

Norton, Kansas (Monday, November 11, 1963)

Veterans Day is one of our greatest commemorative holidays, and its observance was broadened by the proclamation of August 25, 1955, by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, to include veterans of all wars.

The Eisenhower proclamation stated, in part, "Whereas it is altogether fitting that a grateful nation should set aside one day each year to pay special homage to the veterans who have fought so valiantly in all of its wars to preserve our heritage of freedom....I, Dwight D. Eisenhower, President of the United States of America, do hereby call upon all of our citizens to observe Friday, November the eleventh, 1955, as Veterans Day-- a day of commemoration of those who sacrificed to preserve our Nation and of rededication to the task of achieving an enduring peace. I also direct the appropriate officials of the Government to arrange for the display of the Flag of the United States on all public buildings on Veterans Day...signed...Dwight D. Eisenhower."

In the one hundred and eighty-eight years since our country proclaimed itself an independent and a free nation Americans have had to shoulder arms on nine different occasions in defense of this freedom and independence.

The freedom and liberty which are our heritage today have been preserved only through the sacrifices of those men and women who took up arms in their country's defense when our independence was threatened.

We take our liberty and freedom too much for granted. We are quick to resent any obvious infringement of personal freedom, but having been free for one hundred and eighty-eight years, we sometimes fail to notice the subtler, more insidious undermining of the foundations on which American liberty was built.

We must rededicate ourselves on Veterans Day this year to a more profound belief in freedom and liberty -- to a more watchful care of the American way of life. This is a duty we owe to the almost one million defenders who never came back from battle; to millions of others who returned maimed and handicapped as a result of their war service; to the millions now in uniform, here and abroad, and particularly those now engaged in fighting communism.

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While we talk of peace and international good will, the test ban treaty, the sale of wheat to Russia, corn to Hungary, and other American efforts to relax world tensions, let us not forget that 130 Americans have died fighting communism in Viet Nam. If the steps our government is taking were part of any general program to relieve world tensions, to alleviate the threat of nuclear war, to establish a rule of law and order for troubled nations, that would be wonderful. But what has been done or offered to establish peaceful co-existence in divided Germany, where the Berlin Wall separates one people and one side shoots to kill the person who tries to cross it? What has been done to establish peaceful co-existence in Cuba, where Castro rules a once-free people with Soviet backing and spreads subversion to Latin America? What in South Viet Nam, where Americans die almost every day in an effort to preserve freedom for people who want to keep it? Peace and good will, I still insist, are not to be found along a one-way street.

I recognize future progress of Kansas farm economy depends upon expanded trade; that there may be economic benefits, and of course that other countries may sell to communist Russia if we do not, but it seems a reasonable request to me that this Administration should assure the American public that any sale to any communist country of any commodity can be consummated without endangering the life of one American.

J. Edgar Hoover, in his recent book, "A Study of Communism", stated, "In a democratic society, it is the duty of the government to keep the people informed. It is equally the duty of each citizen to insure that he is informed. It is obvious, of course, that no real defense can be maintained against communism unless our government continues to move positively and firmly to protect our freedoms."

In other words, let's be realistic, let us not be overcome by the intense propaganda barrage concerning peaceful co-existence. We owe it to ourselves and future generations, in addition to today's veterans, to make certain the dollar sign does not cloud our thinking in dealing with international communism. Americans want, more than anything else, lasting peace. I suggest this will not be achieved as long as concessions are made on a unilateral basis, but only when Khrushchev is willing to deal with free world countries at arm's length. Let us never forget as we pause to pay tribute to American veterans, living and dead, that there has been no change in Khrushchev's general policy of "burying us."