

Thank you Mr. President.

Good Evening Tomahawks!! What a fantastic day and evening!

It is with respect and a high degree of humility that I thank the Korean War Branch of the 23rd Infantry Regiment for giving me this distinct honor to speak to you on this special day. You Honor Me with your presence. And let me say to you here and now, Thank You For Your Service and Welcome Home.

Has anybody seen the movie about King George the VI titled The King's Speech? Well, aside from the stuttering, I have nothing in common with King George VI. So, please, do not be alarmed by my stuttering. I have been doing this for a very long long time and trust me when I say that I am an expert. I am in no danger here.

My name is Chad Stowers and I am a 3-tour Veteran of the Iraq War. I retired from the U.S. Army on 1 May of 2009 after 24 years of service. Well, wasn't 24 years, was actually 23 years, 9 months and 7 days but I was not really counting. I am currently the Post Commander of Whitlock-Sonnenberg VFW Post #1215 here in Rochester.

What do you think of this Veterans Memorial? Impressive to say the very least no? I would like to tell you if you have not seen this Memorial at night, do not depart Rochester without doing so. Is a stunning and very moving sight.

Less than 1% of Americans serve in the Armed Forces. Yet, 100% of this country should be thankful for their dedication and sacrifices to this great Nation. For 100% of this great country of ours is free because of that 1%. You, Tomahawks, are in elite company. You are that 1%. And I can think of almost 367 million other folks that would agree with me. For that is the combined populations of the Republic of South Korea and the United States of America.

There is a quote on the Korean War panel on this Memorial: "They fought for freedom of a land most had never heard of; for a people they did not know. To those who fought in it, Korea will never be the forgotten war."

Over 63 years ago, on 25 June 1950, events happened on the Korean Peninsula that forever changed your lives and the lives of your families and loved ones. And now here you are, decades later, continuing those bonds that were forged of war so long ago.

Today is special. Special because today, you honor the men and women of our society, the 23rd Infantry Regiment members, both deceased and living, that have allowed us to live in freedom with all the liberties guaranteed to us in our Constitution. Today you say to your battle buddies, to your families, remember that special bond that Veterans have with each other whom have fought together. For the hardship and sacrifices of so long ago, I say to you, "Thank You" for preserving our great American way of life that we have known for over 237 years.

You see the news programs, read the newspapers. So you know that billions of people on this planet live under oppressive, violent, corrupt regimes or governments ranging from communism to military or hereditary dictatorships.

Not in South Korea and not in this country, Thank you Tomahawks.

There are many millions of people on this earth without the liberties that allow them to vote, exercise free speech or the right to petition or the right to assemble.

Not in South Korea and not in this country, Thank you Tomahawks.

In certain countries there are women and girls that have absolutely no freedom, they are treated like property and classified as being of lower value than animals.

Not in South Korea and not in this country, Thank you Tomahawks

In this country, we have two commodities that have no physical form but have value that cannot be calculated. These commodities are freedom and liberty. And they must never be taken for granted. For this country has been free for so long, we do not know what not being free is like. And, it is easy to take liberty for granted, when you have never had it taken from you.

And thanks to our current Armed Forces, we never will!

Look at this great flag of our great nation which you saw carried so proudly and guarded so carefully by our VFW Honor Guard. You are assembled here to honor those brave men and women who have fought under that sacred symbol of our land and who went forth as the living strength of our flag. There is no yellow in the Red, White and Blue is there?

Throughout history, when diplomacy and reason failed, our Veterans answered the call to defend our Constitution and protect the freedoms and liberties of our nation's citizens; our families; you. You answered that call for your country. You answered that call as part of the storied 23rd Infantry Regiment whose lineage of over 150 years, 54 campaigns and 10 wars tracing itself from the Civil War to the Korean War, and to the mountains of Afghanistan today.

As members of this storied Regiment you left the very soil of the United States of America to engage the enemy in their territory, on their land, from Heartbreak Ridge to Chipyeong-ni and across the Korean Peninsula, so that they would not, they could not, engage us on ours.

And because you answered the call of your country, our country, not just today, but every day, you and I must remember that these freedoms we enjoy so much, has been won and preserved on the backs, the blood, the sweat and the tears of our nation's Veterans like the 23rd Infantry Regiment and their families. The sacrifices our military men and women have made in defense of freedom and liberty are both staggering and awe-inspiring.

The adage, Freedom Is Not Free, is very true. The cost of freedom is enormous; and continues today on the deserts, in the villages, and the mountains and valleys of Afghanistan. From the Revolutionary War to the present our nation's military has suffered over 1,335,000 deaths. Over 2,477,000 wounded. Over 85,000 missing in action.

The blood of our Armed Forces has been spilled on the ground, in the water, on the streets, in the fields, and the forests of so many countries across this planet.

This blood has gone into this earth and made its way home, home to America, home to strengthen us, home to remind us what true sacrifice is. This blood that has been shed in defense of our country is now embedded in the fabric of our lives, our country, in each and every one of us. The members

of the 23rd who have shed this blood, they have strengthened us and our Nation with their noble actions and heroic deeds in defense of liberty and freedom and we cannot thank you enough.

And what has the sacrifice of the 23rd Infantry Regiment and over 1.3 million others given this nation? Our Nation? This sacrifice, has given us the gift of freedom, and the gift of choice. A choice on what we want to do with our lives. OUR LIVES. YOUR LIVES. Not the life a caste or class system would have you live, not the life a communist government would force you to live and not the life some military dictator thinks you should live. YOUR LIFE.

To wake up every morning protected by the cloak of our liberties and comforted by the warmth of our freedoms the 23rd have ensured we keep, is nothing short of a treasure.

Think about your last week and all the choices and decisions you made. No doubt life can present many challenges; and certainly is trying at times. But, is not life easier when you have the freedom to choose the path of your liking? To be able to, of your own free will, make the choices YOU want to make?

In no small part, the Tomahawks have allowed generations of the children of South Korea and the United States of America to fill in the blank when they say, "When I grow up, I want to be....."

If you have ever wondered if your sacrifices so long ago made a difference, rest assured they have. During three tours in Korea in Seoul, Pyongtek and Uichonbu I saw firsthand the remarkable results of your efforts. A vibrant and modern society exists their today thanks to you. More importantly, every citizen of that country, that free democratic country owes 60 years of their freedom and liberty to you.

In Closing, take a moment and imagine if you can; what kind of a country we would be living in and what kind of a life you, your children or grandchildren would have had, if the outcome of World War I had been different. If the Axis had defeated the Allies during World War II? If the spread of communism had not been stopped? If terrorism would be allowed to spread across this globe. Can you picture this? Can you imagine how completely different EVERYTHING about your lives would be?

Not in South Korea! Not in Our country! This forever grateful and forever free Nation thank's you Tomahawks!!

God Bless each and every one of you and God Bless and United States of America.

Thank You