

Capt
Richard Donlon
2 Congressional
Medal of Honor
Winner

Legion Distinguished
Service
Award

Commander Elton James
Dr. Rice - U of Alabama

REMARKS

VICE PRESIDENT HUBERT HUMPHREY
National Commanders Dinner
AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL CONVENTION

~~Deke's Speech~~

Mrs Glenn

Mr Blackmore

Gov Godwin

WASHINGTON, D.C.

AUGUST 30, 1966

51 Show Your Colors

This month we observe two anniversaries which ~~without~~ ^{stand} ~~doubt~~ will go down ^{as Benchmarks} as marking places in history.

Some 52 years ago this month men in Europe --
through a tragic accumulation of ambitions, miscalculations
and stupidities -- plunged into World War I and set in motion
a series of events from which we have yet to emerge.

Some 21 years ago this month nuclear weapons were
introduced into the world and World War II came to an end.

As men examine the modern era, I doubt they will find
a period which will match the years between 1914 and 1945
for sheer weight of human suffering, injustice, degradation
and sacrifice.

President's
speech

~~All of us in this room remember how,~~ after World War II,
we resolved that those years should not be repeated. For we
knew, that in the dawning nuclear age, there would no longer
be any room for error ^{no place to hide} . . . ^{must} ~~could~~ that there must not be a World
War III.

~~But~~ ^{as} We looked back and held our own mistakes to the light.
~~And~~ we found that they were, basically, the same mistake
made each time in a different way.

↳ We saw that, had we been playing a more active role
in the world, we might have helped to avert the building tragedy
in 1914. ↳ We saw that we should have joined the League of
Nations . . . that we should have given France security
guarantees on the continent of Europe . . . that we should
have maintained our armed forces.

↳ We proclaimed our desire for peace after World War I,
but we did not support the peace in active, positive ways.

When the peace was threatened by the Japanese attack in Manchuria in 1931, we did nothing. When Hitler moved into the Rhineland in 1935, we did nothing. When President Roosevelt made his famous quarantine speech in 1937, the country did not respond. When terror reigned in Europe and people disappeared in the night, we turned our faces.

In the spring of 1940 the public opinion polls showed that two-thirds of our people thought it was more important to keep out of war than to help Britain.

It was not until January, 1941 that the same polls showed we were ready to risk intervention in Europe. By then, Hitler's armies had already trampled the continent.

And we did not, in fact, finally step forward until we ourselves fell victim to brutal surprise attack. *Pearl Harbor, Dec 7, 1941* What a price we -- and millions of others -- were to pay.

As we look back we see that for
~~We looked back, at war's end, and we saw that our~~

~~mistake, in its many variations, was this: That, for a~~

a world power, there is no escape from international responsibility.

Looking back, we ~~saw~~^{see} that, if we had stood firm and responsibly a few years before, millions of lives . . . billions of dollars in resources . . . the national independence and integrity of peaceful nations ~~could~~^{might} have been preserved.

Since World War II we have, during the Administrations of Democratic and Republican Presidents alike, avoided that tragic mistake of the past.

We have accepted the responsibility of international leadership. ~~For we have known that~~^{we know that} our own peace and safety -- and of those who depend on us -- ~~have rested~~^{rests} on our ~~assumption~~^{fulfillment} of that responsibility.

Yes, our course in these past 20 years has been the course of responsibility.

(Leadership - Responsibility)

We did not seek it but we have it

We have followed - 5 -

~~It has been~~ a course directed toward the building,
day-by-day, brick-by-brick, ~~is~~ a world of peaceful nations
living together in the spirit of the United Nations Charter.

We are
building
Nation
Building

It has been a course combining firm resolve in the
face of international bullying with the capacity to do international
business in the cause of peace. Resistance to nuclear blackmail
in Cuba followed by the Test Ban Treaty, resistance to
Communist war of national liberation in Vietnam at the
same time we propose a non-proliferation agreement on nuclear
weapons and an economic development program which could include a
non-aggressive North Vietnam.

It has been a course successful both in preventing
the expansion of Communist totalitarianism and of avoiding
nuclear war ^{and} all the while working toward the time when
political self-determination, economic well-being, and social
justice might be more widely enjoyed throughout the world.

It has been a course carefully avoiding either
appeasement or nuclear risk-taking.

