

July 4, 1995

Dear Children and Grandchildren:

Grandfather and I have just returned from our ward's annual July 4th flag raising. We had a good crowd. Wally Hansen conducted the meeting. It was our ward's turn to handle the meeting. It was a beautiful cool, but sunny morning. The night before there had been a brief but strong thunderstorm, and the whole valley was re-washed (there had been a strong rain storm the day before, also) clean. Dad and I had both worn jackets because of the coolness.

You children will remember Jack Hopkinson. He made a lot of money in his janitorial business, and has gone heavily into a hobby of antique collecting. Among his antiques he has found and restored one of the earliest fire engines of Provo. He also has some antique cannons, and also happens to be very patriotic. Every fourth of July for our flag raising, he drags out his cannons and for the last couple of raisings, his refurbished fire engines, and shoots the cannons and rings the firebells before and after the flag raising.

In preparation for the fourth of July parade, the powers that be had arranged for 25 large hot air balloons to be launched, and they rose just to the west of us, and it seemed as if they were part of our own celebration.

We started of course, by an opening prayer and the raising of the flag and the reciting of the pledge of allegiance. We then sang the national anthem. Wally Hansen was conducting, and he was getting a little nervous, because the invited speaker had not yet arrived. He asked Tom Toyn if he could recall some war memories before the speaker arrived, but Tom was saved because the speaker just then found us. He had been driving around up by the temple trying to locate us.

He was a high ranking LDS Airforce officer (retired now). His last tour of duty (to his delight) was a tour of duty to be the commanding officer of the BYU ROTC. His name as near as Tracy can remember was Bertylson, and he had flown, among other things, the Blackbird. He told of it's speed. It will fly from one coast to another in about an hour and a half. Prior to the sudden recent demise of communism, he had been on duty patrolling and taking pictures of a Russian Submarine Port, so that our command could know at all times how many Russian submarines were in port or out of port, so that they could monitor how many submarines might possibly be off our shores. He commented that recently there is a mission President of the LDS church located in that same port. The advantage of scout planes over satellites is that the planes can photograph through darkness, clouds, and fog. He said that the Iraqis knew exactly when the satellite would be in position to take pictures of their installations, and they just camouflaged their operations while the satellite was in position and then after it left position, then they just went about their business. They can't hid like that from the planes. At a question and answer session after he finished talking, someone asked if any of those planes are now in service. He said that they all had been taken out of service, but that he understands they recently have put three full units back in service, which he was glad to know.

When he was at the BYU several of his cadets entered a patriotic essay contest sponsored by some national institution (sorry, I don't remember the institution) and a couple of the cadets placed near the top of the contest. He read one of them for us. Afterwards he commented that we now refer to those who serve their country as "being in the military", whereas in previous times those who served were referred to as "being in the service." He much preferred the former

title because it is very necessary that we have young men and women who are willing, usually at some financial sacrifice, to serve and protect their country. We need to be grateful for their "service".

He related that Andy Rooney, of 60 minutes, studied under a famous scholar who was a pacifist. When Andy's number came up in the draft in world war two he was by that time a real devotee of this pacifist, and ask his parents how they would feel if he refused, even at the possibility of going to prison, to serve in the military. He finally decided to go into the service and he fought in the Normandy invasion. He really wondered about the morality of the United States fighting a war to preserve the freedom of any nation other than its own, until he was with a unit who marched into and freed the prisoners in a nazi concentration camp. That experience changed his mind. He realized that there will always be leaders like Hitler, and Mussolini, and Stalin, who will try to destroy the freedom of the whole world if possible, and who must, by all means be stopped.

I was very stirred by his talk. After the talk was over, Daddy drove the car home and I decided to walk home, around the MTC to get a little exercise. I realized that I probably have never indicated to my children and grandchildren, the deep gratitude that I have that I live in this blessed and free country. The Lord created a beautiful world, and there are many places in that world that are as beautiful, even more beautiful than our own country. But it is a rare American who does not return from abroad any place in the world, and not be grateful to put their feet back on the blessed soil of their own country. It is, indeed, a blessed land, and a land blessed beyond all others. In spite of the problems which our country seems to have, and which receives so much attention in the media, I strongly believe that the great majority of the people of this nation are good, patriotic, God fearing citizens. The minority get the attention and the notoriety--but remember--they are the minority. Oh, I remember--I have one other time written my feelings about this blessed land. In the forward of the Langford genealogy if you want to look it up some time. Your Grandfather feels the same way that I do.

Anyway, as I walked home around the MTC, I was so full of gratitude to our Heavenly Father that he allowed me to be born an American and a member of the LDS church, which I know is TRUE. I don't know what I did to deserve such a heritage, but I am grateful to HIM that he allowed this to happen to me--and to all of the rest of our children and grandchildren. I was keenly aware of the beauty of our valley as I walked home. The abundant moisture we have had this spring has made all of our shrubs, trees, and flowers lush and gorgeous. The golden rain trees on the MTC grounds were in bloom and in the height of their glory. It had been a while since I had made this walk, and the grounds around the new addition to the MTC were complete and gorgeous. There is a deep descent from the sidewalk where I stood, down into the drive and landscaping around the new addition. They have built a pavilion where there are many flag poles--maybe one for each of the countries where the missionaries go--I don't know, but on this day only one flag was flying--ours. There was only a light breeze to stir it's colors--and beyond in the western skies were those 25 mostly red-white-and blue hot air balloons--with one in the shape of a dinosaur. It was a glorious sight.

I envy those who, with words, can convey emotions. I can't. But I wanted the grandchildren to know that their grandparents love and revere this beautiful land in which we live, and that we hope that they, too, will feel this same strong patriotism for America--even to the extent, if necessary, to be willing to die for that country.