

## 50th Anniversary of the Korean War, National Commemoration Ceremony

*Remarks as Delivered by Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen, Korean War Veterans Memorial, Washington, DC, Sunday, June 25, 2000*

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President Clinton, Ambassador Lee [Hong Koo, Ambassador to the United States, Republic of Korea], General Lee [Jong Ok, Deputy Commander in Chief, Republic of Korea-United States Combined Forces Command] and the official delegation of the Republic of Korea, ambassadors of all those countries who stood together as part of the United Nations Force a half-century ago, Cabinet Secretaries, Senator [John] Glenn, Members of Congress, General [Richard] Myers [Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff], Deputy Secretary [of Defense] Rudy de Leon, Service Secretaries and Chiefs, honored veterans and families of those who served, distinguished guests, Janet [Langhart Cohen], ladies and gentlemen.

First, let me invite all of you to the great State of Maine immediately following this [hot day and] ceremony. [Laughter.]

The Korean poet Kim Chun-Soo once wrote, "We all want the same thing, to find an unforgettable meaning." We are gathered here today in recognition of the unforgettable meaning and indelible memory of the 22 nations, the thousands of American service members, and the millions of South Korean citizens who stood together half a century ago in defense of freedom.

To meet at this memorial is to experience a searing reminder of all who have served. We can look to the images etched in the polished granite and see in those ghostly faces a reflection of our own. We can look to the 19 figures that are frozen in time and animated in steel, and for a moment walk among them as veterans, family members, and citizens and call them brother, father, comrade, countryman. We can cherish the unforgettable meaning of their service and their sacrifice, whether they rest in Korea, remain achingly unaccounted for, or long ago returned home to their families and the freedom they fought to defend.

There were those who lost their lives in the Korean War, nearly 37,000 who fell on the field of battle. They were soldiers of the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, plucked from peacetime duty in Japan and placed on the fighting front in the first days of conflict, a small force without tanks or advanced artillery, facing a vast advancing army, complete with Soviet tanks and sophisticated weapons. Their casualties were horrific, and yet they held the so-called Pusan Perimeter until reinforcements arrived.

They were the Marines who gave their all taking Inchon in a single day and reclaiming the capital city of Seoul in fierce hand-to-hand combat. And they were the fearless Air Force pilots, Navy sailors and Coast Guardsmen who provided life-saving covering fire and patrolled those hostile waters. They were the young men who perished unseen on the parched mountains of Korea, places that echo down the decades, like Pork Chop Hill and Heartbreak Ridge, as well as countless other unnamed hills we only know as numbers.

There were those who were taken prisoner or met an unknown fate, whose ranks of over 8,000 remain unaccounted for but never forgotten. Indeed today, this nation continues to search for every warrior, every warrior who fought and died to preserve the freedoms we now enjoy and cherish and to seek the fullest possible accounting of America's fallen heroes. They did not face the horror of battle for us to turn away in the hush of peace. They did not fight so that we could forget. [Applause.]

Ladies and gentlemen, there were also those millions of veterans who returned home to help reshape this nation, driving a great economic expansion and growing prosperity, defining a new America of greater opportunity for all, and, in many cases, devoting their lives anew to public service, including several

Korean War veterans who have served in the halls of Congress and who join us today in this ceremony.

Among their numbers is a man who took to Korean skies as a decorated Marine pilot, and who then inspired a nation when he rocketed into the heavens – not once, but twice – and who will soon be sharing his experience with us, and that is Senator John Glenn. [Applause.]

There is a soldier who led his troops into combat on Pork Chop Hill, and then returned four decades later to find a helmet with a bullet hole in the center, which now sits on his shelf as a vivid reminder of those hellish days, and that is my good friend, former Senator Warren Rudman. [Applause.]

And there is a one-time Marine and Secretary of the Navy who continues to care for our men and women in uniform as Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, our own Senator John Warner. [Applause.]

And so on behalf of our military men and women, I want to salute my friends and former colleagues, Senators John Warner, John Glenn and Warren Rudman. And let me say on a personal note, I wish another former colleague of mine could be here today, a great friend and a hero to all of us, and that is John Chafee. [Applause.]

Ladies and gentlemen, a half a century ago, America entered the Korean War with a military made up of many parts: a mix of war-scarred sergeants, toughened by the hard lessons of Guadalcanal, Okinawa and Normandy; a new generation of soldiers who had only seen war on the silver screen; a segregated force of white, black and Hispanic; and a newly created Air Force.

After three long, bloody years, we ended this battle with a military that made up one of the most coherent fighting forces the world has ever known -- integrated and experienced, ready to face the coming Cold War -- and an armistice that prevented the death of millions more in a savage and spreading war and permitted South Korea to flourish in freedom. There was no stalemate as far as the freedom of all those whose lives were saved by the commitment made by those 22 nations.

Indeed, while we pause today to recall with supreme gratitude the sacrifice of all who served, we also remember the struggle of the Korean people to live free. And few individuals have done more for this cause than the man it is now my pleasure to introduce. Before the partition of his country, Ambassador Lee Hong-Koo was born in what is today North Korea.

And as a scholar, teacher, diplomat and leader of his country, he has long provided a guiding vision of peace for all the people of that divided peninsula and of the enduring partnership between our two nations.

An ancient Korean poet wrote that, "It is hard to meet a friend far from home."

But today, I am honored to introduce a man who, although he is far from home, will always be a true friend of America. Mr. Ambassador, please come forward. [Applause.]

[After remarks by Ambassador Lee and a series of speakers concluding with Senator John Glenn, Secretary Cohen returned to the podium.]

Thank you, Senator Glenn, for those most poignant and moving remarks and for your lifetime of service to this country. You continue to demonstrate day after day that age is not a matter of time, but of mind and spirit. Yours are infinite, both in mind and spirit. We are truly indebted to you and we consider you to be a real national treasure, so thank you for all you have given us. [Applause.]

As Senator Glenn mentioned, some 37,000 American lives were sacrificed for freedom, and that is a tremendous burden for any people and any president to bear. And today, that very same number of Americans are still there, still standing in that number for freedom in Korea; soldiers, sailors, airmen,

Marines serving alongside their South Korean counterparts astride what has been called the world's most dangerous border, appropriately so, for the past half century.

Today, this remains a heavy burden for our people and for our president to bear. But this president knows that those Americans are still the thin line separating the shattered remains of a bankrupt ideology from a world in which more of humanity lives under the flag of freedom than at any other time in the history of the globe.

As he prepared to leave office, President Harry Truman talked about such a time. He said, "I have a deep and abiding faith in the destiny of free men. With patience and courage, we shall some day move on into a new era."

Ladies and gentlemen, today we can say that we are fortunate to live in the dawn of that new era and we are fortunate indeed to have a leader with the patience and the courage to guide us, one who is not afraid to make hard decisions about this nation's defense, from Korea to Kosovo, yet one who never forgets the sacrifice our men and women in uniform and indeed their families, all of whom make that sacrifice on behalf of this great country.

For the past three and a half years, it has been my great privilege to serve with President Clinton, and today, it is my great pleasure and honor to introduce to you, the President of the United States, President Bill Clinton. [Applause.]