In these postwar years, over one billion people have
been freed from foreign rule. Over 70 new countries have
been born -- but none has turned to communism.

Inspiration
The ~~inspirators~~ of our time have not been Karl Marx
and the Communist Manifesto. ~~They have~~ *It has* been Thomas
Jefferson and our own Declaration of Independence.

Now we face one more test, in these postwar years,
of our responsibility -- in Vietnam.

and people rightly ask --
Why are we in Vietnam?

We are in Vietnam because we have learned the lessons
of the past: That aggression feeds on itself . . . that
aggression in one place today, if allowed to succeed, can
grow to aggression in many places tomorrow.

We are in Vietnam, with allies, to help the people of
South Vietnam ~~meet~~ *defeat* aggression *and communist*
subversion.

*We have
done well!!*

We are there, ~~too~~, to prevent the spread of aggression to other non-Communist nations which have been, during the postwar period, under constant internal or external Communist assault.

↳ We are in Vietnam to give ^{other} ~~these~~ nations ~~that~~ extra measure of security they need to strengthen themselves for the future -- to build societies which can withstand Communist pressure.

↳ We are in Vietnam so that all the independent nations of Asia, ~~including South Vietnam~~, may be able, together, to marshal their resources to the all-important fight against conditions of poverty, hunger, illiteracy and disease -- conditions which ^{are fertile soil} ~~provide spawning ground for~~ agitation, subversion, and finally, overt aggression from the outside.

↳ And today they are joining together to fight these conditions.

∟ The stakes are high. More than half the world's people live in Asia.

∟ If these people can live, increasingly, in an environment of safety, of economic ~~settlement~~ ^{progress}, and of social justice -- free of destructive pressure from the outside -- then we may have some hope for the prospect of a world at peace.

∟ ~~If they cannot, I think we will have little reason for such hope.~~ ^{But}

In ~~Vietnam itself~~ we are not so naive as to meet aggression with military force alone. We are, with our allies and the South Vietnamese people, waging a struggle on four fronts -- military, political, economic and diplomatic -- all interrelated, each as important as the other.

That is why, I believe, we should be as concerned with the ballot box as we are with the battlefield.

There are those who say that self-determination is an alien concept to the South Vietnamese people.

There are those who say it would be just as well to turn them over to Ho Chi Minh and save ourselves all that trouble.

I say they underestimate both the South Vietnamese people and the basic strength, where they have the chance to grow, of democratic institutions.

The fact is this: Just 12 days from now, the people of South Vietnam will vote in cities and villages from one end of the country to the other. Many of them will vote in places where security is assured only between sunrise and sunset.

This will not be a heads-they-win, tails-you-lose Communist election. As of today, there are more than 540 candidates for the 108 elective seats.

There will not be a single uncontested seat in the whole country.

Everyone 18 years of age and older is eligible to vote.

And all significant non-Communist groups are actively participating -- even the demonstrating Buddhist groups you've read about. Although in theory they still claim to be boycotting the election, in practice they are openly supporting candidates in areas where they have strength.

Meticulous provisions have been made for assuring the secrecy of the ballot and the honesty of the count. Almost 400 American and foreign correspondents will observe and report all that goes on.

Despite these facts, there are those who persist in saying that there cannot be a free election in a country which, they maintain, has had no experience in democracy. They come close, in fact, to saying that democracy can work for people

with names like Smith and Jones, but that people with more exotic names simply aren't up to it.

L I think the best answer to these skeptics is the fact -- too often ignored -- that Vietnam did have a free and vigorously contested election, with an honest count of the vote, as recently as last year.

L On May 30th of last year almost 3-1/2 million South Vietnamese in 44 provinces and 5 cities -- some 72 per cent of the country's registered voters -- went to the polls to elect 471 provincial and city councillors.

L It was not easy to vote. Because of the need for security, voting booths were set up only in Saigon and the provincial and district capitals. Yet almost three-quarters of those registered, voted. And the turnout would have been bigger if the polls had not closed ^{as early} at 4 p.m. instead of in the evening.

∠ The Communists missed the bus in last year's election. They didn't take it seriously, didn't make a determined enough effort to disrupt it. But they aren't about to make that mistake again.

∠ They are determined to "smash" and "crush" the elections -- I quote the words they have been using in their propaganda.

