

DEDICATION ADDRESS  
ALABAMA WAR MEMORIAL CEREMONY

Decatur, Alabama

July 20, 1968

Delivered by Audie Murphy

Your Excellency, Governor Brewer, honored and distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, I am truly proud and deeply honored to be asked to speak here today during the dedication ceremony for this splendid memorial.

It has been my privilege to know many of these fighting Alabamians.

Commander Gunn, your department has every reason to feel very proud. This magnificent memorial is an inspired and fitting tribute to the noble war veterans of Alabama. The Alabama Department of the American Legion and all its members deserve the high praise of all Alabamians, and of the entire nation, for having so honored their fighting men.

Let us hope other states will copy this patriotic gesture...until there are fifty such memorials erected throughout the land...to stand as an inspiration for the entire nation in these troubled days.

I have a couple of random thoughts that I would like to touch on at this time. I will be mercifully brief.

The first concerns a disturbing attitude toward the military service that seems to be developing of late. There is a growing tendency to regard military service as an onerous chore rather than an exciting opportunity. The chance to serve one's country is a high privilege, not a wearisome sacrifice. I feel quite certain that not one of the gallant men, honored here, regretted or regrets the years he spent in the uniform of these United States.

Somehow...perhaps without intending it, perhaps because we have felt guilty about raging war and have mistakenly looked to the abstraction 'Peace' as a panacea for all our ills, we have more and more tended to view military service as an unworthy occupation. But when has man ever known Peace? A great American soldier and statesman once said, "If man ever does find the solution to world peace, it will be the most revolutionary reversal of his record he has ever known."

By all means let us keep searching for Peace, but until it is at least a possibility, let's keep our powder dry and not downgrade the noble profession which safeguards our freedom.

Let me speak from my own personal experience for a moment. I was a soldier for a few years early in my life, and though I have been fortunate to win some success in other fields, I look back on the days I spent in uniform as the most rewarding of my entire career. There is no greater satisfaction, no greater opportunity, a man can have on this earth than the chance to stake the ultimate...his life...fighting for freedom and for country.

All men are born to die...and if one man must go a few turns of the earth sooner than the next...what has he really lost?

In life, quality is what counts, not quantity. It's not how long, how well one lives that matters the most. Who among us would hang on for a few brief moments longer, to leave a worse world behind...or refuse to depart a bit earlier, if he could leave a better world to his children and posterity?

I would like to turn not to a subject that seems to be receiving a great deal of attention recently, the younger generation. I don't believe there was such a thing as I was a kid, but we have them today...and a much maligned group they are. I won't attempt to explore the reasons for this now, except to suggest that the bizarre and unusual make news, and television can easily, if not intentionally, create the illusion that a handful of deserters are the entire army.

There is nothing wrong with the great mass of young people today. For example, I feel quite certain that the 900,000 patriotic youngsters who contributed to the construction of this memorial will never forget why it was erected and will themselves defend, if it comes necessary, the high standards it symbolizes.

More than half the population of this nation was born since the beginning of World War II. That ancient conflict, which still seems very close to some of us, is as remote to the young people today as the War of the Roses is to their elders. Half of the population of this nation does not remember what it felt like to live through those trying years when freedom was at stake during every major battle...yet our proud flag still flies and our noble Republic still stands...and this generation is now guarding the ramparts.

Our country has never in its history been involved in a war as controversial and as frustrating as the bitter struggle in which we are not engaged in Southeast Asia. No war has ever been fought under more trying

circumstances, yet our young men in the field fight on with courage and a high morale never surpassed in the history of the Republic.

I know many young people are disturbed and uneasy. I know many of them are asking some hard, penetrating questions. We must welcome these questions when they are honest and sincere. We simple must provide good answers to the difficult questions they pose. We have never been a complacent people, willing to rest on our laurels. Americans have always welcomed constructive change.

Challenge and Response...That's what this great nation is all about. If we respond properly to the challenge these fine, young people confront us with...If we hand them a better nation that we received. I know they will not let us –or themselves-down. I don't have the slightest doubt that they will build upon that they are given, and that the future of this great country is safe in their strong, resolute, young hands.

In closing, let me indulge in a brief, sentimental reminiscence. I open my heart to show how strongly one man feels about freedom...what a precious thing it is to me. I'm sure most of you will agree with my sentiments.

A few days ago I was poking through some junk that has been gathering dust in my attic and came across a couple of objects that inspired me to compose a short poem. I'd like to share it with you?

Dusty old helmet, rusty old gun,  
They sit in the corner and wait –  
Two souvenirs of the Second World War  
That have withstood the time, and the hate.

Many times I've wanted to ask them –  
And now that we're here all alone,  
Relics all three of a long ago war –  
Where has freedom gone?

Mute witness to a time of much trouble,  
Where kill or be killed was the law –  
Were these implements used with high honor?  
What was the glory they saw?

Freedom flies in your heart like an eagle.  
Let it soar with the winds high above  
Among the spirits of soldiers now sleeping,

Guard it with care and with love.

I salute my old friends in the corner.  
I agree with all they have said –  
And if the moment of truth comes tomorrow,  
I'll be free, or By God, I'll be dead!

**Audie Murphy**