

June 27, 1967

Howard A. Kellermann  
Lieutenant Colonel, USAR (Ret.)  
7157 North Oriole  
Chicago, Illinois 60631

Dear Colonel Kellermann:

Probably no person can adequately sympathize or understand the grief of a father who has lost a son in battle far from home. Nor can one fully understand the bitterness which quite naturally springs from the hard fact, that after thousands of years of civilization, mankind still arbitrates the differences between nations by blood, death, maiming and destruction.

In your bereavement, let me convey these thoughts, feeble as they may be, from one who was a soldier on the Western Front in World War I, who is a father, a father-in-law whose son-in-law served in the Pacific in World War II and who has a grandson who in another five years could be eligible for military service.

At age 22, I sat in a balloon basket high above the terrain on the Western Front in France, observing artillery fire and wondering with each salvo how many enemy soldiers were being killed or wounded.

But I was wondering also what I was doing there 3000 miles from home. Would I be privileged to go back home in due season or was I ordained to be the target of an enemy shell. Back home, a saintly mother was praying for my safe return each day.

They said we were there to make the world safe for democracy. It did not sound too convincing to one who was taken from a college campus and who had so much for which to live. I did not want to die and I prayed that I might live.

Since then, there has been World War II and Korea. Anguished parents have raised the same questions when a son was killed in the Battle of the Bulge or at Pusan Road. And today the same questions are asked as young Americans die at Da Nang or Hill 318 or in the Highlands or elsewhere in Vietnam. Why are they there?

The area in Southeast Asia where your son died was once just one country. It was Indochina. Along with Laos and Cambodia, it had been under the tutelage of France for more than 90 years. The French took much from the land and gave little. At long last, colonial rule ended when the French Legions were defeated at Dien Bien Phu. Strongly enough, I was in North Vietnam shortly before this stronghold fell.

Negotiations to conclude that struggle took place at Geneva. Laos and Cambodia became independent. Indochina was divided at the 17th parallel of North Latitude and became North and South Vietnam with a demilitarized zone 10 kilometers between.

In the period which followed, the United States was a prime mover in promoting a defense treaty which is referred to as SEATO - Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, consisting of seven countries which jointly and severally committed themselves to mutual aid against armed attack, subversion and also to the political integrity of any protocol state against attack. That treaty was ratified on September 8, 1954.

There were many general considerations involved as we assessed our interest in Southeast Asia. The outcome of the present struggle could seriously affect our own ultimate security since it involves international peace. World War II left us with the responsibility for leadership of the Free World since there was no other strong nation to take it.

In 1957, President Eisenhower and President Ngo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam agreed that South Vietnam was covered by Article IV of the SEATO treaty and that aggression and subversion would endanger peace and stability.

On December 14, 1961, President Kennedy wrote to President Diem stating that the United States was prepared to help the Republic of South Vietnam in protecting her people and preserving her independence. Earlier on August 2, 1961, President Kennedy had written to say that "the United States is determined that the Republic of South Vietnam shall not be lost to the Communists for lack of any support which the United States can render."

In 1960, the International Commission for the Supervision and Control of the Geneva Accord reported that arms, ammunition, and supplies had gone from North to South Vietnam for the purpose of carrying out armed attacks against the forces of South Vietnam and that hostile activities were being encouraged to overthrow the administration of South Vietnam.

On August 10, 1964, the United States Senate by a vote of 88 to 2, and the House of Representatives by a vote of 415 to 0, passed a Joint Resolution, approving the determination of the President as Commander-In-Chief to take all necessary measures including the use of armed force to repel

any attack against the United States and to prevent further aggression. That Resolution further recited that "the United States is therefore prepared as determined by the President to take all necessary steps including the use of armed force to assist any member (SEATO) or protocol state of SEATO requesting assistance in defence of it's freedom."

I know this rationalization of the situation is small comfort to an anguished father's heart. But the military and civilian leaders of our country have charted the course, consistent with our treaty obligations, our leadership in the Free World and our devotion to the principle of freedom. It has ever been so, even before we became a free and independent Republic. And always, there have been sacrifices even as there were at Bunker Hill, in 1812, in 1847, in 1861 when the Union was in jeopardy, in 1896 when we rescued Cuba from the butcheries of a Spanish general, in 1917 when I was in uniform, in 1941, in 1950 and now in Vietnam.

He will not have died in vain. So long as freedom is in jeopardy in a fitful world, free men have a cause because man was meant to be free.

In World War I, Colonel John McCrea, a Canadian doctor, watching bodies roll into the very door of his field dressing station at the battle of Ypres, could pause long enough from his medical labors to write,

"We are the Dead, short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow  
And now we lie in Flanders fields.

"Take up our quarrel with the foe,  
To you from falling hands we throw  
The torch, be yours to hold it high  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies  
Blow in Flanders fields."

Sincerely,

Everett McKisley Kirkson