

11-11-2003 Sheldon B. Johnson Speaks to Ninth Graders Assembly at Pine View Middle School in Honor of Veteran's Day

Boys and Girls, it's great to be with you today. I'm representing millions of people who have and are now serving their country in the Armed Forces in times of danger, people who understand that we need to protect our country and keep it FREE!

We have a great country to live in today because lots of people, including some of my best friends, have given their lives to keep our country's freedoms for us to enjoy.

When I was just fourteen years old I enjoyed life, going to school here in St. George, the Woodward 9th grade class. The only threat I felt was from the school principal to achieve well in school. Some of you might even feel some of that expectation from your great principal, Mr. Brooks?

But, although I felt secure, out in the world things were different. Germany had been taken over by a dictator named Adolph Hitler. He was having millions of people killed because he didn't like something about them!

Italy was controlled by a dictator named Benito Mussolini. He had joined forces with Hitler, a ruthless man who was doing the same thing.

Japan was controlled by Hirohito and Tojo. They were killing hundreds of thousands of asians because these people were in their way.

By 1941 these three wicked rulers had joined forces to conquer the whole world. They were going to kill everyone in the world who got in their way as they tried to conquer smaller nations, one by one, and control the world.

The United States of America was not at war when we were attacked December 7, 1941 at Pearl harbour in Hawaii. Thousabnds of people were killed in this surprise attack, and a major part of our navy was destroyed.

But the American people united together and said, "These wicked dictators will NOT take our liberties and freedoms!"

Every able-bodied man in the nation joined the armed services and every one else in the nation joined in to make airplanes, tanks, guns, and ammunition supplies for the war.

Car companies did not make cars anymore. They made tanks, jeeps, machines for our mean fighting overseas. That meant everyone at home could not have cars, or gas, or tires, or sugar, or silk stockings, or leather shoes, or hundreds of other different things because our whole effort was to support the war to save our country.

It was difficult, but it was okay!

I had three older brothers, one in the navy and two in the Air Force. I was the youngest, and when I graduated from high school I was drafted into the army. I was just four years older than you boys are right now.

After training for seventeen weeks we were shipped in a troop ship to the Pacific for the invasion of the Philippine Islands, to drive out the brutal Japanese army. Some of my buddies in training were shipped to invade France and Germany to help stop the war.

It is a very scary thing for an eighteen year old to be part of an invasion force, but here I was, a rifle with bayonet fixed, and grenades on my belt. But with all my experience I didn't know one soldier who wasn't willing to do whatever was necessary to save his country.

Oh, yes, we complained a lot and wanted to be home, but we would do the job that was necessary!

I remember well the night our ship arrived near the island for our landing the next morning. The ship had to be in total darkness because we were a troop ship with very little protection. The Japanese had a welcome party of fighter-bombers. They were trying to decide where we were, to drop bombs on us. Our fighting ships were active with guns to protect us and bombs were going off all around us, but we were silent and scared.

By morning the United States Air Force had chased off the Japanese Air Force and we climbed down the rope ladders of the ship to waiting L.S.D's to take us to the beach.

I did a lot of thinking and growing up that night, and one of the decisions I made that night was that if I was to be blessed enough to live through all this I would get an education and be a contributor to this great nation. I would find a way to serve in gratitude our country that would give so much in the cause of freedom.

I had many more experiences and somehow was protected enough to live through it. But after the war was won and we were coming home, as we sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, signifying entering the Great United States of America, they played over the loudspeaker The Star Spangled Banner. Thousands of tough soldiers on our returning troop ship were crying tears of joy for the knowledge that they were coming home to freedom, coming home to America.

Since that time I have toured many nations of the world. I have witnessed the loss of freedoms to many people. I have met people in China, Russia, Poland and many other countries who dream of the freedom and opportunities we have in America. In some countries people have forgotten how to dream. We are a blessed country. Boys and girls, you must make it your responsibility to keep the flag of Freedom flying.

As we of the older generation pass on you must carry this task with honor and dignity and faithfulness, that generations after you can enjoy the blessings we all have shared.

Study hard. Learn all you can. Find a way to serve and give back. I know you will do it. You may serve with your talents, or with your education, or with your heart, but I have confidence in you. You will do it. You will be prepared and help keep America free.

God bless you in your assignment. God Bless America!