

Remarks on the Observance of the 50th Anniversary of the Korean War

June 25, 2000

Thank you very much, Secretary Cohen, for your remarks and your outstanding service. General Myers, Mr. Ambassador, thank you so much for being here today. Chaplain Craven, Chaplain Sobel; especially, my friend Senator Glenn, whose life is a testament to the triumph of freedom.

I would also like to thank Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Gober for being here, and acknowledge that Secretary West and Congressman Charles Rangel, a Korean war veteran, are in Seoul today leading the American delegation at the commemoration activities there, and we ought to give them a big hand. They're representing us well. *[Applause]*

I want to recognize Congressman Bishop and Congressman Faleomavaega and thank Senator Paul Sarbanes, who did so much to keep this Korean War Memorial beautiful. I want to thank the members of our Armed Forces here and around the world and especially those in Korea, whom I have had the honor of visiting on several occasions; and of course, and especially, the veterans and their families here today.

Five years ago I had the honor of dedicating this remarkable memorial, and on that day, many who were seeing the 19 beautiful statues for the first time commented on how very lifelike they seemed. But one veteran wryly said, "They were lifelike in every way but one. They were all 7 feet tall." He said, "When I think about the courage of those who fought in Korea, I remember them as being 20 feet tall."

All across our Nation today, our fellow citizens are coming together to say to men and women who fought for freedom half a century ago, half a world away, we will never forget your bravery. We will always honor your service and your sacrifice.

As we meet today, we are blessed to live, as Secretary Cohen said, in a world where, for the first time, over half the people on the globe live under governments of their own choosing. It has happened so rapidly that we may fall into the trap of thinking that it had to happen, that communism's fall and freedom's victory was inevitable.

But 50 crowded years ago, the world we know today was anything but inevitable. Hitler was gone, but Stalin was not. Berlin was divided. A revolution across the Pacific began a fierce debate here at home over the question, who lost China? In 1949 the Soviet Union had detonated its first atomic bomb. As we struggled to rebuild Europe and Japan, the free nations of the world watched and wondered, when and where would the cold war turn hot, and would America meet the test?

Fifty years ago today, the world got its answer in Korea, in a place known as the Uijongbu Corridor. In the early morning hours of June 25th, 1950, 90,000 North Korean troops broke across the border and invaded South Korea.

The only American there that day was a 31-year-old Army captain and Omaha Beach veteran named Joseph Darrigo. He was awakened by what he thought was thunder. But when the shell fragments hit his house, he ran half-dressed to his Jeep and drove. Within half a mile of the local train station, he couldn't believe what he was seeing, a full regiment of North Korean soldiers getting off the train. Now, he later recalled, "Over 5,000 soldiers came against one person, me."

Captain Darrigo escaped that day. He went on to serve another year in Korea before an illness brought him home. Time has slowed him down some, but not much. And we are honored that he could be with us here today.

I'd like to recognize Captain Joseph R. Darrigo. Please, sir, stand. *[Applause]*

The truth is, the leaders of the Communist nations did not believe America would stand up for South Korea. After all, Americans didn't want another war; the blood still hadn't dried from World War II. Nobody wanted more rationing. Nobody wanted more Western Union boys riding up with telegrams from the War Department. Americans wanted to start families. They wanted to see gold stars on report cards, not gold stars in windows.

But from the moment Harry Truman heard the news at home, on his first trip to Missouri since Christmas the year before, he knew this

was a moment of truth. If an invasion was permitted to triumph in Korea without opposition from the free world, no small nation again would have the courage to resist aggression. He knew American boys didn't fight and die to stop Nazi aggression only to see it replaced by Communist aggression.

So Korea wasn't just a line on a map. It was where America drew the line in the sand on the cold war and where, for the first time, the nations of the whole world, together at the then newly created United Nations, voted to use armed force to stop armed aggression.

The papers ordering Americans to combat in Korea included the marvelously romantic phrase, "for duty beyond the seas." Some duty. For those who fought it, there was no romance. The war was bitter, brutal, and long.

In the first weeks, not much went right. Troops from the Occupation Force in Japan were thrown into the middle of combat, not prepared to fight a war. Their weapons were rusty. Rockets from World War II bazookas bounced off Russian tanks like stones. In many ways, it wasn't a modern war at all. Oh, there were jets and helicopters, but most of the fighting was done with rifles, machine guns, bayonets, and mortars. Soldiers lived in sandbagged bunkers and stood watch on lonely ridges. It has been said that the Americans who fought in France in 1917 would have understood Korea, that the men who served under Lee and Grant would have recognized Korea.