∠ Every day, every hour that passes from now until election day, there will be Communist intimidation and terror.

∠ The signal was first given by a Hanoi radio broadcast on June 16 and the Viet Cong immediately -- and obediently -- went into action.

∠ First, they warned all candidates to withdraw. They warned all officials concerned with preparations for the elections to cease their activities. Otherwise, the Communists said, they would be acting "at the risk of their lives" and would be "punished without mercy."

Second, the Communists warned government officials
"not to coerce the masses to vote."

∠ No one, of course, is "coercing" the people to vote. As in every free election, a good many people won't. Some have not registered -- no one coerced them to -- and therefore won't be qualified to vote. ∠ Some who have registered will not actually turn up at the polls -- and no one will coerce them to.

∠ In case anyone might miss the point, Viet Cong teams have been busy all over the country spelling it out.

∠ They have been carrying out forcible collections of identity cards and voting cards, in an effort to intimidate people and prevent them from voting.

∠ They have warned villagers that it will be highly dangerous to go anywhere near the polling places on election day. The polls, they have told them, will be the target of rifle fire, and hand grenades. at the moment

L In some cases, they have bluntly threatened villagers with death if they dare to vote.

L Whether the Viet Cong will carry out these threats remains to be seen. But we have reason to believe that they

W will. *(As of last weekend more than 20 village leaders and political activists had already been assassinated as part of the Viet Cong pre-election terror.*

L But what will count will not be what the Communists *threaten* *or* do, but how the people will stand up under their threats. *And*

L So far, not a single candidate has been intimidated into withdrawing.

L So far, the election *Plans* officials are proceeding.

The real test will come on election day.

and L I predict that millions of Vietnamese will show their courage and cast their votes on September 11. And I predict that the silent slide of ballots into ballot boxes may in the long run sound out more loudly than the din of battle.

For, once their constituent assembly is formed, the South Vietnamese people -- after centuries of mandarin rule, after years of colonialism and of constant war -- will finally be on their way toward true self-government. *Nation building*

And, as that happens, those who wage aggression will have one more reason to pause and take stock. For, throughout the world, totalitarianism has withered wherever it has met the fresh air of free institutions.

In the meantime, our adversaries have rejected all initiatives for peace -- whatever the source of those initiatives -- as we have equally welcomed them. We welcome the recent initiative by Asian nations for an all-Asian peace conference.

We welcome any proposal, under any auspices, to bring the conflict to the conference table.

And we repeat once more to those who wage aggression: We do not seek to destroy you . . . we do not seek your territory . . . we do not seek the establishment of permanent American bases. *But we will keep our powder dry yet. We stand*

ready to join you in the works of peace and peaceful development

. . . we only ask that you cease your aggression and leave your neighbors in peace.

~~For my part,~~ I see no immediate end to our struggle

in Vietnam. We must be prepared for many hard days ahead.

But, friends you must know we will persevere

Yet, as we persevere in the face of aggression, I believe

we must also persevere in seeking every possible way of bringing

~~Non-Communist~~
the Communist nations of Asia to see that their own self-

interests are best served by turning to the needs of ordinary

people . . . and to war against man's common enemies of

hunger, ignorance and disease.

*Just as we are brave
So we must be
Bold in Peace*

There may be many months ahead before peace may

come to Asia.

~~First of all~~ those in Asia who preach the concepts of

forceful expansion and of "wars of national liberation" must

come to know that those concepts will not succeed.

- ✓ The Communist world is divided,
torren, and frayed.
- ✓ The free world, with all its troubles
is a bastion of strength
in comparison.

But beyond that, the long-term peace and stability of Asia will only be achieved by Asian nations themselves. If it is an Asian-achieved peace, it can be an Asian-sustained peace.

↳ If it is a peace that is written and dictated, and enforced, in distant foreign capitals, it will be an artificial peace. ↳ The peace we seek ~~is the peace that may be established among nations which recognize that it is a peace~~ ^{must be one} that represents the legitimate hopes and aspirations of the people of that part of the world.

Our course is to seek, and encourage, such a peace.

↳ This, I believe, is the course which responsibility places upon us -- as long as that course may take.

