

Old Glory Over Katrina

Last week's TV coverage showed the American flags come out across the Hurricane Katrina-stricken Gulf Coast. Some were mounted on makeshift flag poles to stand attention in the warm wind. Some were laid out in shreds across the ruins. Yet, these U.S. flags aren't shrouds over the wreckage. Our American flag pops out of disaster scenes because it's our banner of hope, solidarity and defiance.

Four years ago after 9-11, as soon as the fires were stopped, servicemen and firefighters unfurled a huge American flag like a bandage over the wounded Pentagon. American flags blossomed in the cosmopolitan concrete of New York City. Old Glory graced the fence around the smoking scar in the Pennsylvania countryside. Across the Nation, our flag flew across roads, on cars, over homes and businesses – everywhere Americans needed to shout; “We're here. Our flag flies. We live. We survive. We are not defeated. We will win the Victory. We are Americans. We, The People, are one nation under God. And, oh yeah, to whoever did this to us, we're coming to kill you.”

When the War - which was declared against us by terrorist acts, but which is not a Global War on Terrorism, but a World War on Islamists - shifted from the campaign against the Taliban in Afghanistan to the campaign against Saddam Hussein in Iraq, the nation split along the lines our Second American Civil War (ACW II). Liberals balked at saying ‘one nation under God’ lest they offend the God of the murderers of 9-11. Or, exclude the minority, other Liberals, who don't believe in God. Likewise, Liberals lost the ardor to pursue victory in eliminating a mass murderer with designs for more mayhem. Liberals blame the loss of national unity, and all manner of evil and most things detestable to unpleasant on President Bush.

Yet, when soldiers disobey dangerous lawful orders, is the leader or the troops at fault? I was reminded of this specific situation last week when I attended the retirement ceremony of my West Point classmate, Major General Paul Eaton. In our Infantry Officer Basic Course the instructors actually role-played soldiers refusing orders in our field problems. It was 1972. The last infantry battalion folded its colors in Vietnam the week we graduated. The U.S. Army was an armed mob. The American flag was abused in protests by the same-thinking people protesting Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).

Paul spoke about re-building The Army as a lieutenant in the 4th Infantry Division. Comrades from that service, when service was distained, were present at his retirement. Service was its own, and only, reward then. I looked at Paul standing at attention and remembered Ranger Eaton standing straight in the same platoon through a cold Winter Ranger. He kept standing ‘Proud and True’ for 33 years of service. This Major General and his wife, PJ, believe in service, in the Army that says, “This We'll Defend”, as they invested both of their sons in the Infantry. Their young men stood taller in their fatigues than their father. One has been to Iraq and one is on his way.

Iraq is where Paul organized a new Iraqi Army from the broken, Baathist-infested, brutal excuse for an Army that butchered for Saddam Hussein. MG Eaton's life experience of building the world's most powerful Army from Vietnam's institutional self-destruction to

Operation Desert Storm and WW IV served him, Iraq and America well. Iraqi battalions are fighting for a new country – not unlike our Army which is a year older than our Declaration of Independence.

Frankly, I don't know what kind of Iraq will be around 30 years from now when Paul's sons retire, should they serve so long. But, I know this. When the band played 'Retreat' and Old Glory was run up the pole from half-mast for the late Chief Justice to the tip top and lowered swiftly against a brilliant blue sky over the old rampart at Ft. Monroe, Virginia, I got goose-bumps. The real shivers I felt seeing our flag and feeling the love, pride, devotion, courage, unity, and hope which it's simple presence sent coursing through my body surprised me. I've seen it so many times. But, in that moment honoring my classmate, I felt the Duty, Honor and Country ties that touch Katrina survivors and providers, old and young soldiers, and citizens of every condition alike.

The Liberals may surrender to the Islamists. However, the rest of We, The People, will never quit. We will win – no matter what.

James Atticus Bowden