

AWHS MEMORIAL DEDICATION

13 JUNE 2009

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, GOOD MORNING.

DAN, THANK YOU FOR YOUR KIND INTRODUCTION. DR MARIANO, THANK YOU FOR THE EXTRAORDINARY PRIVILEGE YOU HAVE ACCORDED ME BY INVITING ME TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS DEDICATION CEREMONY.

BEFORE I OFFER WHAT I PROMISE WILL BE BRIEF REMARKS, LET ME FIRST THANK ALL WHO ARE IN SOME WAY RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS BEAUTIFUL MEMORIAL AND TODAY'S DEDICATION CEREMONY. I ALSO WANT TO PUBLICLY THANK THE LOCAL MILITARY VETERANS' ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTED HERE TODAY WHO UNSELFISHLY AND CONSISTENTLY SERVE AND ENRICH OUR COMMUNITIES AND OUR NATION.

BUT ESPECIALLY THIS MORNING, I WOULD LIKE TO RECOGNIZE AND THANK THE FAMILIES AND FRIENDS OF THE SIX GRADUATES WE HONOR TODAY. QUITE FRANKLY, THIS MEMORIAL HONORS NOT ONLY THE SACRIFICES OF YOUR LOVED ONES BUT IS A LASTING TRIBUTE TO YOUR SACRIFICES AS WELL.

COULD I ASK THOSE FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS HERE PRESENT TO PLEASE STAND AND BE RECOGNIZED?

I MUST ADMIT WHEN I WAS INITIALLY CONTACTED BY DR MARIANO AND ASKED TO PARTICIPATE IN TODAY'S

CEREMONY, THAT I WAS IN TURN – FIRST, SURPRISED (ACTUALLY SHOCKED IS A MORE ACCURATE DESCRIPTION), THEN HONORED, AND FINALLY HUMBLLED. WORDS CANNOT EXPRESS HOW PLEASED I AM TO HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO JOIN YOU TODAY.

FOR I MUST ADMIT THAT OVER THE YEARS, I HAVEN'T HAD MANY OPPORTUNITIES TO RETURN. BUT IT IS ALWAYS GOOD TO COME HOME AGAIN, AND NEVER MORE SO THAN FOR THE PURPOSE THAT BRINGS US HERE TODAY.

AND WHEN I SAY “COME HOME AGAIN” I MEAN IT IN THE TRUE SENSE OF THE WORDS - FOR TO ME, RETURNING TO ARCHBISHOP WILLIAMS IS A HOMECOMING. THIS SCHOOL HAS AND ALWAYS WILL HAVE A VERY SPECIAL PLACE IN MY HEART. WITHOUT EXAGGERATION FOUR OF THE VERY BEST YEARS OF MY LIFE WERE SPENT HERE, AT THE TIME UNDER THE TUTELAGE OF SOME REMARKABLE SISTERS OF CHARITY OF NAZARETH, TO INCLUDE MY THEN PRINCIPAL, SISTER HUGH FRANCIS, AND MY SENIOR HOME ROOM TEACHER, SISTER MARY MARTINE. OF COURSE THERE WERE A HOST OF OTHERS, AS WELL AS REMARKABLE LAY FACULTY MEMBERS THAT INCLUDED THE LIKES OF MR. JACK GARRITY, MR ARMAND COLUMBO, AND A GREAT ADVISOR, MR. BOB SWAIN, WHO I AM CONVINCED ONLY MASQUERADED AS THE SCHOOL CUSTODIAN.

FOR THE PAST FIFTY YEARS AND CONTINUING TO THIS DAY, I AM A BELIEVER THAT ARCHBISHOP WILLIAMS IS MUCH MORE

THAN JUST A SCHOOL THAT SITS ON INDEPENDENCE AVENUE; IT IS A FAMILY OF REMARKABLE PEOPLE.

ON A PERSONAL NOTE I SHOULD POINT OUT THAT THE ARCHBISHOP WILLIAMS' FAMILY AND MY OWN IMMEDIATE FAMILY ARE IN MANY WAYS ONE AND THE SAME. I HAVE A NIECE AND THREE BROTHERS-IN-LAW WHO ARE GRADUATES AND IT WAS HERE THAT I MET AND STARTED DATING A CLASSMATE, WHO I AM AMAZED TO SAY, HAS BEEN MY BRIDE FOR 43 YEARS.

AS I MENTIONED EARLIER, IN THE YEARS SINCE GRADUATION, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A FEW CLASS REUNIONS, I'VE HAD BUT FEW OPPORTUNITIES TO RETURN. FOR THIRTY YEARS I HAD THE DISTINCT PRIVILEGE OF WEARING A MARINE CORPS UNIFORM AND SERVING WITH A TRULY REMARKABLE COLLECTION OF MARINES, SOLDIERS, SAILORS, AND AIRMEN – SOME OF WHOM I MIGHT HAPPILY ADD, ARE HERE TODAY.

SINCE LEAVING ACTIVE DUTY MORE THAN THIRTEEN YEARS AGO, I HAVE LIVED WITHIN THE SHADOWS OF A GREAT CITY – WASHINGTON, DC. ALTHOUGH NOT WITHOUT ITS BLEMISHES, IT IS A CITY OF GREAT MAJESTY, OF COLOSSAL MONUMENTS AND MEMORIALS TO SOME OF THE GREATEST FIGURES IN OUR HISTORY. ON A NATIONAL LEVEL IT MANIFESTS IN STONE, MARBLE, AND BRONZE THE WORDS OF JOHN F. KENNEDY WHO ONCE SAID THAT “A NATION REVEALS ITSELF NOT ONLY BY THE MEN IT PRODUCES, BUT ALSO BY THE MEN IT HONORS AND THE MEN IT REMEMBERS.”

