

NOTES

VICE PRESIDENT HUBERT HUMPHREY

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS LEGISLATIVE DINNER

WASHINGTON, D.C.

MARCH 8, 1966

It is a pleasure to be here with old associates in the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and particularly with your National Commander, my old and good friend, Andy Borg.

I am delighted, also, that 53 fine young men and women are with us tonight -- the winners of your "Voice of Democracy" contest in all our 50 states, in the District of Columbia, in Panama and Japan.

I am pleased, too, that you have chosen to honor tonight my colleague Senator Everett Dirksen.

I brought back a small tribute to him from Bangkok -- two superbly carved teakwood elephants. Of course, it was sheer hard luck, Everett, that they were shown gouging one another. I asked the vendor if he had one showing two elephants pulling together in harness, but he said they didn't make them that way.

As you know, I returned a few days ago from a mission to nine Asian and Pacific nations.

I would like to share with you some Impressions I bring home from my mission.

First, let me be quite clear about this: The war in Vietnam -- to take some words from previous history -- is far more than "a quarrel in a remote country among people of whom we know nothing."

The significance of the struggle in Vietnam is not simply the defense of a small nation against powerful neighbors, Vietnam is, in a larger sense, the focus of a broad effort to restrain the attempt by Asian Communists to expand by force -- as we assisted our European allies in resisting Communist expansion in Europe after World War II.

Vietnam is a testing ground for principles which reach far beyond even the great continent of Asia.

There are questions being posed there for all men:

Can small nations remain at peace and maintain their independence in a world of international giants?

Are we to live, in this nuclear era, in a world of law or by the law of the jungle?

Let me be clear: If we cannot face squarely these questions, there is not much chance for man's future in this world.



Just what are our objectives in Vietnam?

We do not seek domination of that part of the world.

Nor do we seek to threaten the independence or integrity of any nation.

Nor do we seek to impose our social system on others.

We seek, in Vietnam, to face the questions of this dangerous time.

We are there to help a small nation meet the challenge of naked force applied by powerful neighbors.

We are there to help establish the principle that aggression is not an acceptable means of settling international dispute, or of realizing national objectives.

Certainly this is nothing new in our history.

Let me give you, as did President Johnson in his historic Freedom House address, the words of four American Presidents pledged to the path of security and self-determination:

The first was Franklin D. Roosevelt, in his State of the Union Message 25 years ago. He said: "... we are committed to the proposition that principles of morality and considerations for our own security will never permit us to acquiesce in a peace dictated by aggressors and sponsored by appeasers. We know that enduring peace cannot be bought at the cost of other people's freedom.

The second was Harry S. Truman, in 1947, at a historic turning point in the history of guerilla warfare -- and of Greece, Turkey and the United States. These were ~~X~~ his words then: "I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.

"I believe that we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way."

The third was Dwight D. Eisenhower, in his first Inaugural Address. He promised this: "Realizing that common sense and common decency alike dictate the futility of appeasement, we shall never try to placate an aggressor by the false and wicked bargain of trading honor for security. Americans, indeed, all free men, remember that in the final choice a soldier's pack is not so heavy a burden as a prisoner's chains."

And then five years ago, John F. Kennedy, on the cold bright noon of his first day in office, proclaimed: "let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans -- born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage -- and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world."



"Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty."

In Vietnam the struggle is being waged simultaneously on two fronts.

One is the military front. In Vietnam, the tide of battle, which less than a year ago was running heavily against the Government of South Vietnam, has begun to turn for the better. A series of defeats of main force units of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces has greatly encouraged the South Vietnamese and our forces.

South Vietnamese, American and allied forces have been able to move against Viet Cong strongholds previously immune to attack.

Sections of highway and railroad, controlled by the Viet Cong for many months, have been opened to traffic. The Viet Cong defection rate has gone up sharply and the defectors report food shortages and low morale, and especially, fear of our artillery and bombing.

Allied firepower and mobility are increasing, tactical air support is excellent, and the communication and supply situation has improved.

We have never put a better-trained, better-disciplined army in the field than we have in Vietnam.

