From National Public Relations Division, The American Legion, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Memorial Day

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* Suggested 1946 Memorial *
* Day address for American *
* Legion speakers. *
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MY FELLOW AMERICANS:

A year ago this morning Americans at home and around the world awoke to another day of war. The sound of battle, and echo in Europe, was coming to a roar in the Pacific.

There was little time then to give to our war dead. On the fighting fronts seconds were precious as they always are. Here at home the factories had to be kept going, the wheels of the mightiest of military machines kept turning.

Even as we worked and fought that day graves were being dug for freshly fallen Americans. They were a spur to work harder and fight harder.

Victory was the catchword. Victory and a condition called peace which some of us were having trouble remembering. All of us sensed, however, that peace was something fine and priceless so man, woman and child we put our shoulders into one final heave at war.

We won. Sooner than we had dared hope, Japan's resistance collapsed. Through the combined efforts of our armed forces, our allies, our scientists, and thousands of Americans buried in foreign soil, the world again knew peace.

It is the memory of those hero-dead we honor today. Today, eight months after the worst of wars, there is time for remembering. There is time for thinking back over World War II and the wars before and paying off in what small measure we can the debt we, the living, owe those who died.

The feeling I am sure you share with me is one of inadequacy. How, we ask ourselves, can the laying of wreaths, the parades, the heads bowed in reverence indicate either their sacrifice or our sentiments?

We remember the more than 2,400 soldiers, sailors and marines killed on the coral steeps of Saipan.

The 100,000 who died on the fields and in the air of Europe.

All of the more than 300,000 American youths buried within the last five years beyond the oceans.

These are bitter memories. We would rather put them aside, for they carry a sting. They are oppressive. In these days of groping for the smoothe way of living they keep us from the business at hand.

In the name of all that is good and sacred, hold onto these memories. The business at hand is peace. At least for a day look closely at the white crosses identifying our war dead.

There you will find the message, unspoken, which every dying American soldier from the hour of the Minute Men has passed on to his living comrades.

It reads, fight for peace!

Only if you and I act out the spirit of this message will the memorial services we are taking part in have any real meaning. Our one means of keeping faith with those we honor today is to realize our obligation of saving the peace.

It is so easy on such an occasion as this to put up a smoke-screen of sentimentality and then hide behind it, smug in our belief that we have discharged our duty. On this Memorial Day you and I dare not engage in sentimentalizing. Our mission is as real as life and death.

Why has a nation whose people have cherished peace above all else but freedom found itself so regularly at war? This is the question Americans must answer if they are to entertain serious hopes for lasting peace. It is a question Americans have stubbornly refused to answer in the past.

Let's be the realists we are supposed to be and face facts. Our history of heroism in war, so vividly represented by the still new graves in Europe and Asia, is matched only by our record of cowardice in peace.

Cowardice is a harsh word but who would dispute its fitness here?

Not that first American, George Washington. In 1781 Washington addressed the members of Congress as follows:

"Had we formed a permanent army in the beginning, which, by the continuance of the same men in the service, had been capable of discipline, we never should have had to retreat with a handful of men across the Delaware in 1776, trembling for the fate of America."

Not President Madison who in 1813 had to watch from a distance as the British put the torch to our Capitol.

Not Lincoln who saw the nation almost break in two before he could rally an armed force strong enough to save it.

Not General Pershing who had to send American boys, untrained and unorganized, against a powerful enemy.

And certainly not the "expendables" of this last war who never had a chance on Bataan and Wake.

Today, there is time to learn from the record. The tragic paradox it shows is the willingness of Americans from the Revolutionary days to make great sacrifices during wars which may have been prevented by small sacrifices during peace. It shows the almost criminal refusal on the part of the individual to recognize preservation of peace as an objective worthy of his personal effort -- to see that he himself is a soldier of peace.

The preamble to The American Legion constitution, written in 1919, sets forth as one of the reasons for the creation of our organization, "For God and Country.. ... to promote peace and good will on earth."

To the members of The American Legion, "peace and good will on Earth" is more than a Christmas phrase. Nearly 3 million of us have noted from trenches, ships, planes and foxholes in two World Wars the absence of peace and good will. Thousands of war graves are filled with men who marched and ate and fought beside us. We believe they died not just for victory but for peace. We know their last message to us was to fight for peace.

