

**Director's Talk at HRSC-NE Memorial Day Ceremony**  
**May 23, 2002**



Good morning. I'd like to wish you each a Happy Memorial Day. I hope you enjoy the holiday and enjoy your well-earned day off.

This is our fourth commemoration of Memorial Day at the HRSC-NE.

Last year, when I spoke, I suggested that sometimes a pathological drive to control the lives of other people infects the actions of entire nations and when that happens we are all threatened. I mentioned also that when that happens, we always turn to the men and women of the Armed Forces for protection and that that protection *“is something we can never take for granted.”*

Well, of course, there could have been no more vivid demonstration of those thoughts than the events that subsequently unfolded on September 11<sup>th</sup>. And now, as always, individuals are making the ultimate sacrifice for the people of this nation in an encounter with terrorism that promises to last for years. And so, meeting at this time could not be more appropriate.

On the walls surrounding this conference room are photos of our Armed Forces engaged in the activities that protect us from these murderers of unsuspecting and unprotected civilians. Please take a few minutes to look them over. On the wall to my left, however, are the names of those who have already made the ultimate sacrifice for us. They were alive when we spoke here last year. They are no longer alive. Please take a minute today, or in the future, to read their brief biographies. And, if you are inclined to, say a prayer for the families they left behind.

Many of these men who have died on the battlefield during this past year, did so because they made a conscious choice to put themselves in harm's way in order to protect the principles and ideals of this country. There are, it is true, skeptics who just can't believe that such honorable and straightforward feelings truly exist within the hearts their countrymen. But, in fact, those heartfelt beliefs do exist. For me, the most elegant expression of those feelings was captured in a letter from a soldier to his wife prior to the first major battle in the Civil War, the battle of Manassas, or the battle of Bull Run as it was referred to in the North.

Technically the Civil War started in April of 1861 at Fort Sumpter when the newly formed Confederacy fired on Union forces, who were re-supplying that Fort. But no subsequent confrontations had taken place between that April and July 21<sup>st</sup>. It was then, however, that the Union decided that it needed to engage the Confederacy at Manassas, Virginia. No one knew what the outcome would be, but hopes were

very high that the encounter would be nothing more than a brief skirmish that would bring both sides to their senses and end the War on the spot. A week before the battle, on July 14, 1861, Major Sullivan Ballou wrote to his wife, Sarah, and reflected on his role in the war, his reasons for being there and its possible impact on the life they were sharing together. Here, in an edited version, is what he said:

*My very dear Sarah:*

*The indications are very strong that we shall move in a few days, perhaps tomorrow. And lest I should not be able to write you again, I feel impelled to write a few lines that may fall under your eyes when I shall be no more. If it is necessary that I should fall on the battle-field for my Country, I am ready. I have no misgivings about or lack of confidence in the cause in which I am engaged, and my courage does not halt or falter. I know how strongly American Civilization now leans on the triumph of the Government and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and suffering of the Revolution. And I am willing – perfectly willing—to lay down all of my joys in this life, to help maintain this Government and to pay that debt.*

*Sarah, my love for you is deathless. It seems to bind me with mighty cables that nothing but Omnipotence could break; and yet my love of Country bears me irresistibly on, with all of these chains to the battlefield.*

*The memories of all the blissful moments I have enjoyed with you come creeping over me and I feel most deeply grateful to God and to you that I have enjoyed them for so long. And how hard it is for me to give them up, and burn to ashes the hopes of future years, when, God willing, we might have lived and loved together, and seen our boys grow up to honorable manhood around us. I know that I have but few small claims upon Divine Providence, but something whispers to me that I shall return to my loved ones unharmed. If I do not, dear Sarah, never forget how much I love you, nor that when my last breath escapes me on the battle-field, it will whisper your name.*

*But, O Sarah, if the dead can come back to this earth and flit unseen around those they loved, I shall be always with you in the gladdest day and in the darkest night, amidst your happiest scene and gloomiest hours – always, always, and if there be a soft breeze upon your cheek, it shall be my breath; or the cool air fans your throbbing temple, it shall be my spirit passing by. Sarah, do not mourn me dead; think I am gone and wait for me for we shall meet again...*

*Sullivan*

Manassas turned out to be a terrible battle. 4500 men were killed or wounded on both sides. Among those killed was Major Sullivan Ballou of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Rhode Island Infantry.

Please join me in a moment of silence for those who have lost their lives defending us in this past year.

**Please join me now, in the Pledge of Allegiance.**

**Thank you all for coming. Please enjoy the holiday and fly the flag.**

\*\*\*\*\*