I think you should know that our American troops are conducting themselves in the best traditions of this country, not only in the field but in their work in building rural schools and hospitals, in helping the Vietnamese people to build, plan, and have hope for the future. Their performance is good, their morale is high, and we have every reason to be proud of them.



Special mention should be made of the excellent rescue and medical care available to our troops in Vietnam. Within three hours most wounded receive skilled medical treatment. More than 99 per cent of all our troops hospitalized now survive -- this compared to a casualty rate of 8.5 per cent in World War I; 4.5 per cent in World War II; and 2.2 per cent in Korea.

That is not to say that our men are not fighting a hard and dangerous war. We may well be in for setbacks and disappointments, yet, we will persevere -- and the enemy must finally come to understand that fact.

And we shall persevere in the "the other war" in Vietnam.

The peasants of Vietnam -- and, indeed of all Asia -- are rebelling against the kind of life they have led for ages past. They want security above all. But they also want dignity and self-respect, justice and the hope of a better life for themselves and their children.

The Communists -- In their drive for power -- seek to use and subvert the hopes of these people. If they succeed, we could win many battles and yet lose the war.

Our government has stressed the urgency of the effort in Asia to defeat poverty, hunger, disease, and ignorance.

And I am pleased to report that the Government of Vietnam has given new and strong commitment to this effort.

The South Vietnamese government has now undertaken -- late in the day, it is true -- programs which will give the people of the countryside a feeling of participation and a stake in their government.

The South Vietnamese government is working hard to educate Vietnamese children; to feed, clothe and house hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese refugees; to overcome a dangerous inflation in the Vietnamese economy; to defeat corruption and administrative inertia. It is working hard toward the day when truly free elections may be held.

And we are helping in this "other war" just as we are in the first.

At the same time we seek, as strongly as ever, to bring this conflict to negotiation. Our aim in that negotiation: The establishment of a just and honorable peace . . . and the chance for the long-suffering, valiant people of South Vietnam to decide their own futures.

I hope that, in time, our adversaries will listen and heed. Meanwhile, with patience and persistence, we must wage the struggle on both fronts -- neither withdrawing from the challenge nor resorting to massive escalation.

I believe that the time may come when Asian communism may lose its fervor . . . when it may lose some of its neuroses . . . when it may realize that its objectives cannot be gained by aggression.



But, until that time, I believe we have no choice but to help the nations of Southeast Asia strengthen themselves for the long road ahead.

The continent of Asia may seem distant and remote to us here in the comfortable ballroom. But I would remind you that, in this nuclear age, no point on the globe is any longer remote from any other. In this time we would well heed the words of the great Asian thinker Confucius:

"If a man take no thought about what is distant, he will find sorrow near at hand."

And so it is that we must rededicate ourselves to the pledges made last month in the historic Declaration of Honolulu -- pledges,

to defense against aggression;  
to the work of social revolution;  
to the goal of free self-government;  
to the attack on hunger, ignorance and  
disease; and  
to the unending quest for peace.

It is by the keeping of these pledges that we can,  
finally, hope to achieve a world where men may be safe  
of external threat . . . where they may have the chance  
for happiness and self-fulfillment.

Why do we fight in Vietnam?

In the words of Churchill: If we left off fighting,  
we would soon find out.

We fight for the cause of man since history began --  
the fight against oppression and brutality, against fear  
and injustice.

The struggle will be long, But we have met great challenges in the past. We do not shrink in face of challenges.

We acknowledge the obstacles. We recognize the difficulties. We accept them. And we face them with determination and with confidence.

\*\*\*\*\*



TO: RUTH FELT

FROM: JULIE

RE: VFW--EDITED TRANSCRIPT

ADDRESS DELIVERED BY  
HONORABLE HUBERT H. HUMPHREY  
VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES  
BEFORE 18TH ANNUAL CONGRESSIONAL BANQUET  
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

March 8, 1966

Officers and members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, members of the President's Cabinet, distinguished Members of Congress, young people who are here as winners of the Voice of Democracy Contest and ladies and gentlemen: -

Let me first of all say that it is a real, special privilege to be introduced by a gentleman who lives in Wisconsin, attended the University of Minnesota and has honored his nation by faithful service in peace and war -- Andy Borg. We are mighty proud of Andy. He was visiting here with Senator Dirksen just a moment ago. While Senator Dirksen represents so ably, honorably and devotedly the State of Illinois in the United States Senate, Andy comes from Wisconsin, and I was born in South Dakota, we all attended the University of Minnesota, so you're in "for trouble" tonight.