← ↳ Today, 21 years into the nuclear age, we are still alive. If we are to remain alive -- and if we are not to repeat the

tragic errors of the past -- I believe we have no choice but to hold our course and see it through in Vietnam -- and to

pursume the course of international leadership & responsibility.

REMARKS

VICE PRESIDENT HUBERT HUMPHREY

AMERICAN LEGION NATIONAL CONVENTION

NATIONAL COMMANDER'S BANQUET

WASHINGTON, D.C.

AUGUST 30, 1966

Thank you Commander James, Governor Godwin, Mrs. Glenn, Mr. Blackmore, Commanders of the Departments of The American Legion, our most distinguished guest of the evening Captain Richard Donlon, who you so rightly and appropriately have honored tonight by your applause those 12 Congressional Medal of Honor winners that are with us on this evening's occasion which makes this banquet one of the most distinguished in the history of this capital, the wonderful young people that are here tonight from Boy's Nation, Girl's Nation and may I say to The American Legion if you've never done anything else in all of your life than to support the efforts of these young people in this program, you would've earned a place in the history of the United States for service beyond the call of duty.

Washington, D.C. is very privileged to have these fine young Americans come here every year representing their respective states, learning about government and I might add teaching us a little bit about government too. I have the privilege of having this very lovely young lady that is the vice-president of the Girl's Nation come to see me from down Virginia way Governor and ever since then I felt just a little better about being vice-president, and I want you to know if anybody's going to take my job, I think you ought to have it.

I hope you know that you've had quite a vote of confidence. My associates and this great government of ours, particularly the members of Congress that have distinguished themselves so brilliantly in the service of their country and my good friend Dr. Rose, who I understand rectified this convention by his powerful message. What a joy it is to share this platform with all of you tonight, but I find myself at the end of a long day and at the end of a very long convention for you and as usual, in my position, I come after the President. You really have the message of the day, but since the constitutional system provides that there shall be both a president and a vice-president, it's one of the ways that you've began to appreciate the citizenship of this country when you get us both.

I was not privileged to hear President Johnson's address today, but I read it, and I am sure that you will agree with me that it was more than a speech, it was more than an address, it was a state paper. His reflections upon patriotism and the meaning of true patriotism, his observations on the burdens of this nation and yet its privileges and responsibilities and then his revealing treatment of the causes of tension and violence in war and the determined effort of this republic of ours to pursue the cause of peace with dignity and with honor and strength. I believe that that message will stand the test of time as one of the great messages ever to be delivered to this great organization of The American Legion.

Last year at our Congressional Dinner, we had a little word to

about the pin I hope most of you are wearing tonight of our flag. Show your colors. And it was a very appropriate time that that program or that effort to call the American people to an extra dedication should be undertaken. But I want you to know that this pin that many of you are wearing and I have on tonight, is not something just for a meeting, nor is it something just to display on occasion like this. A little old fashioned patriotism is still in order. I always feel that way. The display of the American flag adds to the beauty of this nation and if you really want to beautify America, you can do it in more ways than just with flowers. You can do it with life, you can do it with your work, you can do it with your words and you can do it too, by demonstrating the quality of citizenship which comes with the recognition of what this republic means in its flag.

This flag that many of you are wearing tonight is not merely our flag. To us it represents the history of the nation. To us it represents victory on battlefields. It represents constitutional government. It represents a revolution won, it represents a nation saved, but to hundreds of millions of people throughout the world, it represents hope, it represents life, it represents their only chance and that's why I think that Americans today have an extra obligation that they be just a little more stand up in their patriotism than ever before. Not only for ourselves.

The month of August has deep meaning to those of you in this great organization and to every free man. Because truly we observe

at least two anniversaries of historical significance. Benchmarks in the history of mankind. Some 52 years ago, the guns of August in World War I result in tragic accumulation of ambitions, miscalculations and stupidities, plunged the world in to what was known as World War I, the most horrible and terrible of all wars up to that time and truly it set in motion events from which none of us have yet quite emerged. And 21 years ago this month, nuclear weapons changed the whole face of war. Nuclear weapons were into the world and World War II came to an end. I believe that as men examine this modern era, I doubt that they will find a period which will match the years between 1914 and 1945 for the sheer weight of human suffering, of injustice, of tragedy and of sacrifice.