And then, of course, there was the weather. The cold war was never so cold as in Korea. It may be hard to believe today, but imagine. They spent a few minutes in temperatures from time to time more than 50 degrees below zero. Now, imagine trying to fight a war in it. I'm told that pins even froze inside grenades. Many died from shock brought on by the cold. And then when summer came, there was no relief but, instead, 100-degree heat and dust so thick, supply trucks had to keep their lights on at midday.

There is no question: Korea was war at its worst. But it was also America at its best.

These are men and women, as the memorial says, who answered the call to defend a country they never knew and a people they had never met. Throughout most of the war, they were unbelievably outgunned and outmanned, in some places 20 to 1. But they never gave up and never gave in.

At Pusan Perimeter, troops were so spread out, if you looked left and right, chances were you couldn't see another soldier. But the line did not break. At Inchon, troops had to scale a dangerous seawall within a 2-hour window. They went on to take back Seoul. At Mig Alley, Americans encountered the world's fastest fighter jets. For every jet the enemy shot down, our pilots shot down 10. At Heartbreak Ridge and Pork Chop Hill, wave after wave of enemy soldiers came crashing in, but our troops stood their ground. And at the Chosen Reservoir, when legendary marine Lewis "Chesty" Puller heard that the Chinese troops had them surrounded, he replied, "Good, now they can't get away."

The Americans, South Koreans, and our allies who fought in Korea set a standard of courage that may someday be equalled but can never be surpassed. Korea was not a police action or a crisis or a conflict or a clash; it was a war, a hard, brutal war. And the men and women who fought it were heroes.

There is another subject that has to be addressed here today. When the guns fell silent, some asked what our forces in Korea had done for freedom, after all, for after all, the fighting began at the 38th parallel and ended at the 38th parallel. I submit to you today that looking back through the long lens of history, it is clear that the stand America took in Korea was indispensable to our ultimate victory in the cold war. Because we stood our ground in Korea, the Soviet Union drew a clear lesson that America would fight for freedom.

Had Americans and our allies, from South Korea to as far away as Turkey and Australia, not shown commitment and fortitude, we could well later, as Harry Truman foresaw, have faced world war III. It is, therefore, not a stretch to draw the line of history straight from those brave soldiers who stood their ground on ridged lines in Korea 50 years ago to the wonderfully happy young people who stood and celebrated on the Berlin Wall 10 years ago.

Because they all stood their ground, today, South Korea is a free and prosperous nation, one of the great success stories in the world, as the Ambassador said, with the world's 12th largest economy and, I might add, a remarkable democratic leader in President Kim Dae-jung.

Because we have continued to stand with our democratic ally South Korea, with 37,000 American troops standing watch on the border today,

just as we have since 1953, we have kept the peace. And because of all that, there is now a chance for a different future on the Korean Peninsula.

Last week's summit between President Kim Dae-jung and Chairman Kim Chong-il, the first of its kind in 50 years, was a hopeful and historic step. It was courageous of President Kim to go to Pyongyang. He had no illusions, however. Nor should we. There is still a wide gulf to be crossed; there is still tension on the Peninsula. North Korea still bears the wounds of self-inflicted isolation. The people there are suffering terribly. But if we hadn't done what we did in Korea 50 years ago, and if the United States and its allies hadn't stood fast down to the present day, South Korea might well look the same way.

Korea helped remind us of a few other lessons, too, that our people and all our rich diversity are our greatest strength, that a fully integrated military is our surest hope for victory, that our freedom and security depends on the freedom and security of others, and that we can never, ever, pull away from the rest of the world.

And finally, for all the talk about Korea being the "forgotten war," we must never forget that for some, Korea is still alive every single day.

In 1950 a young woman from Hannibal, Missouri, named Virginia Duncan saw her older brother, Hallie, go off to fight in Korea. He skipped his high school graduation because he wanted to join the service so badly. In Korea he sent letters home about every week. In one, he told them he was looking forward to a shipment of cookies from his mother.

At the same time, in Belham, Kentucky, another young woman named Betty Bruce watched her brother, Jimmy, go off to war. He was the 10th of 11 children. His parents had to sign a permission slip so he could join the Army at 17. When he got there, he sent a letter home saying that no matter what happened, he was all right because he had given his heart to the Lord.

Betty and Virginia never met. But in the winter of 1950, they both received the same awful news. On the day after Thanksgiving, Betty and her family got a knock at the door and two Army officers told her her brother was missing in action. Two weeks later, 4 days before her own wedding, Virginia and her family were told that her brother, too, was missing in action.

Not long after, the cookies they sent came back home, marked "return to sender."

