

## Notable Speech

### *In Memory of Those Who Have Fallen*

By Patrick A. Mead, Ph.D.

In the center of the ancient town of Edinburgh, Scotland, a huge outpost of volcanic rock juts from the earth like a ship freed from the depths. A 1,000-year-old castle sits on that rock. For centuries, it has been the symbol of who the people were and, now, are. As you climb up the long mile to the castle gates and work your way past each successive barrier, you eventually ascend to an inner courtyard. One entire side of the courtyard consists of an imposing granite wall interrupted by a massive arch with a message in carved block letters that reads, "To the glory of God, and in memory of Scots who fell." It is the war memorial of a nation. As you walk through that towering arch, you find the names of Scottish soldiers who have fallen in one of the scores of Britain's wars of empire. There is one red book after another, perched on stone pulpits, approached in silence by those who wish to pray, point to a name, and remember.

In every Highland village, men answered the call to war, and each village has a memorial of its own that stands quietly in the center—a simple stone, raised high, with names of men long gone carved upon it. There are many, many names for World War I. Fewer names are present for World War II, and there are almost none after that. The villages had emptied themselves of young men and never would recover.

In America, citizens also raise memorials to the fallen. They cheer those who serve their nation, ask them to stand at ball games, and give them a

discount on a cell phone plan or admission to a park. They are honored, and so they should be. We are a nation at war. We understand war. My father came here and joined the U.S. Navy during the Korean War. He wanted to stand alongside you. My son is a rifleman in the U.S. Marine Corps. We know war; it is something going on "over there." But, there is another war going on. This war does not take place between insurgents and soldiers, nor Shia and Shiite. This is a war on our streets, a war for the hearts, minds, bodies, and futures of our people. Insidious, creeping, moral rot has entered our nation, streets, schools, and media. The siren call to mindless self-worship has been heard, seducing our people to lawlessness, apathy, and worse until their cry mimics that of the Roman masses that craved nothing but the lack of responsibility, effort, and discipline. Wanting food and entertainment, they cried, "Bread and the games!" So, Rome sent more and more into the Colosseum and passed out more and more money from government coffers, hoping that the people would become peaceful, productive citizens in return. It did not work then. It is not working now.

In this war for our souls, a new kind of warrior emerges that often receives far less respect and public recognition than those in the armed forces. They are not showered with glory, though they deserve that honor just as much as their peers in the military. They live among us, not on a base. They frequently travel alone, not with a rifle squad. They

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live in the middle of those who support them and those who have made themselves millionaires by singing songs encouraging violence against them.

Every morning, these citizen heroes awake and prepare themselves for the task at hand. They kiss their spouse and children goodbye, reminding the children to listen to their mother or father, do their homework, and, in other words, be good. They strap on a gun and a badge, and, if the department's budget is sufficient, they pull on body armor under their uniform shirt, a silent acknowledgement of the dangerous task before them. They climb into a car that has just been vacated by another of their ilk—a brother or sister. They now are tasked with keeping the peace and bringing order to the streets. They have an awesome responsibility on their shoulders, more responsibility than authority. They must use persuasion, wise words, polite speech, and guidance. They are citizens, friends, and neighbors. They are one of us.

*Dr. Mead, senior pastor of the Rochester Church of Christ in Rochester Hills, Michigan, delivered this speech on May 15, 2008, during National Police Memorial Week to honor officers in Washtenaw County who have died in the line of duty.*



Those whom they approach have no such rules governing them. They have no chain of command to whom they must report their words, decisions, or actions. Into this lopsided contest comes the law enforcement officer—a symbol of peace, strength, and discipline in a world that gives lip service to such things but bears no burden to live out what they say they believe.

These everyday heroes risk death by painting themselves as targets every time they don the uniform, drawing the wrath of the extremists, the wild, the belligerent, the angry, the paranoid, the evil, and even of some in our media or popular culture. They take the abuse and shake it off, knowing that they will return again tomorrow to these same streets.

Except, some do not return. Some cannot. While engaged in actions to make our streets safe and our neighborhoods peaceful, they were run down or gunned down. They—the best of us—were taken from us. Perhaps, their murderer was drunk, on drugs, mentally ill, or confused. While such things matter to newspapers and television, they do not matter to the wives, husbands, sons, and daughters left behind. We comfort their families by telling them the truth: the one who was taken was the greatest among us. For we know that those whose names are written here have elevated their lives by giving them away. By losing *their* lives in service to us, they have given us *our* lives. Because they got between evil and us and paid the ultimate price, we are here in the sunshine of a spring day.

We are here today because of dead men. Dead men and women fought for our rights and freedom, crafted our laws, and drafted our Constitution. Because men are dying in fields far away, we can shop, eat, and play. And, because men and women are in patrol cars, I can be assured that our roads are safe and people will obey the traffic lights, drive on the right side of the road, and keep their speed to a reasonable standard. I can travel safely because others are willing to get between me and those

who would break our laws and endanger even my simple commute. Others of their tribe make sure I am not burglarized, robbed, or defrauded. They toil endlessly to find those who would take advantage of their fellow citizens. They hunt down those who sexually abuse our children and remove those evil persons from our communities. They stand between our children and those who would addict them for their own monetary pleasure. While they do this, they hear complaints. They rarely get discounts at amusement parks. If they accept a free cup of coffee, someone always lurks nearby, ready to pounce with accusations and slander.

But, they do it anyway. Why? As my son grew up, I often told him that in my experience, only three entities would die for a stranger, even a stranger who hates them. Dying for a friend is

something many of us would do. But, to put your life in jeopardy for someone who shrieks abuse at you and waves a weapon at you, who would do that? Jesus Christ, those serving in the U.S. Armed Forces, and the men and women of law enforcement. Those who wear the badge are due our highest accolades, prayers, support, and thanks. Jesus said, "Greater love has no man than this—than to lay his life down for a friend." The names on this memorial bear witness to the fact that such love has not perished from the earth. The skirl of the bagpipes and the rows of men in uniform stand in stark contrast to a world pathologically self-centered. Today, we honor those who were the best of us. We come to honor those to whom honor is due and the memory of those who have fallen. ♦

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