

Honoring The National Heroes

By Myron M. Cowen

The American people unite with all other freedom-loving peoples of the world today in paying high tribute to the countless men and women of the Philippines, who have sacrificed their lives in the supremely important cause of creating and defending liberty, freedom and the democratic way of life.

Rizal, Mabini, Bonifacio, Abad Santos, Quezon — these immortal leaders of the Filipino people and others who were associated with them or who followed in their footsteps — stand out today as landmarks in the onward and upward march of this sovereign democratic Republic. Because these great men lived, labored and died as they did, this nation today stands on the threshold of greatness. They are, in the truest sense of the word "national heroes," from whose example your nation and the whole world may well draw inspiration and courage with which to meet the challenging problems of the future.

In recent times the significance of this day has been broadened and deepened to include the sacrifices made by the Filipino people as a whole during those four tragic years of World War II — sacrifices which today constitute as great a monument to idealism, patriotism and self-sacrifice as has ever been erected in all history.

As I say this I am not thinking of individual deeds by specific people but, rather, of the heroism of the whole nation which stood fast in the face of the weapons of death and destruction, both physical and ideological, which were used against it by the enemy. Your people suffered brutal indignities, starved from lack of food, saw their friends and relatives die before their eyes, and yet struggled on for an ideal and a principle. No words of ours can add to the glory they have achieved. The world in general and the Philippines in particular do well today to pay honor to these thousands of men and women who by their heroic fortitude established a standard by which all human courage and sacrifice can be measured in the future.

More specifically, we are met here this morning to pay tribute to the scores of men and women who suffered torture and death at the hands of the Japanese in the cells and dark dungeons of this historic old Fort.

Fort Santiago which has stood here on the banks of the Pasig River for more than 400 years, and under the flags of five nations, has witnessed the relentless march of history. It was here that Jose Rizal was imprisoned prior to his execution by the Spanish. It was here in these dark cells and torture chambers that Filipinos and Americans alike shared an ordeal by fire in World War II.

I am honored indeed to be able to join with you today in paying humble but grateful tribute to this legion of heroic

men and women, Filipinos and Americans alike and others who met a similar fate on the death march, at Camp O'Donnell, at Cabanatuan, at Palawan and at the Davao prisoners camp.

Today, as we depart from our daily routine to commemorate the deeds of these honored dead, it seems a fitting time to rededicate ourselves to the principles for which they died. Both our peoples, who have fought and died for freedom, must keep ever in mind that "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." If, in what we do or what we fail to do, as individuals or as organizations, we are false to the basic concept of government which Filipinos and Americans share — that it is a servant of the people, not their master — to the same extent are we destroying this way of life which we value above all others.

We have come to speak of the personal liberty and the dignity of the individual, which are the basis of democracy, as the rights of man. They are his rights in a free land. In fact, we and our forbears have come to feel that they are his inalienable rights, an endowment from his Creator. We know all too well, however, that there are millions of people in the world today who enjoy no such rights. Totalitarianism recognizes no right but that of might. In that large portion of the world where a totalitarian form of government exists, the individual does not dare to express his own opinion. In such countries, where men's minds are rigidly controlled, the individual is subjected to a slavery more abject than any the world has ever known.

Your people and mine, as freedom-loving peoples, must not stand idly by. Nor should our tactics in this struggle of ideas be merely those of passive resistance. If democracy — if a government of the people, by the people, and for the people — is as precious a heritage as our founders considered it and as we, today, are convinced that it is, it behooves us to make it a real and living thing. It is imperative that the democracies demonstrate to the rest of the world more effectively in the future than they have in the past the innumerable benefits which mankind enjoys under self-government. It is only by making our governments democratic in every sense of the word, by assuring all men equal political, social, economic and legal rights and privileges that we can prove to our own people and to the world at large the benefits and blessings of our chosen way of life.

Let us today re-dedicate ourselves to these high principles, and by so doing, fittingly memorialize those heroes who have died to preserve them. No better offering could be made in grateful acknowledgement of our debt to them than to strive more diligently for the achievement of the ideals for which they sacrificed their lives.