For 50 years, Virginia and Betty asked questions without answers. Oh, they made sure their children came to know the uncles they had never met. They kept the pictures, and they prayed. They both had just about given up hope, but earlier this month, their prayers were answered. Three weeks ago, they both learned that a search and recovery team, working out of Hawaii, had identified the remains of two soldiers in North Korea.

Today I am honored to say that the remains of Betty's brother, Sergeant Jimmy Higgins, and Virginia's brother, Sergeant Hallie Clark, Jr., are finally coming home to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery. I'd like to thank Virginia Duncan and Betty Bruce and their families for being here today and ask them to stand and be recognized. [*Applause*]

Before I close, I also want to say a special word of appreciation to the men and women of the Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii, known as CIL-HI. Since 1996, they have recovered more than 40 sets of remains from Korea. On Memorial Day I announced that we had resumed talks with North Korea in hopes of recovering more. The talks were successful. Today I am pleased to announce that as we are here meeting, the latest team from CIL-HI is in the air, on the way to North Korea. We will not stop until we have the fullest possible accounting of all our men and women still missing in action there.

To my fellow Americans and our distinguished allies and friends from Korea and those representing our other allies, we all know that Korea isn't about Hawkeye and Houlihan but about honor and heroes, young men and women willing to pay the price to keep a people they had never met free.

To the veterans of the Korean war—those here, those around the country, those whom we must remember today—let me say, on behalf of a grateful nation: Fifty years ago you helped make the world that we know today possible. You proved to all humanity just how good our Nation can be at its best. You showed us, through your example, that freedom is not free, but it can be maintained. Today your fellow Americans say: We remember, and we are very grateful.

God bless you, and God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:47 p.m. at the Korean War Memorial in West Potomac Park. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. Richard B. Myers, USAF, Commander, U.S. Space Command; Hong Koo Lee, South Korean Ambassador

to the United States; Chaplain John N. Craven, USN (Ret.); Chaplain Samuel Sobel, USN (Ret.); former Senator John Glenn; and General Secretary Kim Chong-il of North Korea.

Remarks on the Completion of the First Survey of the Human Genome *June 26, 2000*

The President. Good morning. I want to, first of all, acknowledge Prime Minister Blair, who will join us by satellite in just a moment from London. I want to welcome here the Ambassadors from the United Kingdom, Japan, Germany, France. And I'd also like to acknowledge the contributions not only that their scientists but also scientists from China made to the vast international consortium that is the human genome project.

I thank Secretary Shalala, who could not be here today, and Secretary Richardson, who is here; Dr. Ruth Kirschstein, Dr. Ari Patrinos, scientists of the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Energy, who have played an important role in the human genome project.

I want to say a special word of thanks to my science adviser, Dr. Neal Lane, and of course, to Dr. Francis Collins, the director of the international human genome project, and to the Celera president, Craig Venter. I thank Senator Harkin and Senator Sarbanes for being here, and the other distinguished guests.

Nearly two centuries ago, in this room, on this floor, Thomas Jefferson and a trusted aide spread out a magnificent map, a map Jefferson had long prayed he would get to see in his lifetime. The aide was Meriwether Lewis, and the map was the product of his courageous expedition across the American frontier, all the way to the Pacific. It was a map that defined the contours and forever expanded the frontiers of our continent and our imagination.

Today the world is joining us here in the East Room to behold a map of even greater significance. We are here to celebrate the completion of the first survey of the entire human genome. Without a doubt, this is the most important, most wondrous map ever produced by humankind.

The moment we are here to witness was brought about through brilliant and painstaking work of scientists all over the world, including many men and women here today. It was not even 50 years ago that a young Englishman named Crick and a brash, even younger American named Watson first discovered the elegant structure of our genetic code. Dr. Watson, the way you announced your discovery in the journal "Nature" was one of the great understatements of all time: "This structure has novel features, which are of considerable biological interest." [Laughter] Thank you, sir.

How far we have come since that day. In the intervening years, we have pooled the combined wisdom of biology, chemistry, physics, engineering, mathematics, and computer science; tapped the great strengths and insights of the public and private sectors. More than 1,000 researchers across 6 nations have revealed nearly all 3 billion letters of our miraculous genetic code. I congratulate all of you on this stunning and humbling achievement.

Today's announcement represents more than just an epic-making triumph of science and reason. After all, when Galileo discovered he could use the tools of mathematics and mechanics to understand the motion of celestial bodies, he felt, in the words of one eminent researcher, "that he had learned the language in which God created the universe."

Today, we are learning the language in which God created life. We are gaining ever more awe for the complexity, the beauty, the wonder of God's most divine and sacred gift. With this profound new knowledge, humankind is on the verge of gaining immense new power to heal. Genome science will have a real impact on all our lives and even more on the lives of our