After World War II, not only America but many peoples resolved that those years should never be repeated. The same mistake should not be made again. For we knew that in the dawning of the nuclear era, there would no longer be any room for error or mistakes. There would be no place to hide and above all that there must not be World War III.

This has been the consuming demand upon the leaders of humanity ever since. That this powerful weapon or should I say the power that is known as the atom should not be used for man's destruction rather for his salvation.

Now, as we look back we see that for a world power and we are a world power, some people would like us not to be but we are, there is no escape from international responsibility. And if there is one

word that needs to be brought home to the American people day in and day out it is this word responsibility. No longer do we have the luxury of irresponsibility, because leadership is not a privilege...it is a heavy burden and an awesome duty. It is no cloak of comfort ... it is in fact the mantel or the robe of responsibility. Therefore, every word, every decision, every action of this nation must be measured not only in terms of what it does here at home but what it means to others in far away places.

Looking back, I suppose we can say that if we'd stood firm and responsibly a few years before World War II.... millions of lives and billions of dollars in resources, a national independence and integrity of peaceful nations might have been preserved.... but we didn't. There is no use in recounting the mistakes of history but we ought to learn from them. And I think, in a sense, we have. Because since World War II. presidents, republican and democratic alike, avoided the tragic mistake of the past. The mistake of ignoring the rest of the world as if we have no relationship to it and above all the mistake of leaving America defenseless, weak, feeling that in weakness somehow or another we would attract respect. You and I know better. Peace does come for the wishing of it. Nor does it come through a display of weakness. It comes through hard decisions, concerted effort and strength.

Now, we've accepted the responsibility of international leadership. We didn't seek it, we didn't connive it or plan it, but it

came, and we know that our own peace and our own safety and those who depend on us and there are hundreds of millions that do depend on us, rests upon our capacity to fulfill that responsibility.

Our course in these past 20 years, I believe, has been a course of responsibility. I am not one that believes America has arrived at this pinnacle of its wealth, its power, and its greatness through a series of mistakes. I believe that this nation in the main has been blessed, not only with the great citizenry, not only with a dedicated people, not only with a great economic system based upon private initiative, not only with great educational establishments but with good leadership in public and private life.

And while at time it may make us feel a little better to be the critic so aimed that we could appoint a better way or a better course. I think history will judge America rather well in these post-war years. Because we've followed a course directed towards building day by day, brick by brick a world of peaceful nations, hopefully living together in the spirit of the United Nations Charter.

We are builders, not destroyers. We are educators and teachers and healers, not by desire warriors. And we know that the pursuit of peace and a peaceful order in this world requires every bit as much courage and determination as the pursuit of victory on a battlefield.

Our course has been one that combined firm resolve in the face of international bullying with the capacity at the same time to do international business in the cause of peace; resistance to nuclear

blackmail only a few years ago in Cuba and yet within a few months a nuclear Test Ban Treaty to curb the power of that mighty weapon. Resistance to Communist aggression now in Vietnam, at the same time that we propose a non-proliferation nuclear treaty or agreement on nuclear weapons and an economic development program which would include even non-aggressive or a non-aggressive North Vietnam.

I submit to the critics of this nation that no nation has been willing to be so generous as it faced adversity as the United States of America in these post-war years.

And the course that we followed has been rather successful. Successful both in preventing the expansion of Communist totalitarianism and avoiding nuclear war and all the while working towards the time when political self-determination, economic well-being, and social justice might be more widely enjoyed throughout the world. And knowing full well that there are no instant cures to mankind's problems. That there is no instant peace that can come merely for the asking of it. Recognizing that like the building of a mighty and beautiful cathedral, it requires the plan of a master architect and the continuing efforts of generations... building, building, building. It's been a course that we follow that has avoided either appeasement or nuclear risk-taking. It has been a course of statesmanship and responsibility. And in these post-war years, over one billion people have been freed from foreign rule, and over 70 new nations or countries have been born --- and my fellow Americans, not one

of the 70 has turned to Communism as their way of life.

The inspiration of our time has not been Karl Marx and the Communist Manifesto. It has been Thomas Jefferson, Governer, and the Declaration of Independence.

But now we face one more test, in these difficult and long post-war years --- one more test of our responsibility and I suppose other tests are yet to come, but this time in a far away place in a strange land called Vietnam. And the American people have a right to ask questions....why are we there?

