

Memorial Day, 2009

“Blowing in the Wind”

Many years ago at my high school baccalaureate program, a song written by a Minnesota boy named Bob Dylan was sung entitled “Blowing in the Wind”. In that song, the question was asked “How many deaths will it take ‘til he knows that too many people have died?”

We are gathered here today to pay homage to those brave men and women who believed so strongly in the American dream that they were willing to put their lives on the line for our country.

The first Memorial Day dates back to 1865 following the Civil War when liberated slaves in Charleston went to a former Confederate prison containing a mass grave of Union soldiers. They re-interred the Union soldiers in individual graves and returned en masse on May 30, 1868 with flowers to decorate the graves.

By this, the 142nd observance of Memorial Day, there are over 1 million Americans who have given their lives in service to our country.

In 1967, I answered my call to service to my country and was trained as a combat medic. Along with many other young Americans, I was sent to SouthEast Asia to serve in places with unusual names such as the A Shau Valley, Khe Sanh, Con Thien, Phu Bai, and Hamburger Hill.

During my over 2 years of service in Vietnam, I cared for hundreds of GI's and their injuries, many of whom ultimately did make it home alive, but also many who did not.

As my first tour of duty in Vietnam was nearing its end, I was serving as the medic for C Company of the 1st Battalion, 83rd Artillery at LZ Bastogne, and was replaced by another medic, PFC Fred Paddleford, who went home 2 weeks later in a body bag.

Following my service commitments, I became active in the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. When Senator John Kerry was standing on the steps of the Capitol leading an anti-war rally, I was in Paris, France as part of the International Commission in Solidarity with the Vietnamese People, meeting with the four delegations to the Paris peace talks. Despite some philosophical differences in so-called peace groups then and today, the vast majority of these individuals have remained extremely supportive of our troops and their service to our country.

In 1814, during the War of 1812, another Family Physician by the name of Dr. William Beanes was captured by the British in his home of Upper Marlboro. As the town clamored for his return, a lawyer by the name of Francis Scott Key was sent to meet the British on their Flagship HSS Tonnant to successfully negotiate Dr. Beanes' release, which was delayed by the British bombardment of Fort McHenry. It was while awaiting the cessation of that military engagement that Key wrote our Star Spangled Banner.

The first verse of the Star Spangled Banner ends with the question "O! say does that star-spangled banner yet wave?"

The answer to that question is "The answer, my friends, is blowing in the wind, The answer is blowing in the wind"

As you look around the community today, you will see the Stars & Stripes blowing in the wind, O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

I thank Fred Paddleford and the million other Americans who have given their lives to keep this country the land of the free.