

50th Anniversary of the Korean War, Wreath-Laying in Honor of the Korean Unknown Soldier

Remarks as Delivered by Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen, Arlington National Cemetery, Washington, DC, Sunday, June 25, 2000

Vice President Gore, General Lee [Jong Ok; Deputy Commander in Chief, Republic of Korea-United States Combined Forces Command] and the delegation of the Republic of Korea, ambassadors of all those nations who stood together a half-century ago, General [Robert] Ivany [Commander; Military District of Washington], Vincent Krepps and all honored veterans of the Korean War, families of all those who served, distinguished guests, Members of the Joint Chiefs, Janet [Langhart Cohen], and ladies and gentlemen.

We gather here today in these fields of memory dedicated to the thousands of timeless heroes who served this nation so well to remember an unknown soldier of what regrettably has been called a forgotten war; a soldier who stands as a symbol for a nation's abiding appreciation for all of those who lost their lives in Korea and the more than 8,000 who fell and were never found.

And although we stand here for a solemn moment of remembrance, this will also be a day of ceremony and celebration. Because on this 50th Anniversary of the beginning of the Korean War, we will be able to say that all America remembers the brave heroes who fought for freedom half a century ago.

General Matthew Ridgway once said that, "There can be no real love without a willingness to sacrifice." And he asked all those who stood with him in Korea, "Do you love your country? Do you love the men with whom you will be privileged to serve?" And then he answered that question. "If you do, then you will be prepared to sacrifice for them."

And so as we honor those who gave their all and their green for their country and comrades they loved, we also honor those of you who said by your service that you, too, were prepared to make that sacrifice on Korea's harsh terrain in the face of overwhelming hostile forces. Indeed, many of you came fresh from the battlefields of Europe and the Pacific and others would return to fight again in the jungles of Vietnam.

Those of you here today are more than brave veterans of our nation's wars, you are the bold victors of the 20th Century -- the soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen who bestowed on all Americans the peace and prosperity that we cherish today and the blessings of freedom that we pass to the generations that follow. On behalf of a grateful nation and the men and women who serve in our armed forces today, let me say thank you for your many years of dedication and devotion and sacrifice and for all you have given to this great country.

Inscribed above us in the walls of this amphitheater behind us are the words once spoken by George Washington. He said, "When we assumed the soldier, we did not lay aside the citizen." It is now my pleasure to introduce to you a man who once put on the soldier's uniform and served in Vietnam, and then went on to make his mark as a devoted citizen and a dedicated public servant; one with whom I had the great privilege of serving many, many years with in the House of Representatives and the United States Senate.

Along with President Clinton, this Vice President has supported America's veterans who proudly wore the uniform of this nation yesterday, and all the military men and women who serve us and who so proudly wear that uniform today. Ladies and gentlemen, the Vice President of the United States, Al Gore.