Why is it important? Why should we risk so much? Why should we have to pay so dearly?

Well, let's try to answer those questions. Why are we then? Not merely because of treaty, even that would be asked. Not merely because there are 15 million South Vietnamese who would like to be free....even that would be asked, and I must say that I can find no moral justification for preventing 15 million people who want to be free, to become the slaves of the Communist System. I don't call that liberalism, morality or decency, I would call it a sellout.

We're in Vietnam because we've learned some lessons the hard way. Because we've the lessons of the past....that aggression unchecked is aggression unleashed. That aggression feeds on itself. That aggression in one place today, if allowed to succeed has a tendency to grow and to become aggression in many places tomorrow.

If we have'nt learned that from the past 25 to 30 years then

we've learned nothing.

We are in Vietnam not alone, but with brave allies, to help the people of South Vietnam defeat aggression and Communist subversion.

We are there to prevent the spread of aggression to other non-Communist nations which have been, during this post-war period, under constant internal and external Communist assault.

We are in Vietnam to give other nations that extra measure of security that they need to strengthen themselves for their future--to build societies which can alternately withstand Communist pressure.

We are in Vietnam so that all independent nations of Asia may be able together to marshal their resources to the all-important fight against the conditions that your President spoke to you about...of poverty, of hunger, illiteracy and disease--conditions which are fertile soil for agitation, subversion, and finally, overt aggression from the outside.

And I am happy to say that today these nations are joining together in fighting these conditions.

The stakes are high. We are in Vietnam because more than half of the people of this world live in Asia and the peace that these young people hope to enjoy will be won or lost by what happens in that area of the world where half of God's children live.

If these people in Asia can live increasingly in an environment of safety, of economic progress and the hope of social justice, free of that destructive pressure from the outside then we may some hope for the prospect of a world at peace. But, if

Asia is to be consumed by international bullying and aggression and attack, half of a nation, half of the world's population at the mercy of the aggressor.

There is no peace...neither for them or for us.

But we're not so naive as to believe that aggression and the conditions that provoke it can be met with military force alone even though military force is essential. We are with our allies and the South Vietnamese people, waging a struggle on four front--military, political, economic and diplomatic -- everyone and all interrelated, they all must move forward in a solid phalanx, each as important as the other.

There is no military victory to be achieved in Vietnam alone. Needless to say, there can be no political victory without military success. And there can be no economic progress without full political and military success.

And ultimately there must be peace which can come only through diplomatic success. Interdependent, interrelated, and the American people are growing to understand this. This is why, I believe, that we should be as concerned with an event that is about to take place in Vietnam in the next few weeks--the ballot box and we are with the battlefield.

Now there are those who say that self-determination is an alien concept to the South Vietnamese people.

There are those who say, too, that it would be just as well to turn them over to Ho Chi Minh and save ourselves all that trouble.

There are few in numbers that say that, but some do. I say to these people they underestimate both the South Vietnamese people and the basic strength, where they have a chance to grow of democratic institutions.

The fact is this: Just 12 days from now, from tonight, the people of South Vietnam will vote in cities and villages from one end of that country to the other. And many of them will vote in places where security can only be assured in part, from sunrise to sunset.

This will not be one of these heads-they-win and tails-you-lose Communist elections. As of today, there are more than 540 active candidates for 108 elective seats.

Now we American politicians think it's bad enough having one fellow contesting for your seat, much less five. There will not be a single uncontested seat in the entire country. And for those who are the critics of South Vietnam, let me ask them to ask this question--when was the last free election held in Vietnam?

Everyone 18 years of age or over is eligible to vote.... 18 years of age and over. And all significant non-Communist groups are actively participating -- even the demonstrating Buddhist groups you've read about. Although in theory they still claim to be boycotting the election. The truth is that they are openly supporting candidates in the areas where they think they can win... and where they have strength.

Meticulous provisions have been made for assuring the secrecy of the ballot and the honesty of the count. Almost 400 American

and foreign correspondents will roam the country and observe and report all that goes on....and I know of no better way to ascertain whether or not it's a reasonably honest election.

Some of our reporters have had some experience at home.

