

## THIS IS MY FIGHT SONG

*For Some Veterans, the Real Battle Has Just Begun*

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### ***“Of Barbeques and Battlefields”***

by Susan Heffner



Photo Credit: Susan Heffner

### ***“And You Can Tell Everybody This is OUR Song...”***

*“Oh, say, can you see by the dawn’s early light  
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight’s last gleaming?”*

Francis Scott Key wrote “The Star-Spangled Banner” on September 14, 1814 (during the War of 1812) aboard the *HMS Minden* while facilitating a prisoner exchange between the Americans and the British. Because he became privy to details of an impending attack on Fort McHenry, he was held captive until the siege ended. While watching “the rockets’ red glare” and “bombs bursting in air” over the ramparts, he breathlessly waited until dawn, desperately hoping the 15-starred and striped flag of our infant republic would still be waving. He was not to be disappointed!

Some interesting sidebars:

- Key wrote the lyrics to an 18<sup>th</sup> century drinking tune, “*To Anacreon in Heaven*,” the theme song of a London gentlemen’s club
- The U.S. Navy adopted it as its official song in 1889
- President Woodrow Wilson commissioned a single arrangement of the song in 1916, which debuted at Carnegie Hall on December 5, 1917
- It did not become our National Anthem until March 3, 1931, under President Herbert Hoover, after winning out against “My Country Tis of Thee” and “God Bless America”
- On September 12, 2001, after the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, Queen Elizabeth allowed our Anthem to be played during the Changing of the Guard ceremony, and the following day, she joined with her fellow countrymen in singing the Anthem at a packed St. Paul’s Cathedral

### **“What’s Going On?”**

Yet, when Key penned his words, he never anticipated how beloved, controversial and divisive his patriotic poem would prove.

Recently, the NFL has taken a wallop in the wallet because certain players decided to “take a knee,” instead of a hand over their heart, during the Anthem to protest perceived racial injustice and inequality. But this was not the first time it has been used as a political platform.

During the 1968 Olympics, U.S. African-American Track & Field gold and bronze medal winners Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised black-gloved fists during the medal ceremony, while wearing human rights badges. This became known as the “Black Power Salute,” although in his autobiography, Smith called it a “human rights salute.” It became the loudest political statement in the Games’ history.

### **“Say What You Need to Say...”**

From our Vets:

*“The kneeling, while abhorrent to many, is being overblown. The right to protest as we see fit is part of what makes this country the finest in the world. When the threat level is perceived to be low, patriotic fever is low. However, as in 9/11, once threatened, we respond as a nation and work for the good of the nation.” RC, USAF*

*“Not on my watch, you overpaid, over-privileged milquetoasts! Why don’t you ask me how I can take a knee when I only have one leg! You think they gave us petting ponies on the battlefield because we disagreed with the order to ‘take that hill’? Go back to your ‘safe room,’ but keep in mind, ‘Who will protect when we’re gone and they come for you?’” SD, USMC*

*“I don’t believe in using our Flag or our Anthem as a political platform for protest. There are other avenues to get a message across without having to demean those who wore the uniform and sacrificed. If somebody knelt with their hand over their heart, a tear in their eye, and their head bowed, with a silent prayer for all who paid the ultimate sacrifice...kneel away.” MS, USAF*

*“Kneeling for the Anthem is not controversial, nor is it anti-American. In fact, I agree with the symbolic nature of the gesture....If you live here, you have no excuse to be mediocre and fail. You have the freedom to do nothing, and if you choose to do so, it is your personal choice and no one’s fault but your own.” MA, USMC*

From our civilians:

*“The freedom to take a knee is one of many freedoms we have, individually and as a country. To start using opinions to remove or curtail any of those freedoms will be the beginning of the end.” GP*

*“Anyone taking a knee is disgusting, disrespectful and selfish! We either love our country or leave it. We don’t need to agree on everything, but we do need to respect our nation and the veterans who serve. I was an immigrant, and I LOVE America! Every time I hear the Anthem, I feel pride. I am embarrassed by how everyone is acting and disrespecting our flag. We can heal, but change must come first.” RB*

**“Celebration...”**

This Independence Day, as you fire up your grill surrounded by family and friends, and perhaps missing those who made other plans, or loved ones who have passed, take a moment to reflect on those who gave their “all” so that we might celebrate *our* freedom. Please also pray for soldiers who are spending Independence Day on a distant battlefield fighting for our safety and the freedom of others.

Then consider veterans who can’t join in the revelry because fireworks and firecrackers trigger memories of mortar rounds and combat. Surely, we can take some time to remember them, those who are still fighting to forget, as well as struggling to remember life before combat, or how to re-take their place in a society that seemingly discounts their service, or ignores them altogether.

If you really want to understand and appreciate the value of human life, or the price paid for freedom, talk to a vet, who, despite knowing the potential cost of each, enlisted anyway.

**“Can’t You See, Lord, Can’t You See...”**

Think you don’t know any veterans? Guess again! They’re all around us: at the grocery store, the gas station, the Post Office, the mall. They are the kind, the quiet, the unassuming, the broken, the humbled, the homeless, or the ones we’ve allowed to fall through the cracks or refuse even to acknowledge—like they are somehow beneath us—when, in fact, we would not be blessed with the liberties we take for granted were it not for them.

The end of deployment doesn’t denote the end of the battle. Sadly, for many veterans, old and young alike, the wars continue: the war against self and the struggle with survivor’s guilt; the war to make peace with core Christian values; the war with family and friends who can’t possibly understand what they’ve endured or the anxiety they continue to feel; and, even more sadly, the war to feel *human* again.

***“Where Have All the Soldiers Gone?”***

Adlai Stevenson stated, *“On the plains of hesitation lie the blackened bones of countless millions who, at the dawn of victory, lay down to rest, and in resting died.”*

How might this apply to our veterans if they don’t receive the help they need and deserve?

*“On the plains of hesitation”* (hurt, distrustful, disheartened)

*“Lie the blackened bones of countless millions”* (our vets)

*“Who, at the dawn of victory”* (when they returned home safe, but not sound)

*“Lay down to rest”* (battle weary, feeling ostracized)

*“And in resting died”* (PTSD, alcoholism, homelessness, helplessness, suicide because nobody took the time to listen and understand)

As you celebrate this July 4<sup>th</sup>, I leave you with several questions to ponder:

- Hasn’t there been enough hatred?
- Hasn’t there been enough bloodshed?
- Haven’t our soldiers seen and endured enough?
- For what and for whom are they fighting?
- Don’t they deserve our support and gratitude?

If we can’t honestly address these questions, recognize and honor our vets for their service and sacrifice, and come together as a nation to heal, then what in the world *are* we celebrating anyway?

***“The Answer, My Friend, is Blowin’ in the Wind...”***

*“Oh, say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave*

*O’er the land of the free and the home of the brave?”*

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*“EAR – Express, Address, Resolve.”* Please contact me at [Susan.Heffner.ForTheVets@gmail.com](mailto:Susan.Heffner.ForTheVets@gmail.com) with your feedback, your stories or anything else you’d like to share. Together, we *will* make a difference.