

Lt. Col. Kyle Nickel  
Speech Delivered on Saturday, June 14, 2008  
Flag Day Ceremony  
11:00 a.m.  
At the Veterans Memorial at Patriot's Point  
Acworth, Georgia



First I want to thank all of you for having me out here this morning. It is my pleasure and my honor to be here. For most American's this day goes relatively unnoticed. There are no flag day sales, there isn't a day off of work. For most, it is just another day in their lives, taken for granted. But today as we continue to wage a global war on terrorism, and watch as our military continues to deploy around the world, and watch as our flag is abused and destroyed by our enemies, hopefully, we can appreciate even more the freedom that this symbol represents.

On this day, Flag Day, it is important that we take time out of our busy schedules, and briefly shift our focus. A SHIFT from thinking about ourselves, a shift from thinking about the high gas prices, and water rationing, to remembering and honoring not only our flag, but what it symbolizes. We are honoring freedom. We are honoring the freedom to worship as we please, to speak as we please and to vote as we please. We are honoring the hardworking men and women who have made this the greatest and most successful country that the planet has ever known.

But what does the flag represent. The red, white and blue, the Stars and Stripes, Old Glory, the Star Spangle Banner, the American flag - It has heard the battle cry for freedom and has been the banner for democracy. It is our sacred symbol of the heart and soul of our country, our freedom.

It represents the fifty states and the blood of the men and women who died carrying it - if not on their bodies, in their hearts and souls as they fought for freedom of a nation "our nation."

Though tattered and worn, it waved as 4,400 patriots died in the Revolutionary War breaking off the chains of tyranny from Great Britain.

It survived the Civil War and draped the caskets of many of the 500,000 (some brother against brother) who fought and died defending freedom. Though they disagreed on what that freedom meant the flag continued to wave in its defense.

It stood for justice's sake though 116,000 Americans fell in WW I and 405,000 in World War II.

It survived the numbness of frost bite in the Chosin Reservoir of the Korean Conflict and heard the brassy bugle's cry of Taps being played for more than 36,000 who lost their lives in Korea.

It proudly, but sadly waves today over a wall that bears only etched names in stone of more than 58,000 faces, hearts, souls and bodies of the fallen soldiers who died in the jungles of Vietnam.

It blew for righteousness' sake mounted in the dirt of Desert Storm as 382 Americans' were killed but their love for country was not captured, conquered or defeated.

Today, that price is paid in Iraq and Afghanistan where more than four thousand of us have died, and ten-times this number have been wounded. Yet the flag still endures. It still waves - restoring the foundations on which we were built and reminding us of the freedom with which we've been blessed.

Like it or not America is engaged in a war today against an enemy that is savage, offers no quarter, whose only objectives are to either kill every one of our families in our homeland, or enslave us with a sick form of

extremism that serves no God or purpose that rational men and women can understand. Given the opportunity to do another 9/11, our vicious enemy would do it today, tomorrow and everyday thereafter. I don't know why they hate us, but they do hate us and are driven irrationally to our destruction. The best way to fight them is somewhere else and that is why we are in Iraq and Afghanistan. For whatever reason they want to destroy our way of life. We should be on our knees everyday thanking God we still have enough young people in America today willing to take up the fight as our Veterans did from the earliest days of our nation.

Know that today, you are protected by men and women as good as have ever served; as good today as their fathers were in Vietnam, and their grandfathers were in Korea and World War II. Men and women who are as dedicated to the freedoms that we cherish as our founding fathers were when they envisioned a better way of life.

Every generation has defended our freedom and determined our destiny and the destiny of our nation. 285,000 now rest in peace at Arlington National Cemetery having defended our freedom, while we enjoy it with as much passion as they once felt when they were defending it.

That is what this country and this flag are all about. That is why we are fighting a war in Iraq and Afghanistan. We aren't fighting for oil. We aren't fighting for a love of aggression or because we want to establish colonies. We are there because we wanted to share democracy with a people who have been repressed by cruel and oppressive dictators for the last two millennia.

Ladies and gentlemen, like many of my brothers who've gone before me and those who are represented here today by this flag-I've seen the horror of war. I've had Marines that have experienced horrible injuries and disfigurement. I've visited with my brothers and sisters who've suffered, who lie in military hospital beds and wait for their wounds to heal, for infections to subside, for prosthetics to be made and fitted. Almost to a man, the question foremost in their mind is "When can I go

back?" They understand that there is a job to do. A mission with a true purpose and a noble cause. A cause so important that a Marine who's lost both legs does not wallow in self pity, but focuses on returning to his unit, to those who he has experienced more of life than with his own family. The personal courage of our nation's veterans never ceases to inspire and amaze me. These individuals, know what our flag represents. Their pride in their country, and in their flag, is what pushes them beyond what ordinary men could endure.

This Flag symbolizes the freedom, hope, and determination of the American people and the strength of our spirit.

Some have purchased the freedom our flag represents, others have defended it - and by the grace of God those of us here today have been blessed to simply live under it in the greatest country on the face of the earth. For most of us, it costs us nothing; and that's why it should have our utmost honor and respect. This flag has seen it all and survived it all. It is the epitome of the sacred symbol we know it to be.

It represents a message of hope and freedom that is carried in the hearts and souls of the people of a nation for generations.

I pray today that God will continue to bless this country and that we may never divorce ourselves to the preservation of that freedom for which our men and women have died and our flag still boldly stands.

The United States Flag is the embodiment of our Constitution that proclaims our absolute commitment to defending the freedoms given to us by our Creator.

For our military personnel overseas, they identify the flag with almost everything we hold dear on earth. It represents peace and security, civil and political liberty, freedom of religious worship, families, friends, and most importantly home. They see it in the multitude of blessings, of rights and privileges that make up our country.

When they look at that flag flying high over whatever base, outpost, or tent that they are living and working in, they know that it is equally a symbol of their duty to every man, woman, and child who's rights they are defending in the United States.

The legendary American Author O. Henry once wrote, "You can't appreciate home till you've left it, money till it's spent, nor Old Glory till you see it hanging on a broomstick on the shanty of a consul in a foreign town." For those who have deployed overseas, gone to war, served in the military or been a military family, this simple piece of fabric means home and safety and freedom.

We should never take for granted that this piece of material is delicate, just like the freedom we hold so dear. Just because our flag has flown for over two hundred years does not mean it can't be devalued or forgotten in a fraction of that time.

We need to continue to teach the younger generations that respect for the flag is more than just reverence for a piece of material—it is appreciation for our way of life and for the sacrifices of so many who have fought and died to preserve it.

Let Flag Day be a means to ensure that all Americans better understand what it means to "serve OUR country" and honor our heritage.

Thank you for being here and for helping to celebrate this truly inspirational symbol of our great country. And thank you for the opportunity to BE WITH YOU TODAY as we HONOR OUR GREAT FLAG!