

SERMON FOR VETERANS DAY 2017  
NOVEMBER 5, 2017

The Lord said, "Whom shall I send and who will go for us" And I said "Here am I; send me.

Forty-eight years ago, I took an oath, something I still live by today.

I, Michael Stitt, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same and I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me according to regulation and the uniform code of military justice,  
SO HELP ME GOD.

This is the oath that anyone entering any branch of the military takes. It is the beginning of a long road to becoming a veteran.

Next Saturday November 11<sup>th</sup> is Veterans Day. A day for picnics, maybe a trip to a park, hiking or fishing and all kinds of sporting events. Then there are the parades, school bands, scouts, marching units and the veterans, three generations strong. Most people along the parade route will cheer and wave but some will laugh and jeer. I feel sorry for those that do this. They don't know that most of these veterans have seen the horrors of war, they endured hardship that we can only imagine and they came home to fight a personal battle for what they saw. Just so we can enjoy the freedom that we have today.

Cindy and I are a family of veterans. Most of Cindy's family served during WW2, my great-great grandfather served in the Union army during the civil war, my grandfather in WW1, my father and uncles in WW2, I in Viet Nam during the Cold War, our son in Iraq and Afghanistan, and several other countries that most people don't know exist, our grandson is a 1<sup>st</sup> Lt in the Army serving in Germany and our grand son-in-law is in Japan serving in the Air Force. For almost three years a blue star flag hung in our window, I wouldn't wish that on anyone. A blue star flag is a small banner that is hung in a window. The number of stars indicates how many children of that household are in the service of their country during wartime. I have read that because of the all-volunteer military only two percent of United States families have someone in the service. In some ways, this is good but it puts a great burden on so few.

I have also read and heard people saying that veterans are heroes. We are not heroes. I like to think that we are just ordinary people that have done extraordinary things. I have met some outstanding and brave men and women during my time in service. Medics who risk their lives to save others, doctors and nurses working tirelessly, snipers who spend days, weeks alone watching for the right moment, men who stood their ground knowing they were outnumbered. Pilots who provided cover fire and helicopter pilots that flew into enemy fire to get their men out of harm's way. Then there were the chaplains, men of God of all faiths who went out armed with only a bible and communion set. Well, except one Catholic priest I knew who always had his bible in his pocket, a 45 strapped to his waist and 12-gauge shotgun over his shoulder. He often said "I might be a man of God but if I'm going to heaven from the field of battle I'm taking someone with me for company".

I have always considered my time in service easy, at least compared to my forefathers and son. As most of you know I was a cook. In Viet Nam, I worked in the Commanding General's Club of the 25<sup>th</sup> division and the rest of my service was spent in hospitals in the states and Germany. My time was not

without some excitement. In Viet Nam, I would hear the rockets passing over head headed for the airfield that was their favorite target. At night, I could see mortar rounds being lobed toward our compound. As was the case of many of us that traveled highway one, there was a sniper who would shoot at us, he was such a poor shot that no one shot back thinking that he would be replaced with someone better. While flying with the General one day, I got to watch a B-52 strike, you didn't see the plane, you couldn't hear the bombs but for an area one mile wide and three miles long nothing was left except piles of burning earth. The worst I saw and will always remember is the aftermath of it all. The damage done to the mind, body and spirit of a lot of brave men.

I was also fortunate to meet many interesting and famous people. A lot of one, two, three, and four star generals and the grandson of Gen. George Patton. Many government officials and a vice president that wasn't supposed to be where he was. Bob Hope, he was as funny off stage as on, Neil Armstrong, that was a great honor and the rest of the cast of the USO show. While stationed at Brook General Hospital in Texas I met and talked with Lady Bird Johnson in the Presidential suite, President Johnson had just had a heart attack and was at Brooke for treatment, of course my son had to beat that by having lunch with Laura Bush while in Iraq. In Germany I was stationed at the 97<sup>th</sup> General Hospital in Frankfurt. One day the wife of a Russian officer was brought in, she had suffered a stroke and because she was a military dependent she couldn't go to a civilian hospital. Since I had a high security clearance I was assigned to her care team. Can you imagine this was at the height of the cold war, Russia and the United States weren't exactly friendly and this poor Russian woman is in an American Army hospital. Not only was I her cook, I was also her food taster, did I mention she didn't quite trust me. My proudest moments came several years after leaving the service. The first being when my son graduated from officer candidate school and I was allowed to give him his first salute, a few years later his son followed in his footsteps and I was there to give my grandson the first salute of his career.

When most people think of veterans day we think of people going to war in defense of our way of life. We see Army Special Forces, big tanks and guns, the big ships of the Navy, the fighter jets and bombers of the Air Force and Marines storming a coast line. Most people don't see the Coast Guard saving people from a sinking ship or plucking people off of rooftops after a flood. They don't see military doctors and nurses treating people after a disaster or the Air Force loading their big cargo planes with much needed supplies. The National Guard being called out in the middle of the night to search for lost hikers and the Reserves being called to protect and serve areas ravaged by storms. We forget about the Marines and their toys for tots and the children's homes and hospitals all over the world getting supplies and equipment they need because a soldier cared.

This veterans day let's not forget the real heroes. The wives, husbands and children who had to watch us leave for far off places. They endured being without their spouse, fathers and mothers for months sometimes years at a time. They endured the loneliness hardships, not knowing when or if we would return, all while we were serving our country.

There is a little poem I think about this time of year.

Some people dream the dream  
Some people live the dream  
Some people defend the dream  
God bless the defenders

The lord said "who shall I send and who will go for us" and I said "here am I; send me. Amen.