



WILLIAM H ROEDY



Vietnam Memorial Speech

October 10th, 2015, Washington DC.

- *Thank you, Charlie*
- Thanks and congratulations Charlie for arranging this.
- His idea, vision, inspiration.
- We go back a awhile:

Roommates.

Taught me about Bronx Irish Catholic (BIC)

Branch School

Airborne/Ranger

Lost our friend, Kenny Gillihan in Ranger School

My best man

Together in Vietnam

Patty/Life long Partner

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- Welcome Fellow soldiers, friends, and family – Veterans, class of 70, Vietnam veterans, Fathers, sons of West Point graduates.
 - Gerry Minor, Mike's brother, great to see you after 45 years. Don't wait so long next time.

One more shout out – Bob Kimmitt – class of '69' instrumental in building this Memorial Wall, and still serves on its board.

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- ***“THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE”***
 - I'm always moved when I see men and women in uniform being thanked in public.
 - Total strangers, hands eagerly outstretched rushing up to soldiers in airports and shopping malls and earnestly thanking them for their service to our country.
 - Not in response to some spectacular act of valor splashed across the headlines, or to purple hearts pinned to their chests or medals draped over their necks in Rose Garden ceremonies.

- Just for the uniform/plain and simple. ***“Thank you for your service”***.
[It has even happened to me 40 years after my Vietnam tour when using my USAA card for a rental car in North Carolina]
- It was not always thus. No, it was not.
- The class of West Point 1970 stood ready, 148 served in VN. The last bookend, the last class to have the ultimate sacrifice.
- Some of us here had fathers who graduated West Point in 1940 near the first book end. We are all part of the long grey line. My father, for example, soon after graduation in 1940 found himself under attack in Pearl Harbor: like those of us, who ended up in Vietnam
- ***BUT SOMETHING WAS DIFFERENT THIS TIME***
- When we came home, we were advised to change into our civilian clothes, as if hiding a parachute the moment you hit enemy territory.
- Nowhere in the field were our uniforms more of a target than when we got home, whether in airports or neighborhood sidewalks.

- While in Vietnam, I wrote a letter home every day, sometimes two. You may remember the book and HBO movie 'Letters Home'. (which I introduced while at HBO)
- When I came home, I gathered all my letters and burnt them.
- It seemed like a good idea at the time.
- It matched the mood of the country. I regretted it later on.
- When I told my Dad that I volunteered for Vietnam, even he asked why?

My mom gave my dress grays to a hippie, while I was in VN.

THINGS WERE BAD. REALLY BAD!

- We weren't expecting parades, or the brass bands that earlier soldiers had heard playing John Philip Sousa.
- Or ticker tape.
- But boy, did we hear a lot of music. It was just different music. Instead of Sousa, it was Jimmy Hendrix
Instead of flutes, it was electric guitar

- Music that was not terribly flattering, with soul-searching lyrics.
- It was a music and cultural revolution, and a disruption to many of us.
- It was Woodstock
- It was psychedelic
- It was:
 - *IMAGINE* by John Lennon
 - *BORN IN THE USA*
 - *WAR – WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?*
 - *BLOWING IN THE WIND*
 - And of course, '*TIMES THEY ARE CHANGIN'*' by Bob Dylan.

*There's a battle outside and it's ragin'
It will soon shake your windows
And rattle your walls
For the times they are changin'*

- Times were turbulent, swirling all around us
 - Student protests
 - Kent State (Where the National Guard killed 4 protest students)
 - Walter Cronkite saying to America to get out

(Thank you for the helicopters above us, feels like Vietnam).

- Later on, Hollywood didn't make us feel much better with films like
 - Apocalypse Now
 - Deer Hunter
 - Platoon
 - Coming Home
 - Born on the 4th of July.

For a veteran, they were hard to watch

- *Dylan and Lennon were right, that war is often ugly.*
- *But here's the thing, what they didn't say was most of its participants are anything but.*

- So, who are they ?
- They are young, they are dedicated, they are innocent
- Ready to sacrifice – ready to serve – the ultimate sacrifice
- They are from the cornfields of Iowa
- Or the manufacturing plants of Detroit
- The steel mills in Ohio
- Or the beaches of Florida
- Or the Irish families in the Bronx (Charlie)
- They are Captains of their high school football team, debate team, class presidents, sons, brothers, husbands, fathers
- *All moving from the immortality of youth to the mortality of a soldier*
- And dedicated women, our wives and partners, girlfriends, mothers, fathers.

