

INDEPENDENCE DAY 2011 ADDRESS
FORT SAM HOUSTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

San Antonio, TX

By

Judge Edward F. Butler, Sr.

We are here today to celebrate the 235th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence by our founding fathers in Philadelphia. On July 4th each year, we take time to pause and reflect upon the brave founding fathers of our young nation who wagered their fame and fortune upon our new country. Many of them lost their lives to give us freedom.

We would not be here today celebrating our freedom were it not for France and Spain, both of which provided the American colonists with money, arms, ammunition and supplies. The French also gave us Lafayette and Rochambeau, who led French and American troops in the east coast areas. Spain gave us General Bernardo de Galvez, for whom Galveston, TX is named. Galvez quashed the British second front; removed the British from the Mississippi River; kept the supply lines open up the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers; and destroyed the British along the Gulf coast.

Last year I had the honor of delivering the principal address at the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, DC, to honor our third President. It was also my privilege to bring greetings to the 6,000 members of the American Legion at their annual convention.

As we look out over this peaceful cemetery, we see the neat graves of thousands of American service men and women. Not all of them died in combat, but all of them served our nation's defense. So, today, we pay homage to the brave men and women whose remains are buried here.

In celebrating our independence, we must also take a minute to thank all of those still living who have served our country, whether on active duty, or as reservists or as members of the National Guard. **Would those of you here today who have served our country in the military please raise your hand and be recognized.**

During our year as President General and First Lady of the National Society Sons of the American Revolution, my wife and I were privileged to meet with several hundred of our Wounded Warriors from Tripler Army Hospital in Honolulu, to Ft. Campbell and Fort Knox, KY, to those fresh off the battlefields

in Iraq and Afghanistan at the US Army Hospital at Landstuhl, Germany. We also visited hundreds of them in V.A. Hospitals around the country. Robin and I each received a blessing.

We honored our veterans through Commemorations at the *USS Arizona*, *USS Oklahoma*, and Punch Bowl Military Cemetery in Hawaii; the Veterans Park in Albuquerque; the Medal of Honor Park in California; and with a wreath laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington, VA. We also placed wreaths honoring our patriot ancestors in Tennessee, Kentucky, North and South Carolina, Virginia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, Ohio, Indiana, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and California. We conducted similar ceremonies in France and Spain.

Today, I am going to ask two favors of everybody here.

1) For the next year, when you run into a person in a military uniform at the mall, grocery store or at the airport, please extend your hand with a smile on your face and thank that person for his or her service to our country and for their sacrifice. And sacrifice they do. Suicide rates among returning combat veterans is at an all time high. Some of our courageous men and women are serving four and five combat tours. It is hard for us to recognize the toll this takes on our service members.

Long family separations often result in the breakup of marriages. Many come home with heartbreaking injuries that we can see with our eyes. Often, there are just as severe mental or emotional problems that are not so readily seen. Dealing with those physical and emotional scars also result in marital problems. So, please go out of your way to say “thanks.”

2) Secondly, I ask that each of you remember our military, our veterans and their families in your prayers every night.

There are many organizations that provide recognition for our servicemen and women such as The American Legion, VFW, and other veteran’s organizations. Lineage groups such as the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution focus on the bravery and exploits of our founding fathers and our ancestors who won our independence for us. Heritage organizations that extol the virtues of specific groups include the Granaderos y Damas de Galvez, who focus on our Hispanic allies, and The Texas Connection with the American Revolution, who remind us that Texans, played a vital role in the American Revolution. All these groups are to be commended for keeping our history alive.

Today, I want to focus on another group of citizens who also deserve to be recognized for the vital role they play in patriotism. I am talking about the historians, biographers and genealogists who spend months in dimly lit archives, sorting through dust covered manuscripts; and who spend long hours in libraries, researching our history by searching exhaustingly through rolls of microfilm, and ferreting out important details about our founding fathers in old military records. These men and women dig up interesting facts and put them into context. They write articles in historical, biographical, genealogical, and lineage society magazines, and some write history books, genealogies, and biographies.

Some of the famous historian's names are on the tips of our tongues: James Michener, William Manchester, and Herman Wouk made World War II come alive for us. Benjamin Franklin gave us a peek into colonial times. Others, not so well known are just as important historians. Wesley Odom has written a blow-by-blow description of the Spanish capture of Pensacola. Thomas E. Chavez produced a comprehensive book about Spain's involvement in gaining our freedom. He has made Hispanics proud that their ancestors were our allies. Judge Robert Thonhoff has written several books proving that Texans had a part to play in winning the war. John Francois, in his novel, *The March*, opened a window into the Cajun militia in Louisiana.

Without these historical, genealogical and biographical scholars, we would not have our history readily available to us. These men and women make history come alive – they give history a heartbeat. Their words bring our history to us in technicolor. They provide a means by which all of us can learn our history. They inoculate us with patriotism.

Another group we must also recognize are the combat reporters, such as Ernie Pyle, who kept the country up to date through the World War II European campaign. Today, reporters and cameramen risk their lives to let the public know what is happening around the world. Many of them have been killed in action and unfortunately, some have been brutally murdered. Their current events become our historical record.

So, later today when you are enjoying your cookouts, swim parties and fireworks to celebrate our nation's 235th birthday, take a few seconds to lift your glass, and toast our servicemen and women; our veterans – both living and dead ; their families; and those who have kept their stories alive.

God bless you and God Bless America.