Now despite these facts, despite what I've told you, there are those who persist in saying there simply cannot be a free election in Vietnam, in a country which they maintain has had no with democracy. Sometimes I have a feeling that they're saying that democracy can work for people with names like Smith and Jones, but people with more exotic names simply aren't up to it. This, I don't agree with. I think the best answer to these skeptics is this fact, too often ignored-- that Vietnam did have a free and vigously contested election, with an honest count of the vote, as recently as last year....gone almost unnoticed, may I say, in the American public scene.

On May 30th of last year, a year ago this last May, almost $3\frac{1}{2}$ million South Vietnamese in 44 provinces and 5 cities -- some 72% of the eligible country's registered voters -- went to the polls to elect 417 provincial and city councillors.

That election was relatively peaceful, because then the Viet Cong was not at all sure that the Vietnamese would vote. And it wasn't easy to vote. Because of the need for security, voting booths were set up only in Saigon and the provincial and district capitals. People had to walk many miles. Yet almost three-quarters of all the registered voters --those 18 years of age and over --

registered voters, passed their vote in that free election.

My fellow Americans, we have a tough time getting 55 per cent of the American eligible voters to cast their vote in the Presidential election and in congressional off-year elections, we're lucky if we get 40 per cent. In a country where we beg people to vote, where we use every known technique to gain the people's confidence to get them to vote and where you're surely not under threat if you walk to that ballot box.

Now the Communist missed the bus in last years' election. As I said, they didn't take it seriously and they didn't make a determined effort to disrupt it, but they're not about ready to make that mistake again.

Tonight I can tell you, as you've been told in your press, but the details are even more sordid than had been reported. The Communist are determined to smash and crush these elections. I quote the very words that they've been using in their propaganda. "Smash and crush". Everyday, every hour that passes from now until election date, there will Communist intimidation and terror. The signal was first given by a radio Hanoi on June 16 and the Viet Cong immediately and obediently went into action.

First, the Viet Cong -- the Communists -- warned all candidates to withdraw. They warned all officials concerned with the preparations for the elections to cease their activities. Otherwise the Communists said, they would be acting at the risk of their lives and would be punished without mercy. Second, the Communists warned government officials "not to coerce the masses

to vote". In other words, don't encourage the election. No one of course is coercing the people to vote. As in every free election, a good many people just won't vote. Some haven't registered. No one coerced them to, and therefore, they won't be qualified to vote. But some who have registered will actually turn up at the polls and no one will coerce them to do so. In case anyone misses the point -- the Viet Cong teams -- teams -- trained teams of terrorists have been busy all over the country spelling out their message of intimidation.

They have been carrying out forcible collections of voter registration identity cards in an effort to intimidate people and to prevent them from voting.

They have warned the simple villagers that it will be a highly dangerous exercise to go anywhere as near the polling places on election day. And radio Hanoi beams constantly into the villages and the hamlets, the threats of death itself. The polls -- they have been told -- will be the prime target on election day for mortar shells, rifle fire and hand gernades.

They have bluntly threatened villagers with death if they vote.

My fellow Americans, I wonder what would be the result in this country if the same program of coersion, intimidation and terror were spread throughout this land. As of last week, more than 20 village leaders and political activists had already been assassinated as a part of the Viet Cong pre-election terror. Just to show that they mean it. But what will count will not be what the

Communists threaten or do. What will really count for you and for me and the whole world will be how the people stand up under these threats.

So far the reports are good. Not a single candidate has been intimidated to withdrawing, and not a single public official responsible for the elections, has resigned.

So far, the election plans are proceeding and a real test will come 12 days from tonight.

I predict that millions of Vietnamese will show their courage and their faith in freedom and they'll cast their votes on September 11. And I predict that the silent slide of ballots into ballot boxes may in the long run sound out more loudly than the din of battle. And once that their constituent assembly is formed, to right their consitution which is the base of free government, the South Vietnamese people after centuries of mandarin rule, after years of colonialism and 26 years of constant war -- will finally be on their way towards true self-government and nation building.

My fellow Americans, this is good news. Nations are not built in a day and freedom is not free as you well know. And national independence and self-determination doesn't come by the textbook or the proclamation. It comes from sacrifice and from work. And as all of this happens, those who wage aggression will have one more reason to pause and stock for throughout the world totalitarianism has withered wherever it has met the free air or the fresh air of free institutions.