BUT FOR ALL OF ITS MAJESTY AND GRANDEUR, WASHINGTON, DC, CANNOT REPLICATE THE INTIMACY, AND THE PERSONAL SENSE OF FAMILY AND REMEMBRANCE, WE ACHIEVE HERE TODAY. FOR IT WAS HERE, IN THIS ENVIRONMENT, WITHIN THIS BUILDING AND WITHIN THIS FAMILY, THAT THOUSANDS OF GRADUATES HAVE BEEN INSTILLED WITH THE VIRTUES OF SERVICE, RESPONSIBILITY, AND SACRIFICE.

AND NONE OF THOSE GRADUATES LEARNED AND PRACTICED THESE VIRTUES MORE SO THAN THE MEN WE HONOR AND REMEMBER TODAY.

SIX BRAVE YOUNG MEN, WHO DURING THEIR HIGH SCHOOL YEARS PARTICIPATED IN ACTIVITIES COMMON TO MANY STUDENTS: FOOTBALL, WRESTLING, HOCKEY, TRACK, BASEBALL, LANGUAGE CLUBS, AND A HOST OF OTHER ACTIVITIES. SOME WERE DESCRIBED AS QUIET AND REFLECTIVE – OTHERS RELISHED THE PARTIES AND OPEN HOUSES THAT I REMEMBER SO WELL. SEVERAL ATTENDED SERVICE ACADEMIES AND COLLEGES. ALL SIX – PAUL, BILL, BUD, BOB, MICHAEL, AND DANIEL – LEFT US TOO SOON, MAKING THEIR ULTIMATE SACRIFICES AT AGES RANGING FROM 21 TO 27.

AND SO TODAY, ON A BEAUTIFUL JUNE MORNING, SEVERAL GENERATIONS OF OUR ARCHBISHOP WILLIAMS FAMILY ARE GATHERED TO HONOR AND REMEMBER THESE SIX YOUNG MEN. SOME 45 YEARS AFTER OUR FIRST YOUNG GRADUATE MADE THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE, WE GATHER TO WELCOME HIM AND FIVE OTHERS HOME. ALL PRODUCTS OF A

RELATIVELY SMALL, CATHOLIC, NEW ENGLAND HIGH SCHOOL, WHO ANSWERED THE CALL – WHO UNDERSTOOD AND EXEMPLIFIED THE MEANING OF SERVICE, RESPONSIBILITY, AND SACRIFICE.

LET US PLEDGE HERE TODAY TO NEVER FORGET THEM OR HOW THEIR BRIEF LIVES ENRICHED US ALL. WE, AS A NATION, AS A COMMUNITY, AND AS AN EXTENDED FAMILY OWE THEM A DEBT OF GRATITUDE - A DEBT WHICH CAN NEVER BE REPAYED.

I FIND IT PARTICULARLY FITTING THAT THIS MEMORIAL IS BEING DEDICATED ON THE EVE OF FLAG DAY - AND THAT IT SITS BENEATH THE STAFF WHERE OUR COLORS ARE RAISED AND LOWERED EACH DAY. AS SUCH, LET ME SUGGEST THAT THIS MEMORIAL IS NOT MERELY CHISELED STONE AND CONCRETE BUT IS IN FACT A REMINDER – ONE THAT WILL PROVIDE GENERATIONS OF ARCHBISHOP WILLIAMS FAMILY MEMBERS YET TO COME, WITH A TWICE DAILY OPPORTUNITY. AN OPPORTUNITY TO VIEW THESE SIX NAMES, MEMBERS OF OUR EXTENDED FAMILY, AND TO REFLECT ON THE TRUE MEANING OF SERVICE, RESPONSIBILITY, SACRIFICE, AND PERHAPS EQUALLY AS IMPORTANT, TO LEARN AND APPRECIATE THE HUMAN COSTS OF FREEDOM AND PEACE.

I WOULD ALSO ASK THAT THOSE FUTURE STUDENTS, WHO GAZE AND REFLECT ON THIS MEMORIAL, REMEMBER NOT ONLY THESE SIX MEN BUT ALSO THE COUNTLESS OTHER MEN AND WOMEN IN UNIFORM FROM ACROSS THIS COUNTRY,

WHO ON A DAILY BASIS CONTINUE TO SERVE AND SACRIFICE.

SO IN THE SHADOW OF OUR FLAGSTAFF, LET US REMEMBER SIX YOUNG MEN IN THE WORDS OF THE ENGLISH POET, LAURENCE BINYON, WHO SAID NEARLY 100 HUNDRED YEARS AGO:

“THEY WENT WITH SONGS TO THE BATTLE - THEY WERE YOUNG,
STRAIGHT OF LIMB, TRUE OF EYE, STEADY, AND AGLOW.

THEY WERE STAUNCH TO THE END, AGAINST ODDS UNCOUNTED;
THEY FELL WITH THEIR FACES TO THE FOE.

THEY SHALL GROW NOT OLD, AS WE THAT ARE LEFT GROW OLD; AGE SHALL NOT WEARY THEM, NOR THE YEARS CONDEMN. AT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN AND IN THE MORNING, WE WILL REMEMBER THEM.”

THANK YOU AGAIN FOR ALLOWING ME TO SHARE IN THIS DEDICATION.

MAY GOD BLESS ALL OF YOU – SEMPER FIDELIS.