

Commentary

Our freedom came at a great price

MAJ. CHRIS RICHIE
MARINE AIR CONTROL SQUADRON 2

Editors note: Major Richie is the detachment commander for Marine Air Control Squadron 2 and is commanding Marines from 12 commands within II Marine Expeditionary Force. These Marines have been deployed for more than 100 days in an unspecified location in the Middle East. This is his Independence Day message to them.

As we continue to accomplish a very important mission in this country, while supporting Operation Enduring Freedom, I want to take a moment of your time to reflect upon the significance of July 4. More than 200 years ago, our great nation won its independence from the most powerful regime history had ever known. It was not a powerful military that fought so long ago for the freedoms we enjoy today; rather, it was a conglomeration of commoners who shared one theme. They were brothers-in-arms who all fought to obtain and preserve something more precious than all the gold in the world; they fought for Freedom. Freedom to live their lives the way they wanted to.

Fast forward to modern times and our current conflict in an international war against terrorism. This war is not so entirely different from our nation's struggle for independence. When the terrorists destroyed the Twin Towers, they attempted to destroy our very way of life. They expected the United States to withdraw from every corner of the earth, where we help countries in need that strive for the same freedoms we won from the British so

long ago. The terrorists expected us to back down and cower in defeat. They expected us to be afraid in our own backyards. They expected us to revert to the isolationist state we were prior to World War II.

The tragedy of Sept. 11 produced the exact opposite.

Americans adore life and understand that when our way of life is challenged, we will not rest until that way of life has—once again—been preserved. Our way of life is something worth fighting for. And fight we will, until every would-be terrorist has been dealt with, on our terms. After we had grieved in both public and private, our president called upon his citizens and military to rise up in the face of our enemy, in much the same way

Gen. George Washington did in the 1770s. The American people along with their military responded. The United States did not withdraw from any country, nor did it change any of our diplomatic or foreign policies. Instead, we stepped up our efforts to lend a hand and set out on a noble cause to rid the world of terror. The United States did not cower in spite of such a ruthless assault on our very character, but rather, we took the fight to the enemy, in his very own backyard. The world has rallied to our battle cries, because they realize that it was not just the United States that was attacked; the freedom of the world was attacked. There is no isolationist state here; our nation will be

remembered for hundreds of generations as the one that sought for peace on the entire earth. When diplomacy failed, our powerful military was called into action again and again—where they have never known defeat.

Victories are not always obtained easily or quickly. In 1776, our continental soldiers were on the verge of complete collapse. They missed their families and loved ones. They faced an enemy that was undefeatable. They wanted to throw down their arms and return to the comforts of home. It was during this most dismal moment that Gen. Wash-

ington asked his friend, Thomas Paine for some help to encourage his men and convey to them that their sacrifices were not taken lightly by any citizen, and

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—Maj. Chris Richie
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they would be remembered from generation to generation for their sacrifices to a nation struggling to emerge. It was then that Thomas Paine wrote these words:

These are the times that try mens' souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service to his country. But he that stands it now deserves the love and thanks of both man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered, yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly.

Following these words, the great citizen-soldiers were inspired to fight on. They eventu-

ally beat the British and won our Independence. It was not easy in 1776, nor was it easy in 1812, 1865, 1898, 1917, 1941, 1952, 1970, or in 1991. It is not easy for us today either; however, we too understand that "what we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly." That is the beauty of the American spirit. The reason Americans fight so well is because we have so much to live for. Since 1776, we have fought not only for our way of life, but also for one another. No, our freedom has never been free; it is something we have been fighting for over 200 years. And now, you are over here in the Middle East, still fighting for our freedom. Once again, today's war is not so different. Our enemy is elusive and will strike our foundations to the core without concern for the innocent. It will, indeed take time to rid our world of terrorism, but we will be victorious. Our way of life is too valuable to consider any alternative. The Americans who wrote our Declaration of Independence in 1776 defined our spirit in the closing paragraph: "And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor." Our American spirit lives on.

Freedom came with a price for the American patriots of the 1700s. Freedom comes with a price for the American patriots of today. I am humbled to be your commanding officer as we pay our dues together.

Thank you for doing your part for our freedom. Thank you for your sacrifice. God Bless you, and God Bless America!

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