There is good news. Plenty of good news ... if we but look for it. In the meantime, our adversaries have rejected every initiative for peace. And to those who criticize a government and a nation because we are unable to gain peace...may I say from this platform what I've said from a hundred others -- the roadblock to peace is not in Washington, it's not in your Capitol or in the Whitehouse. The roadblock to peace is in Hanoi and Peking and let every American and people throughout the world know where the blame rests.

We welcome every initiative ... wherever it may come from. We welcome the recent peace initiative by the Asian nations themselves for an all-Asian peace conference. We welcome any proposal under any legitimate auspices, to bring this conflict to the conference table.

And we repeat once more to those who wage aggression: We do not seek to destroy you... we do not seek your territory...we do not seek the establishment of permanent American bases...but we shall keep our powder dry ... we stand ready to join you or anyone else in the works of peace and peaceful development ... we say to friend and foe alike: We only ask that you cease your aggression and leave your neighbors in peace.

Now I regret to say tonight that I see no immediate end to our struggle in Vietnam. I think there are hard days ahead and we must be prepared to face those hard days. One thing above all that can prolong this struggle is indecision here at home and a

misinterpretation of honest dissent in the American community. The American people must have it manifestly clear to the entire world that while we love peace...and while we are dedicated to the cause of peace, that we have wills...that we have the power of perseverance...that we will see it through. Then friend and foe alike, doubters and believers must know that we will and can stay and that no power on the face of this earth can dislodge us ...until peace comes.

And just as we persevere in the face of aggression, and there are men here tonight who have suffered from that aggression, I believe that we must also persevere in seeking every possible way of bringing Communist and non-Communist nations in Asia and elsewhere to see that their own self-interests are best served by turning the needs to the needs of ordinary people...and to war against man's common enemies of hunger and ignorance and disease.

This nation is brave in war...it must be bold in statesmanship. There may be many monthsmany dreary and hard months ahead...before peace may come to Vietnam and, indeed, to Asia. But those who preach the concepts of forceful expansion and "wars of national liberation" must come to know that those concepts cannot and will not succeed.

But, beyond that the long-term peace and stability of Asia, I believe, will be achieved by Asian nations themselves with our help. If it is an Asian achieved peace, it can be an Asian sustained peace. But, if it is a peace that is written and dictated, and enforced, in distant foreign capitals, it could well be an

artificial peace. The peace, therefore, that we seek must be one that represents the legitimate hopes and aspirations of the people of that part of the world.

Our course, therefore, is to seek and to encourage those initiatives and to seek that road to peace.

This, I believe is the course which responsibility places upon us....however long that course may take.

My fellow Americans, we have our troubles ...they are many. We are faced with powerful economic forces at home of inflation. We have heavy burdens around the world. Much is expected of us... sometimes almost too much. A nation that has given generously of its men and of its substance.....165,000 casualties since World War II...120 billions dollars in gifts and grants to those in other parts of the world.

Yes, our burdens are many and our problems are great, but my fellow Americans...the Communist world that would have people believe that it is strong...that Communist world is torn and divided tonight and it is frayed and it's in disaray. It is not on the march unless we let it march.

The free world, your world and mine with all of its problems, is a bastion of strength in comparison. And the time is at hand for free men to let all men know that in a free society, the well springs of strength flow everlastingly.

So today 21 years into the nuclear age, we are not only still alive, we're moving ahead. And if we are to remain alive

and move ahead..and if we're not to repeat the tragic errors of the past, then we must steer a steady course. We must make up our minds that difficult days cannot, in any way, detour us from the mission that is ours.

I believe that this nation has no choice but to hold to the course and see it through ...see through this painful, this unbelievably painful experience of Southeast Asia and Vietnam. And then to pursue above all the course of international leadership and responsibility. And I want to, as your Vice-President, thank The American Legion...not only for its call to great citizenship to every American..not only for its rallying cry to patriotism and patriotic duty..but I wish to commend you, Commander James, and all of your officers and all of the department commanders, for your realization and your recognition that America, in the words of Lincoln is yet the last best hope on earth and that our duty is to care for it and protect it.

Thank you



Minnesota Historical Society

Copyright in this digital version belongs to the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, link to, or email content, however, for individual use.

To request permission for commercial or educational use, please contact the Minnesota Historical Society.



www.mnhs.org