

## Reflecting on our Enduring Freedoms

*The cement of this union is the heart-blood of every American. I do not believe there is on earth a government established on so immovable a basis. - Thomas Jefferson to Lafayette, 1814*

Iconic Dodgers sportscaster, Vin Scully, in his holiday public service announcement, makes an important point when asking us to discern the difference between the 4<sup>th</sup> of July and Independence Day. He notes that July 4<sup>th</sup> is a day of flags, parades, barbecues, fireworks and apple pie. Our national commemoration of declaring independence from tyranny, however, is an appropriate time to call to mind those who risked everything in order to guarantee American self-governance and those who took a sacred oath to stand as sentinels in the defense of our freedom for the last 246 years.

At the heart of the Revolution was the core belief that those who govern can only do so with the consent of the governed. This humble founding principle formed the foundation of what would become the most powerful country on the planet and from which flows the guarantee of freedom that her citizens so richly enjoy. Our forebearers won for us the right to have our voices heard, to peacefully protest and the right to choose the leaders we feel will govern well. Yet today we are inundated with reporting of American discontent of government, often resulting in mass protest, vitriol and even violent insurrection. Today's 1776 banners and "Don't Tread on Me" flags hearken back to the righteous outrage and helplessness that the colonists endured under British rule in the American colonies, but the years leading up to the signing of the Declaration of Independence offered an intolerable setting that would be alien to us today.

After the French and Indian wars, many colonists couldn't grasp why the British Crown still needed to maintain an oppressive military presence in the colonies. Why, after fighting for and toiling on colonial land, were colonists forced to pay a series of taxes to fund the British military presence and the Crown's colonial governors in the colonies? Colonists were forbidden from westward expansion, creating the widely-held belief that the Crown intended to limit colonial access to bountiful American lands and easier control of the colonists. Of greatest consequence, the colonists had no representation in British Parliament and the Crown repeatedly abolished colonial legislatures, laws and charters. To add insult to injury, the Crown implemented an act requiring the colonists to provide food and shelter to the same British troops whose abuses against the colonists were not accounted for and who had the authority to arrest and try colonists in jury-less military tribunals. Widespread indignation took hold in the American colonies as did the understanding that revolt meant a British civil war on American soil - with no guarantee of success.

The Declaration of Independence, as a statement of principles, would have meant little were it not for those who felt the duty to wager their fortunes, honor and lives for this noble

cause. Of the 56 men who signed the declaration, 12 fought in battles as members of colonial militias; five were captured and imprisoned during the Revolutionary War; 17 lost property as a result of British raids; and five lost their fortunes in helping fund the Continental Army and state militias to battle the British military. With a population of approximately 2.5 million colonists inhabiting the 13 colonies, an estimated 35,000 Continental forces were killed as a result of War for American Independence. Proportionally, this would make the American Revolution the most costly conflict in American history. The freedoms we enjoy, or take for granted, were by no means free.

I remember hearing Vin Scully's voice while watching sports on Dad's lap in the mid 1970's. Baseball, safety, comfort and the voice I'll always associate with America. At 94, Mr. Scully asks us to remember who and what we are thankful for receiving on this Independence Day. To be sure, America faces some challenges. Soaring inflation, intervention in foreign wars, turbulent judicial decisions, hyper-partisan politics and antidemocratic movements are just a few current trends that create anxiety over the country's future. But the liberties our colonial forbearers fought for, and our veterans stood watch over, still bless our lives as Americans. Our voices still matter and those who govern still do so with the consent of the governed. Mr. Scully asks us to thank those who have maintained our freedoms and to consider supporting veterans organizations like the Gold Coast Veterans Foundation, in order to put an end to the tragedy of veteran suffering and homelessness. On Independence Day, as we express our gratitude for those who stood for freedom and appreciate what it means to be a free nation, as Mr, Scully said, our fireworks are a little brighter and our apple pie a little sweeter.