

2006 Independence Day Message From the Secretary of Defense

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More than two centuries ago, groups of patriots gathered in halls and in farm houses to debate the course of a young nation's destiny. Their journey was a difficult one. Early in their pursuit of freedom, a man named James Allen wrote in his diary, "Many thinking people believe America has seen its best days." But, many other Americans thought better, and the result of their determination was a government dedicated to the inherent equality of all people and their unalienable right to liberty.

It was one group of patriots in particular - farmers and shopkeepers turned colonial soldiers - that our nation relied upon to secure those ideals. The soldiers suffered many defeats along the way, but they never surrendered their willingness to make any sacrifice for a cause greater than themselves.

Promoting the highest of ideals and defending them at all costs is a defining characteristic of what it is to be American. The American commitment to a noble cause began at Lexington and Concord, but it did not end with a surrender at Yorktown. The work continued -- in the courage of generations who marched for suffrage and civil rights, and on hundreds of battlefields, from Gettysburg to Normandy to Tal Afar.

Today, we continue to be blessed by the service of men and women as dedicated to the cause of freedom as the first generation who wore our country's uniform. And it is during this time of year we reflect on our freedoms and way of life secured through their actions. Those men and women -- volunteers all -- serve and they sacrifice along dusty streets in harsh lands, aboard ships sailing across the globe's oceans, and among our communities, all with a single purpose: to make safe the blessings we are privileged to enjoy.

To each of you serving our nation's highest ideals, know that you are part of a proud legacy. You have been and are making history, and you will be an inspiration for the generations to come. May God bless each of you. May God bless your families and your loved ones. And may God continue to bless our wonderful country.

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