



**Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet
65th Annual Mayor's Memorial Day Ceremony
Honolulu, Hawaii
Admiral Harry B. Harris Jr.
26 May 2014
As prepared for delivery**

Thank you Mayor Caldwell for that introduction and for your inspirational leadership in supporting all of our armed forces stationed in Oahu. We are all lucky to have a mayor who understands the linkage between the great State of Hawaii and the U.S. military.

Senator Schatz, Representative Hanabusa, Lieutenant Governor Tsutsui, veterans of our armed forces.

Director Horton, and all of you who work tirelessly to take such great care of our nation's veterans laid to rest here, thank you.

And let's give it up for Misty Kelai, the Royal Hawaiian Band and the Sounds of Aloha. Thank you for providing such inspirational music here today.

To the families and loved ones of those buried here in this beautiful setting, this hallowed ground, these 112 acres of sacred soil, thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

I'm deeply honored and humbled to be asked to speak to you on this Memorial Day—a day on, not a day off—to honor those who sacrificed their lives in service to our country. If you believe as I do, that God implants an intense desire in every human heart to live in freedom, then this holiday—in which we remember all servicemen and women who gave their lives so that we might live in freedom—this holiday is a special and sacred day. This is why we are gathered here to memorialize the fallen, because the spirit of freedom will never let us forget.

Now, I'm no expert on the Good Book, and I prefer to leave the preaching to men of God like Lieutenant James Reagan here, who gave today's inspirational invocation. But I do know that in the book of Ezekiel, God was searching for a person who would build up a wall and stand in the gap to defend a new nation, a warrior who would represent the honor and integrity of the people.

Thankfully, our nation has always been blessed to have strong men and women with exceptional courage, who are willing and able to stand in the gap and defend America whenever our liberty is in jeopardy.

And they have answered the clarion call to defend our nation time and time again, on every front, in every battle, and in every skirmish. From our war for independence 238 years ago, to Pearl Harbor, to Korea and Vietnam, to 9/11 and the Global War on Terror, to Iraq, to our current fight in Afghanistan, and every perilous war fight in between, America's brave sons and daughters have willingly come forward to build up that wall, and to stand in the gap to defend our nation. To willingly and ably represent the honor and integrity of the American people, our American

ohana. And today, we are here to commemorate all those who made the ultimate sacrifice for the cause of freedom.

America is the country she is because of young men and women who are willing to forego wearing a business suit, forego strolling down Easy Street, and forego living the good life, to wear instead the cloth of the nation, to travel instead along an uncertain road fraught with danger, to live lives that matter on a fundamental level.

I'm reminded of a poem, written by a young Huey helicopter pilot in Cambodia during the Vietnam War, Captain Michael Davis O'Donnell. It goes like this:

“If you are able, save for them a place inside of you, and one backward glance when you are leaving, for the places they can no longer go.

Be not ashamed to say you loved them, though you may or may not always have.

Take what they left, and what they have taught you with their dying, and keep it with your own.

And in that time when men decide and feel safe to call the war insane, take one moment to embrace those gentle heroes you left behind.”

Memorial Day is set aside to evoke those gentle heroes like Captain O'Donnell, who made the ultimate sacrifice just two months after he wrote those words, and was missing-in-action for more than 20 years before his remains were discovered in the jungles of Cambodia and were finally brought home to be laid to rest.

Our strength as a nation is drawn from military heroes like Captain O'Donnell, and from the warriors who sleep forever here at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, or onboard the USS *Arizona* in Pearl Harbor: men and women who stood in the gap, who wore the cloth of our nation and served so that our nation could endure.

America continues to draw her strength from those who serve today, and she will draw strength from those who will serve tomorrow—an unbroken chain, linking Americans, generation to generation.

And America draws her strength from across our nation, especially those men and women from Hawaii who serve with distinction, courage and honor. Kualana na koaao Hawaii. Famous, indeed, are the warriors of Hawaii.

Our strength as a nation also comes from loyal citizens like each of you in the audience today, Americans who are aware of the challenges, opportunities, and dangers we face. Those of us who serve are grateful for patriots like you, who support us, who make us what we are today: the world's strongest force for stability and peace on the face of the Earth.

Ladies and gentlemen, my tribute today would simply not be complete if I didn't recognize the families of our veterans who have also sacrificed so much for our nation. Mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, wives and husbands, daughters and sons, close friends and loved ones. Theirs has never been an easy burden.

So as we remember our fallen warriors as a nation, we must also remember our heroes on the home front—America’s military force simply could not carry out our duties without the critical support our families and loved ones provide every day.

May God bless every one of our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and Coastguardsmen—past and present—who answered our nation’s clarion call. May God bless our beautiful state of Hawaii, and may God bless America.

Thank you.