Let's not forget the pain, the anguish and the suffering of our families back home, which could be as great if not greater

“DUTY/HONOR/COUNTRY”

We heard General McArthur utter these words in the West Point Mess Hall

- Now, speaking as a veteran of MTV as well as a veteran of Vietnam, (very different worlds), I admit these three words of virtue don't make great rock lyrics.
- But they do make a great country;
A safe country.
Made safe by a strong military, and its soldiers.
- These words rocked us at West Point.
- Even in 1970, while our friends and neighbors back home were burning their draft cards like the 4th of July fireworks, above the din, our 148 members of the class of 1970 heard another rhythmic beat - the last West Point class to serve in Vietnam.

These virtues – DUTY HONOR COUNTRY

As well as SERVE WITH INTEGRITY, our class motto

These virtues;

- That's what makes Americans smile when they see a man or a woman in uniform.
- There is something timeless, something treasured about the values, stitched into our uniforms.
- Because a uniform isn't only a symbol, it's also what a soldier wears when you want to put democracy and freedom to work.
- Times, yes they are changing, they always do
- But
 - not values,
 - not integrity
 - and not honor

DUTY HONOR COUNTRY

- They aren't hot topics you ask a Gallup to conduct a poll on.
- Service is never about popularity.
- Duty is never a trendy cause.
- Serving in Vietnam was the least fashionable line on any person's bio.
- None of us made it onto the cover of Rolling Stone or Esquire.
- We didn't debate whether Vietnam was right or wrong.
- We didn't run from the battle.
- Instead we marched (as we were taught) to the sounds of cannons.
- There were respectable reasons for drafters or high lottery numbers to become conscientious objectors.
- But there were also important reasons to be conscientious WARRIORS
- Back then 'anti-war' was the most 'with it' brand you could adopt.

- Being tie dyed in 1970 was the most predictable label you could wear.
- Nowadays, you still see a fair number of sailors or soldiers, airmen and marines strolling through airports/but you don't see too many tie-dyed head bands.
- Being a soldier isn't a trend
It's not even a movement
It's not a call to fashion.
It's a call to duty.
- I took my family to Vietnam last year, showed the kids and my wife my firebases, Khe Sanh, the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the Hanoi Hilton. Answered their questions. We met South Vietnamese veterans, even had lunch with a former Viet Cong Family, our former enemy. Took pictures, exchanged stories.
- Vietnam is a much different place now.
- Times they are changin'
- We summon the courage to adapt to change.
- But DUTY, HONOR, COUNTRY remain the same.

- Here at the memorial, we bring mementos of these young lives cut short.
- Over the years 400,000 relics of lives stopped mid-breath have been brought to the Wall, and are now stored in a warehouse because they no longer fit anywhere else:
- Boots, medals, beer cans, love letters, even a custom made Harley Davidson, complete with dog tags and painted scenes from Vietnam.
- Here we have memories of
 - Smell of Uniforms, M-16's
 - China Beach
 - Me Lai
 - Arc Light
 - snafu (situation normal...)
 - fubar (...beyond all recognition)
 - Khe Sanh
 - Dusters
 - Malaria Pills
 - C-130, Hueys, Chinooks
 - 175's, 155's
 - Incoming 122mm rockets
 - Forward air controllers
 - F 4's over our AO
 - Didi, Didi Mau
 - And not to forget the delicious C – Rations, especially our favorite- 'Ham and Lima Beans'

- This wall unites us, ensures us that for the fallen, their memory does not fade
- There is no political statement, no more controversy
- Only memories and respect
- When you polish a name on the black granite, you see your reflection, like a mirror
- People put both hands on the wall to feel the weight in their palms.
- Vietnam weighs on us.
The gravity in our lives, something hard to grasp
- But there is also solace, seeing the names not only of a father, brother, son, but also the names of other fathers, brothers, and sons.
- The reflection will remain, reflecting forever all of us and our sense of honor, our call to service, the reflex of duty; calling on us to do good things with our life.
- The day will come when the last child will visit a fallen father here, or the last teddy bear will be left by a name.
The day will come when the last living Vietnam veteran will stand tall and salute his brothers in arms. But these names on the wall will remain forever.

- Today we salute these men.
We salute Bob, Marshall, Dick, Mike –
we salute 58,000 others.
- The wall will stand.
- West Point will stand.
- The country will stand
- And it will continue to be defended and made safe by men and women, yet unborn
in Texas or New Jersey or California, across the land. And like the men and women
who we commemorate today,
- they shall protect with valor, the imperishable, the incorruptible granite principles of freedom
and honor.

DUTY, HONOR, COUNTRY

- May these names of our lost brothers pass eternally into the memories of those many, many millions who owe them their freedom

THANK YOU, AND THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE.