

ADDRESS

TO THE MAITLAND KIAWANIS CLUB

MAITLAND, FLORIDA

ON VETERANS' DAY, NOVEMBER 11, 1981

BY

JOHN O. MOENCH

MAJOR GENERAL, USAF (RET)

**Recovered from the personal files of Maj. Gen. John O. Moench
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Kiwanians, Veterans and Friends,

It is a distinct, personal honor to have been invited to speak to you on this important national day of remembrance and re-dedication.

Like many of you here, I am no longer 20 years old. As such, I don't have the time nor the inclination to play games. And with each added year I am less inclined to walk around issues.

Also, I must confess to you that I find it difficult to talk about the dead. So most of my comment today will be about the living -- the living veterans and those who honor and should honor all veterans.

And I come before you at a point in history where I admit that I perceive but fail to understand a wall that is emerging between much of our citizenry and the military reality.

There is a military build-up today that overshadows the wildest imagination of Hitler. But the bulk of our citizenry appears as unconcerned about this military build-up as the French were of Hitler in the twenties and early thirties.

This cancerous military build-up is now virtually exploding. The Nation is in ostrich-like fashion, turning its back to it as if this enormous unprecedented enemy military build-up did not exist.

To cite but a few examples - the Soviets have expanded their armed forces to the point where they outnumber us 2 to 1 in manpower, 2 to 1 in fighter aircraft, over 4 to 1 in tanks, and 3 to 1 in attack submarines. Their current production outstrips ours 3 to 1 in tanks, 4 to 1 in infantry combat vehicles and 7 to 1 in artillery. A new fighter aircraft rolls off their production line every 7 hours.

In just two years the Soviets produce enough aircraft to equal the total fighter inventory of the U. S. Air Force and reserve forces -- which inventories include aircraft dating back two decades.

Today, on this November 11th Veterans' Day you are asking thousands of patriotic American men and women to defend this country and the world's frontier against a formidable enemy but many citizens don't want to give those defenders equivalency in personnel, in equipment, in spare parts, in supplies or in training. It is almost unbelievable, but some of our men on the frontier fly and use equipment that is older than they are. And I have listened to some pious arguments that this same antique defense materiel should be satisfactory for yet another decade!

I am an American. I was born that way. I was fortunate!

I was fortunate too to have been born of poor parents in difficult circumstances. Not that these parents failed in life --

they had not! But being of poor parents and in difficult circumstances I had none of the burdens of richness and richness can be a burden, particularly for the young. And how fortunate that I was not born in today's environment of permissiveness, socialism and welfare!

When I was young, we were told that, notwithstanding a birth of poor parents and surroundings, notwithstanding one's health or strength, notwithstanding initial education, notwithstanding depression or lack of money -- but just because we were Americans we could achieve great things in our lives. We just had to pass the test!

But what was and is greatness? And what was and are the tests?

Electricity was greatness for us -- we had none. An inside toilet would have been greatness for me. Heat was greatness -- we had little and none in my attic bedroom. Food was greatness -- I remember the day when my father brought a car full of stale bread for chicken feed and I was able to eat all I wanted. Clothes was greatness -- I had few. On most days a dime or a quarter in the pocket would have been greatness.

Material greatness we did not have. But that was not cause for complaint. Why? Because we were Americans and we had the greatness of a future with a golden promise, if we worked for it and passed

the test. It wasn't going to be easy, but the promise was there. There was no welfare; there was no socialism; government was small -- a person was responsible for his family, himself and his nation. Giving was there but it was a personal, not a governmental act. And as poor as we were, we were still charitable to others.

When the big war came, we were all volunteers. America was our country, it was a great country even though we were poor. When December 7th came, I didn't know where Pearl Harbor was -- it didn't matter. It was the United States and it was us! More reason to volunteer to defend the Nation was not needed. We were being tested! When finally called to active duty, I paid my own way to my duty station and was surprised to learn that I didn't have to purchase my own gun. On the home front, those who were left behind put their shoulders to the wheel and gave us the support and equipment which made possible our victory.

I, as others, worked and fought for America and Americanism and we won -- we passed the test! And we continued to work and fight and to win where we were needed and where we were politically allowed to win.

America was a success when I was born and it became a greater success. We passed test after test.

But Americans progressively found it difficult to recognize

success and to deal with success. And we were to learn that success did not necessarily bring happiness nor independence -- strangely, success brought dependence and unrest and welfare and high taxes. Progressively, we began not to pass the test -- many did not even want to take a test any more. Somehow success had destroyed the basic need for even being tested! Or the worth of that which we possessed.

Let me discuss briefly this thing called "success."

When I was young, the standard wage level for a strong man for a 10 to 12 hour day of hard work was \$1.00 plus a noon meal. With a meal then running about 35¢, the daily "minimum" wage for that period could be stated as \$1.35.

Now with gasoline then costing about 13½¢ a gallon, this \$1.35 equated to 10 gallons. With eggs at 12¢ a dozen, this daily wage bought just over 11 dozen eggs.

When I was young you were happy to get one of those dollar-a-day jobs. No one looked for relief or unemployment compensation -- there wasn't any. You were tested and you made it or you didn't!

But today, in our current recessionary "hard times," a period when many people disdain a minimum wage or employment out of their special "speciality," a minimum wage for just an 8 hour day buys not 10 gallons of gasoline but 25 gallons. And instead of 11 dozen eggs it buys over 40 dozen eggs.

In the thirties a good car cost about \$700.00 or almost 520 minimum wage work days. Today a good car, a car with gadgetry and convenience we wouldn't have dreamed of in the thirties, costs about \$8000.00 but requires only about 250 minimum wage days.

In the thirties we all scrambled for a job. Today, with 8% unemployment, jobs in the market go begging for lack of interest --it's too easy not to work! With unemployment up in Central Florida, last Sunday I counted local advertisements covering over 5000 jobs. I have business friends begging for employees.

We live in a nation of success -- a success we don't appreciate and apparently can't handle. And we no longer want to be tested.

I'm an importer and when I travel overseas the successful merchant may well treat me to hospitality in an environment that in the U.S. we would call slums or worse -- and most likely the U. S. government or the U. S. occupants would have torn or burned it down. I spent three years riding the train through Harlem and could have cried at the destruction of our heritage and our resources by our so-called under-privileged and deprived citizens. Somehow success has made relatively good things unacceptable.

In the thirties, I took a lunch bucket to school. Now we have to have the children fed at school and many want it free. Still I see those same children driving expensive cars and racing around on purposeless mopeds. And based on the trash I pick up daily in

front of our house there is no shortage of money.

I went to a three-room grade school -- three teachers and a janitor -- the janitor was the disciplinarian. Somehow, we all graduated from eighth grade, white and black, knowing history, geography and literature, plus algebra and the English language. We were tested and we passed the test. Today with all our immense educational costs and super educational ideas we all too frequently graduate someone from high school who can't pass a basic arithmetic and English test. Even the idea of a test is shunned -- in some cases because of the English language.

When I was a boy no one cared what your family language was -- you learned to communicate in the primary language of America and that was English. And that, in my view, is how it should be. America achieved unity through one primary language, not a babel of tongues, and disunity will emerge if we now resort to the babel.

When finally, after 17 years of night school, I concluded my graduate study and turned in my graduate thesis it was letter perfect. Now, I am advised, that insistence on a letter perfect thesis would result in an almost discontinuance of doctorate degrees! This is like other testing that has become invalid because certain select groups can't pass it.

America has not been able to handle success! America doesn't

even understand success -- and how it got to be successful -- and how it can stay successful.

But America is still a great country and it can remain a great country if we recognize that it is great and the values that made it great.

What are the values of America? What is Americanism?

I can tell you what Americanism means to me and to the host of veterans we honor today.

Americanism is the holding of my country and its President as supreme. I have stood and I stand ready to die for my country and its President. I hold no other allegiance. And this allegiance is not conditional. The President represents the U. S. and, as George Washington noted, the President is the one and only person who does that. If you degrade the President, you degrade your country and yourself.

Americanism is the building of America. I have no place in my house for those who claim to be Americans, some of whom dutifully pledge allegiance to America, but who think first of another country. I am of German descent, but the word German is an adjective, not a noun. My wife is an Italian-American -- not an American-Italian.

Americanism is standing on my own two feet, advancing by my own brains and energy, and living within my own means. Americanism is not living off the means of other Americans. The West was not won, America was not built, on a foundation of food stamps and welfare. And third world countries will not be built on the basis of grant aid.

But Americanism is also a willingness to go to any length to help another American or innocent foreigner in trouble. When a crewman went down in Hanoi there was no end of real volunteers to take choppers into that enemy city to get the downed crewman out. These were real Americans doing real American things. These were not "do-gooders" and communist sympathizers flying the American flag while catering to and collaborating with the enemy.

Americanism is the possession of fundamental rights. Rights, however, are earned and they belong to a citizenship who earns and re-earns them. Non-citizens have privileges -- unearned privileges -- and that is all. Americans and Americanism need not and should not be pushed around or intimidated by non-citizen demonstration, violence and agitation.

Americanism is, however, compassion and giving to the less fortunate. There is, nonetheless, no Americanism in a giving to Americans or others that subverts the idea of individual initiative, work and independence.

Americanism is the antithesis of socialism -- Americanism is maintaining encouragement and reward for individual and corporate capitalistic success. Americanism is not big government but it can and should be big business for big business is success.

Americanism is freedom to move about, freedom to speak responsibly, freedom to succeed honestly, and, most of all, freedom to fail. America needs no safety net for failures. The right to fail should never be destroyed.

Americanism is the right and duty to work and to work hard. There is no Americanism in a reward for shoddy work or non-work. And surely there is no Americanism present in those individuals who pride themselves on non-work with some of them now, with professional, careerist government support, having produced three generations of non-workers. Non-work should not be a profession!

Americanism is quality -- quality of purpose, quality of person and quality of product. Americanism is not mediocrity. There can be no pride nor any success in mediocrity and America will not survive with mediocrity. But, sadly, America now is moving toward being a nation of mediocrity in many ways -- purpose, product and individual. I grew up in a world wherein one sought to achieve excellence. Our top grade was an "E". Now the top grade is an "A", indicative, I think, of the "average" that is now the dominating goal. How is it that America can reduce itself to the level of tolerating tests that serve no end other than quotas?

Is this not guaranteeing mediocrity or even less? Do you want your military officers, your doctors, your scientists, your teachers, your leaders selected by excellence or by quota?

Americanism is the right as a result of one's labors to acquire property, to hold that property without penalizing taxation, and to pass that property to others as a heritage.

Americanism also involves a deep respect for another's property. Sadly, this principle of Americanism is being eroded by virtually unbridled governmental and individual disrespect. Both are stealing the hard won property of America -- one through taxation and inflation, the other through conversion. Both are destroying the property cornerstone of America.

Americanism is not high taxation nor spending beyond the individual or corporate means. America was founded on the issue of excessive taxation and it should remember that. And if we need an in-house example of how high taxation does not work we can always turn to the vivid disaster of New York City.

Americanism is the idea of being the best and staying the best. The idea of second-ratism in nation or individual is not American. We know that the Soviet Union has now pronounced the U. S. second rate as a people and as a nation. If, indeed, we are second rate we cannot remain that way and be Americans and America.

But American motivation is not hate nor vindictiveness. Americanism is the tremendous capacity to tolerate mistakes by others

and even deep wounds on America. Americanism is not an institution of perpetual agitation for acts and events deep in history -- and I deplore the bigoted, self-serving witch hunts of history with which we are surrounded.

Americanism is the giving of value to God and religion.

Americanism is also volunteerism -- patriotic and philanthropic volunteerism. And there is no greater patriotic volunteerism than that which exists in our military forces. Money is essential but it cannot ever substitute for patriotism in the make up of our Nation's defenders.

Ultimately, America and Americanism is individuals and not government, but is a nation of individuals willing to speak and work for the "we" and not just for the "me."

Americanism is the long term dream and the long term investment to achieve that dream. But, sadly, the America of today has moved far from the long term objective to the "fast buck" psychology; it has shed the idea of conservation and saving, and has gone too far in adopting the concept of "getting and spending the money now." Business management itself, long a most conservative element in the American structure, now emphasizes more and more the short range result, the quarterly report, and the instant return. As Edward Deming notes: In this attitude can be our downfall.

But America is still a great country -- a very great country! It is great to be an American. And if you ever wonder about the still greatness of America, try to find another country where people are dying to get into it.

I think that I represent the core of a lot of ideas and concepts that made America what it is today and will preserve it in the future. I think that most of these ideas and concepts are shared by my military compatriots, living and dead, and I would hope that they are shared by you for just as they made this Nation great so they will also preserve it.

November 11th is not just a day for the military veteran -- it is a day for America.

And I hope that with this day there emerges a new dedication to the principles that made America and for which so many Americans have died.

America and America's military heros -- the dead, the maimed, the still whole and the new -- deserve no less.

They have been and are your frontier!!