I am very pleased to be here with old associates of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. May I take this opportunity to congratulate and to thank the V. F. W., not only for great patriotic service to this Nation in time of war, but above all, for the foresight and the vision that the Commanders, Officers and Members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars have had in these years, particularly since World War II, when the V. F. W. has come to Washington, time after time, in these Legislative Conferences to ask members of Congress and officers of Government to keep the defense forces of America ready and in balance, so that we could meet any emergency, anytime, any place. We are indebted to you for that vision.

Tonight, we are particularly delighted to have these 53 young men and women with us. I couldn't resist the temptation to go to each of them and extend the hand of congratulation and warm friendship, because these are the winners of your Voice of Democracy Contest, in all of our 50 States and the District of Columbia, Panama, and Japan. What wonderful young people.



How well I remember last year's dinner and how well I remember the V. F. W. National Convention in Chicago. I recall that, when I came into the auditorium, your winner of last year was presenting his magnificent speech, and somebody interrupted that speech, namely me. I have never forgiven myself, but I did have the chance when I got up to speak, to introduce that young man, so he could deliver the real speech of the day. And what a job he did. Tonight, I am very very pleased to be present when you honor one of America's most distinguished public servants with the V. F. W. Congressional Award. It is indeed a high honor. In 1964, this award was given to the dean of the United States Senate, none other than that young man from Arizona, the Honorable Carl Hayden. In 1965, it was given to one of America's most distinguished patriots, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Honorable John McCormack, and in 1966, it is given to none other than Everett McKinley Dirksen of the great State of Illinois. Now, I want to share with you what Everett Dirksen already knows, that on my recent journey, I stopped off in Bangkok, Thailand for a few days. While I was there, I took a moment out of the busy day, one early morning, to go into a shopping area.

There, I found in the market two superbly carved wooden elephants. I thought of my friend, the Minority Leader, Everett, right then and there, It was just sheer hard luck, Everett, that those two beautifully carved elephants that you will get in due time were shown goring each other in ferocious combat. I thought, this is not the right thing to do -- to buy a gift like that -- he may misunderstand my feelings of friendship. So, I asked the vender if he had one showing two elephants pulling together in harness. But he said, they didn't make them that way in either Thailand or America. But, Senator, may I say that in recent days, I don't know what you, in turn, might say about those donkeys the way they've been acting up.

Let me just be serious with you for a brief moment. We are deeply indebted to the V. F. W. for many, many wonderful good works. We are indebted to you for your support of programs of education, of health care of our veterans and their families. We are indebted to you for your constant vigilance for the defense of this Nation. And we are indebted to you for your foresight on the role of America as a leader in the world - a world that is oftentimes divided, a world filled with tension and a world at the same time, filled with opportunity. The V. F. W. gives us courage, because you represent the spirit of indomitable valor.

You give us strength, because you have demonstrated your faith in this land of ours.

I want to say just a few words this evening that might be particularly worthy of the young people. You have every reason in your daily life, every reason in the days you yet have to live, to have unbounded faith in this great land of ours. History does not tell us of the future, but it gives us good guidance from the past. America's past is anoble one, and America's future will undoubtedly be a glorious one. I say this, because we have every quality that a Nation entrusted with leadership should have. Fortunately, we are blessed by Divine Providence with wealth and power. This wealth and this power ~~are~~ not for the purpose of luxury, nor ~~are they~~ for the purpose of domination. This wealth and this power are for the purpose of helping ourselves and others to live a full and good life and to protect the weak. We seek in this world of ours that the rule of law shall prevail, rather than the rule of the jungle. The United States of America is not the policeman of the world, but the United States of America does stand for a standard of decency for the world. But it can't be that way if we were to forfeit that great privilege and honor. Leadership, as I have often said, is not a luxury; leadership imposes responsibility



and duty. It gives you no hope of comfort, but it does give you duties and opportunities.