The first requirement for a fighter is conditioning. Like the prizefighter a nation of individuals must be morally and physically conditioned before it stands a chance of winning.

We must renew our faith in the value of principles. We must not only believe in but live by the creed of sacrifice, mutual devotion and the dignity of man -- America's creed as expressed in the constitution. We must develop a new fervor for the freedom and equality of human beings everywhere -- a new eagerness to aid the unfortunate and punish the unlawful. We must learn and practice humility and justice.

The prospect of another war is frightening. We must bear the fright and consider the prospect so that, fearing another war, our efforts for peace may be doubled.

So much we -- you and I -- can do to condition America's mind for the fight. It is imperative that we do more.

Look again at the record. The late President Roosevelt aptly described December 7, 1941 as a date that "will live in infamy". It will also live in the hearts of men as another chapter in the history of Americans' unwillingness to back up hopes for peace with action for peace.

Failure to prepare physically to fight for peace has been America's life-long sin of omission. Adherance to principles of right and wrong is fundamental but it gains nothing unless supported in the field of reality. Consider the ideal of justice for all in our national constitution. Do you suppose it would have had any lasting impact on our national behavior if the courts of law had not been empowered to back it up? Would the prizefighter, no matter how fine his mental attitude, enter the ring too flabby to throw a punch?

Military preparedness is the conditioning that will allow the United States to "throw a punch" for peace. Without the physical support of a strong Army, Navy, and Air Force, the principles preached by our diplomats at the world council tables will never see the test of practice. Another generation of Americans will have to answer for failing to achieve that end of which our honored dead laid down their lives.

The guns are quiet now. Grass is growing under the white crosses. Throughout the nation there is a tendency to forget the discomforts and horrors of the past five years. Mention of the things of war brings a frown from those who would enjoy to the hilt their peacetime lethargy.

Surely, no one feels a greater desire to put away war thoughts than the men who fought history's two bloodiest wars. They know too well the grimmest, least glamorous side of armed conflict. Precisely for that reason they feel duty bound to the dead and the unborn to remember war now so that their children will not have occasion to remember it.

American military preparedness is as yet an ideal. The American Legion has in mind specific means of converting it into reality.

For twenty-seven years The American Legion at its annual national convention has urged the adoption of universal military training. This civilian-controlled program would at best prevent war, at least reduce the cost in lives and dollars should war prove inevitable.

It is a program carefully devised to work the minimum hardship on youths beginning collage or employment. Eight months of the required one year's training could be spent in classrooms.

In 1783 George Washington, in a message to the Continental Congress, saw fit to write:

"It should be laid down as a primary position and the basis of our system that every citizen who enjoys the protection of a free government owes not only a portion of his property but even of his personal services to the defense of it."

Here, then, is a way for the male citizens of America to pay off the debt of "personal services" which George Washington said they owe their government.

Here is a way for every citizen to pay off that debt by inviting and accepting the small personal sacrifices exacted by such a program.

Never before was so much at stake. Weapons of war of such heinousness as to put the atomic bomb in their shadow are even now being plotted on blue prints throughout the world. The wildest of dreamers search in vain for a prediction of what another war would be like.

Never before has America enjoyed such a promising opportunity to abolish the threat of "another war."

United Nations, an organization born of love of peace during the frenzy of war, offers that opportunity. The first year of the United Nations has taught us that men learn slowly. While the echo of World War II was still in the air we saw proof that a minority of men recognize even at this late date the law of force alone. If hopes for peace are to be realized, America must be prepared to counter force with force.

The first year of the United Nations has also taught us that even a world peace organization suffers from "growing pains." It is unreasonable to expect fifty-odd nations to set up a workable peace machinery without engendering a certain amount of friction. Long-practiced policies of nationalism and isolationism are not easily discarded.

To prevent these "growing pains" from paralyzing the United Nations before it matures, America must exert an aggressive, positive influence at the council tables. It is imperative that this influence be felt and seriously considered by all delegates.

There is time today, by virtue of the sacrifice of our war dead, to remember America has never commanded such influence in the past.

There is time today to condition America, in mind and in body, to command that influence in the future.

The American Legion says America's future must depend on her national strength. The backbone of this strength must be a plan of universal training for national security.

The American Legion calls on each one of you, this Memorial Day, to build by your support of this plan, the one memorial worthy of our hero dead.

That memorial is lasting peace.

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4/17/46