO FIGHT A WAR WHICH OUR POLITICAL LEADERS IN WASHINGTON DID NOT LET THEM WIN BECAUSE THEY GAVE PRIORITY TO DOMESTIC POLITICAL AFFAIRS, ADOPTED A FAILURE STRATEGY AND FAILED TO PROVIDE THE BUDGETARY AND RESOURCE SUPPORT REQUIRED ON THE BATTLEFIELD.

WHO ARE THE LEADERS I AM TALKING ABOUT? I WILL BE VERY SPECIFIC. LET ME REASSURE YOU THAT I WOULD NOT BE SO SPECIFIC IF I DID NOT HAVE THE BENEFIT OF MANY YEARS OF WELL DOCUMENTED RESEARCH TO BACK UP MY STATEMENTS. MILITARY HISTORIANS, PRESIDENTIAL SCHOLARS, INVESTIGATIVE REPORTERS OVER THE YEARS HAVE DOCUMENTED AGREEMENT WITH WHAT I WILL SAY TO YOU.

FIRST, THERE WAS OUR PRESIDENT (LYNDON JOHNSON) WHO PUT POLITICS, HIS DOMESTIC PLANS FOR A "GREAT SOCIETY" AND HIS RE-ELECTION AS HIS NUMBER ONE DAILY PRIORITY. THE WAR IN VIETNAM CAME IN SECOND. FROM TIME TO TIME HE JUMPED IN AND PERSONNALLY DIRECTED MILITARY ACTION FROM THE SITUATION ROOM IN THE BASEMENT OF THE WHITE HOUSE BUT IN MOST INSTANCES, HE WAS WILLING TO LET SECRETARY OF DEFENSE MCNAMARA AND HIS HIGHLY EDUCATED WHIZ KIDS RUN THE WAR.

OUR SECRETARY OF DEFENSE (ROBERT MCNAMARA) HAD A VERY LIMITED TIME IN THE ARMED FORCES BUT HE WAS DEDICATED TO THE PROPOSITION THAT THROUGH STATISTICAL ANALYSIS HE KNEW WHAT WAS BEST FOR THE DEFENSE DEPARTMENT AND KNEW BEST HOW TO CONDUCT THE WAR IN VIETNAM. IT IS CLEARLY RECORDED NOW THAT MCNAMARA OFTEN SUPPRESSED THE ADVICE OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF AND ON A NUMBER OF IMPORTANT MILITARY ISSUES DID NOT FORWARD THEIR VIEWS TO THE WHITE HOUSE.

THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF HAVE TO TAKE SOME HITS TOO BECAUSE IN SOME INSTANCES

THEY LET THEIR PARAOCHIAL SERVICE INTERESTS KEEP THEM FROM GIVING A UNIFIED VIEW TO MCNAMARA AND THE PRESIDENT. AS YOU MIGHT EXPECT, THE CHIEFS FAVORED APPLYING MAXIMUM MILITARY FORCE IN VIETNAM IN ORDER TO WIN THE WAR. MCNAMARA AND HIS WHIZ KIDS HOWEVER CONVINCED THE PRESIDENT THAT OUR STRATEGY SHOULD BE ONE OF "GRADUATED RESPONSE".

IN THAT STRATEGY, THE AIM OF FORCE WAS NOT TO IMPOSE ONE'S WILL ON THE ENEMY BUT TO COMMUNICATE WITH HIM AND CONVINCHE HIM THAT HE SHOULD GIVE UP HIS EVIL WAYS. THAT STRATEGY GIVES ALL THE INITIATIVES TO THE ENEMY AND MADE US JUST A REACTION FORCE. THAT SUITED PRESIDENT JOHNSON JUST FINE BECAUSE, FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES, IT MADE HIM SOUND LESS LIKE A WAR PRESIDENT AND, IN HIS VIEW, ENHANCED HIS CHANCES FOR REELECTION.

WHAT ABOUT THE TROOPS ON THE GROUND, ON THE RIVERS AND IN THE AIR? APPROXIMATELY 9 MILLION MEN SERVED ON ACTIVE DUTY FROM 1964 TO 1975, AND ALMOST 3 MILLION OF THEM SERVED IN VIETNAM. IN ADDITION TO THE 58,000 KILLED, 304,00 WERE WOUNDED, SOME 75,000 WERE SEVERELY

DISABLED, MORE THAN 5000 LOST LIMBS AND MORE THAN 1000 SUFFERED MULTIPLE AMPUTATIONS. OF THOSE KILLED, 61% WERE YOUNGER THAN 21 YEARS OLD. 5 MEN KILLED IN VIETNAM WERE ONLY 16 YEARS OLD AND THE OLDEST MAN KILLED WAS 62. THOSE ARE PRETTY GRIM STATISTICS FOR A WAR WHICH THE MILITARY WAS NOT PERMITTED TO WIN.

ONE OF THE MYTHS ABOUT THE VIETNAM WAR WAS THAT MOST VIETNAM VETERANS WERE DRAFTEES. WRONG. ONLY 1/3 OF THOSE WHO SERVED IN VIETNAM WERE DRAFTEES AND 70% OF THOSE KILLED WERE VOLUNTEERS.

ANOTHER MYTH IN SOME QUARTERS OF THE WORLD IS THAT THE UNITED STATES MILITARY LOST THE WAR IN VIETNAM. GROSSLY UNTRUE. THE AMERICAN MILITARY NEVER LOST A BATTLE OF CONSEQUENCE IN VIETNAM. IF YOU LOOK AT TOTAL CASUALTIES, YOU WILL FIND THAT NORTH VIETNAM SUFFERED LOSSES OF 1,500,000 KILLED VERSUS OUR SIDE OF JUST OVER 58,000 KILLED. I SAY AGAIN, OUR MILITARY FORCES DID WHAT THEY WERE ASKED TO DO IN VIETNAM. IT WAS OUR POLITICAL LEADERS WHO REFUSED TO DEVOTE THE NECESSARY RESOURCES OF TROOPS ON THE GROUND AND

THE DEFENSE BUDGET THAT WOULD HAVE PERMITTED US TO WIN.

THE WALL THAT HEALS IS TRULY A NATIONAL MONUMENT, DEVELOPED WITHOUT POLITICAL PARTISANSHIP, WITH EVERY INSCRIBED NAME EQUAL TO ALL OTHERS. AT THE WALL IN VIRGINIA, AND WITH THIS TRAVELING REPLICA, IT IS A PLACE WHERE EVERYONE, REGARDLESS OF THEIR OPINION, CAN COME TOGETHER TO REMEMBER AND HONOR THOSE SERVED. BY DOING SO, THE MEMORIAL HAS PAVED THE WAY FOR FURTHER RECONCILIATION AND HEALING.

IT IS MY DAILY PRAYER THAT GOD WILL CONTINUE TO BLESS AMERICA BY PROVIDING YOUNG GENERATIONS OF MEN AND WOMEN WILLING TO SERVE THEIR NATION IN DEFENSE OF FREEDOM.

THANK YOU.