Tonight, over 200,000 young men, the best that this Nation has to offer -- are in a far away place. Some people say, it is so far away that we ought not to be so deeply involved. I say that there is no place "far away" when freedom, self-determination and liberty are at stake, and America knows that. Neville Chamberlain, the man who in terms of history is remembered for Munich, once said, at the time when the free Nations were going to appease Hitler -- that Czechoslovakia involved a "quarrel within a remote country among people of whom we know nothing." And yet, this organization knows how close was Czechoslovakia, how close Western Europe was, how close Hitler was. Now, the continent of Asia may seem distant and remote to us here in this comfortable ballroom, but in the nuclear age, in the space age, and in the age of the jet, nothing is far away. If we have learned anything, we have learned that this is one world, shrunken in size. Everybody is your neighbor. In this time, I think we should well heed the words of a great Asian thinker, Confucius. These are his words, my young Americans, "If a man take not thought about what is distant, he will find sorrow near at hand." Those are profound words. Freedom is everybody's business, and freedom has never been free. Nothing is distant, when it

affects the great human values of brotherhood, of liberty, of decency, of individualism. So knowing that nothing is remote, we take a keen interest today in the world in which we live, because we can not isolate ourselves from it. One of the most historic meetings of recent days was the meeting at Honolulu, Hawaii, just a month ago. It was there in Honolulu that the President of the United States with his top advisors met with the Chief of State and Prime Minister of the Republic of South Vietnam and with General Westmoreland, who by the way, may I say, once again, is one of the finest citizens that this country has every produced -- a great soldier and a great patriot. There, in Honolulu, they outlined what is known as the Honolulu Declaration. I believe that the essentials of that Declaration are to be found in the concluding paragraph. Just as Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt met together to outline the Atlantic Charter, this was a charter of hope, a charter of promise, a pledge to stand together in the cause of freedom. The Declaration made certain specific pledges, and I'd like to repeat them here tonight, because these are the pledges to which this country is committed, and friend and foe alike should know. They are pledges to defense against aggression; to the work of social revolution, to the goal of free, self government, pledges to the attack on hunger, ignorance and disease, a pledge to the unending quest for peace.

And it is by keeping these pledges that we can finally hope to achieve a world where men may be safe from external threat, and where they may have the chance of their lifetime for happiness and fulfillment. Now, these are not new pledges; they're as old as this Republic, and they're as old as the hope of freedom and democracy. They are the pledges to which many a President has given his word and hand. I do not take the time this evening to repeat these words of the President. Within the lifetime of many here in this room, I would remind you, Presidents Franklin Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, John Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson - in our lifetime - have pledged America to the defense of freedom, to resistance of aggression, to helping to build for a better world for ourselves and our posterity. It is to those objectives, my fellow Americans, that tonight, our young men on the battlefield give their lives, and it is to those objectives that we have pledged the resources of this Nation to see to it that not only is Communist aggression defeated, but that a better life shall be open to people in Vietnam and everywhere. Yes, I use good old fashioned words - we seek victory over poverty and disease. We seek victory over the idea that aggression, terror and murder are the proper vehicles of political power. We seek to end the fighting in a just and honorable peace. We seek to impose no form of government



upon anyone. We seek to let people select their own form of government. We seek no bases. We seek no territory. We seek no conquest. We threaten no people. All that we ask is that the rule of law be substituted for the rule of force. We ask that the rule of reason supplant brute power. We ask that those who talk peace be willing to sit down and achieve it. We say to those who defy the hope of mankind for peace that their brute force can never prevail. We say this in the spirit of a nation that loves justice, a nation that loves peace, but a nation that is strong, too strong to be afraid and too determined to retreat. I ask that every citizen in this land dedicate himself to the opportunity that is ours to force the aggressor to abandon his plans. I ask that we help to build the kind of life that is worthy of mankind.

Thank you very much.

#####



# Minnesota Historical Society

Copyright in this digital version belongs to the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, link to, or email content, however, for individual use.

To request permission for commercial or educational use, please contact the Minnesota Historical Society.



[www.mnhs.org](http://www.mnhs.org)