

Commentary

StepSaver THE OBSERVER

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Happy birthday America

In honor of the Fourth of July, The Observer is reprinting selected sections of the Declaration of Independence. For the complete Declaration or other historical documents, visit, www.ushistory.org.

"When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with

another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security. — Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States.

We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these united Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States, that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. — And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor."



Covering a heartfelt graduation surprise

A few hours before Southington High School graduated last month, a member of the Policki family called my office to tell us about the surprise awaiting Jennifer Policki, who was graduating later that night. Her brother Andy, a Marine, had just returned home from a tour of duty in Afghanistan and had every intention of surprising his little sister at her graduation.

According to mother Marita, the family had tried to make the surprise happen for a while before graduation. Andy began planning the surprise once he was notified that he was returning home after he had suffered minor injuries when a vehicle he was in was hit by a roadside bomb.

Wearing his dress uniform and holding a bouquet of flowers, Andy waited patiently for his sister to come into view. The surprised worked, and when Jennifer saw Andy she gave him a big hug with tears flowing freely down her face.

This touching scene was caught by several print and television journalists, including The Observer.

It was not until I was editing staff reporter Rob Glidden's article on the graduation and looking over the photographs from the evening did I realize that I had interviewed and talked with both Andy and Jennifer for a 2007 story concerning their older brother Mike.

That May, Mike had returned



Ed Harris
Thoughts around town

home for a little rest and relaxation following an eight month tour of duty in Iraq. I do not recall completely how it came about, but I was invited to the Policki house to talk to Mike about his return home for a brief period.

I was especially taken aback by how candid Mike was about his experiences in Iraq. I had thought there would be little he could say about his tour, but he was forthright and spoke quite frankly.

Mike said his unit drove heavily armed trucks while they were out in a convoy, so there was little worry about small arms fire. The biggest fear and worry, he said, was improvised explosive devices (IED).

Mike said his truck had come upon four IEDs, but all were discovered and safely detonated before they could cause any damage.

He was only in Iraq for five days before he had his first taste of combat when insurgents opened fire on his convoy while it was out on patrol. His gunner was hit in the neck and slumped back into the truck, falling behind Mike, who was in the driver's seat. Mike said he watched the soldier bleed out as the convoy sped to the nearest checkpoint in search of aid.

This is just a sampling of the combat action that Mike told me about. At the time, he said his unit lost 11 men, mostly due to IEDs.

Mike said he had limited interaction with the Iraqi population, mostly at checkpoints and while training the country's police and army. However, Mike said he grew to dislike the Iraqis, as they were known to hit U.S. servicemen with little or no provocation.

During that May 2007 interview I also talked with Andy, had then just recently enlisted in the Marines. He said it was something that he had always wanted to do and that he was leaving for basic training that September.

I did not get the chance to talk to Jennifer that much, but she did tell me she missed Mike while he was gone.

In the months following I did a few more stories involving Mike and his mother Marita. While in Southington, Mike spoke at a few

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My memories of the fourth of July

The 4th of July is special. It is America's birthday, and most people have fond memories of this wonderful summer holiday. These memories may include fireworks displays, family gatherings, parades, picnics, baseball games, or boating excursions.

Some people might even remember a time when Americans would pause on this holiday and contemplate its true meaning: a group of citizens courageously risked everything they had to tell the most powerful nation on earth, "Thanks but no thanks for all your meddling and oppressive taxes. We're gonna govern ourselves from now on." Something, in my view, the states ought to say occasionally to Washington, D.C.—but I digress.

Contrary to what my kids think, I was not present at the original signing of the Declaration of Independence, hanging out and sharing a few beers with Thomas Jefferson and Ben Franklin, along with their wives, Weezy Jefferson and Aretha Franklin. From what I gather, Philadelphia in July, before the invention of Hawaiian shirts, Bermuda shorts, air conditioning, and flush toilets, was not exactly the world's most comfortable summer vacation spot. Ol' Tom and Ben surely had fond memories of the original 4th of July, but those memories probably did not include how lovely wool clothing and powdered wigs felt when the weather was 97-degrees and humid.

My most fond 4th of July memo-



Bill Dunn
Laugh or Death

ry dates back to 1970. I was 13 years old, and my family had just embarked on a cross-country camping trip. We had one small camper and seven people, including five kids between the ages of one and 13. Five weeks and 8,000 miles later we returned home without losing a single person. (We did, however, lose our sanity, somewhere in South Dakota, I believe.)

We actually spent the 4th of July in Ontario, Canada, which was pretty interesting, because back in 1970 Canadians used a very special term to describe the 4th of July: Saturday. They celebrate our Independence Day the same way we celebrate their Victoria Day, that is, with a shrug of the shoulders and a puzzled, "Huh?" (Or rather: "Eh?")

But the really vivid memory occurred on July 2nd, when we were at a rural campground in upstate New York. (The word "rural" doesn't do it justice. This place was like "Deliverance" meets "Little House on

the Prairie" meets the PBS documentary "The Violent Life of a Cro-Magnon Village.") It was the first time I ever observed people doing two particular things: drinking whiskey straight from the bottle and blowing stuff up.

An especially boisterous group of campers seemed to have more explosives than Patton's entire Third Army. In the evening, from dusk until about 3 a.m., these guys set up shop on the shore of a small lake and went through about four bottles of rot-gut and 400 pounds of cherry bombs, M-80s, quarter-sticks of dynamite, and possibly a couple of low-level nuclear devices. The more they drank, the more they thought it was hilarious to toss lit cherry bombs at each other. It was an awesome show.

I vividly remember one guy who decided to do a Bob Feller windmill windup before hurling a cherry bomb out into the lake. Just as his pitching arm moved forward—KABOOM!—the bomb exploded in his hand. I think the ump called a balk.

After pausing a moment, the guy held out his smoldering hand toward his pals—as blisters the size of golf balls formed in his palm—and they all laughed hysterically.

The 4th of July brings back fond memories. At least for those of us who still have all our fingers.

Bill Dunn is a freelance writer who resides in Torrington. He can be reached via his Web site at: www.boomertrek.com.