

"THE UNLIKELY LIBERATORS" MISSION TO JAPAN  
WELCOMING REMARKS  
(SEPT. 21, 1994)

RABBI LEBEAU, MR. SOLOMON, MR. AMICHAEL. I AM VERY PLEASED TO JOIN YOU FOR THIS PROGRAM HONORING THE SOLDIERS OF THE 522ND FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION, KNOWN AS THE "UNLIKELY LIBERATORS." WE ALSO ARE RECOGNIZING THIS EVENING THE REMARKABLE CONTRIBUTION OF THE LATE MR. CHIUNE SUGIHARA, WHOSE BRAVERY SAVED COUNTLESS LIVES FROM THE HORRORS OF THE HOLOCAUST. I UNDERSTAND THAT MR. SUGIHARA'S SON, HIROKI SUGIHARA, IS HERE WITH US TONIGHT, AND LET ME EXTEND MY WELCOME.

LAST MAY, I WAS FORTUNATE TO HAVE ATTENDED IN TOKYO AN EXHIBIT -- THE FIRST OF ITS KIND IN THIS CITY -- ON THE HORROR OF THE HOLOCAUST AND MAN'S CAPACITY FOR INHUMANITY. IT IS, THEREFORE, PARTICULARLY GRATIFYING TO BE HERE TONIGHT TO HELP US REMEMBER THAT EVEN IN THE DARKEST HOUR OF THE HOLOCAUST, MEN DISTINGUISHED THEMSELVES BY THEIR LIMITLESS CAPACITY FOR HUMANITY AND HEROISM.

ONE SUCH MAN IS CHIUNE SUGIHARA, JAPANESE CONSUL-GENERAL IN LITHUANIA, WHO IN DIRECT DEFIANCE OF HIS GOVERNMENT'S ORDERS AND AT GREAT PERSONAL RISK, TOOK WHAT HE CONSIDERED THE ONLY HUMANE PATH. BY TOILING DAY AND NIGHT WITH HIS WIFE, YUKIKO, MR. SUGIHARA WROTE OUT, BY HAND, EXIT VISAS, THEREBY ENABLING 6,000 JEWS TO ESCAPE CERTAIN DEATH. WHEN INTERVIEWED ABOUT HIS BRAVE ACTION, MR. SUGIHARA SAID SIMPLY: "I JUST DID WHAT WE, AS HUMAN BEINGS, SHOULD DO."

TOO OFTEN, WE FAIL TO MEET THE CHALLENGE TO ACT IN THE WAY OUR SHARED HUMANITY ORDAINS. YET WE NEED ONLY LOOK AT THE "UNLIKELY LIBERATORS" HERE WITH US TONIGHT FOR FURTHER EVIDENCE OF MAN'S CAPACITY TO ACT WITH BRAVERY AND COMPASSION. THESE VETERANS WERE PART OF THE 522ND FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION WHICH WAS ATTACHED TO THE 442ND REGIMENTAL UNIT, ONE OF THE MOST HIGHLY DECORATED UNITS OF THE UNITED STATES MILITARY. THE MEMBERS OF THE 522ND WERE JAPANESE-AMERICANS WHO DISTINGUISHED THEMSELVES BY THEIR ACTIONS AND BY LOYALTY TO THEIR COUNTRY EVEN AT A TIME WHEN THEIR ALLEGIANCE WAS BEING CALLED INTO QUESTION BECAUSE OF THEIR ETHNIC BACKGROUND.

WHAT HEROISM!! RATHER THAN CEDING TO THE PREJUDICES OF THE DAY, THESE MEN VOLUNTEERED TO SERVE THEIR COUNTRY AND SHOW THEIR FELLOW AMERICANS WHAT IT TRULY MEANS TO BE A PATRIOT. YOU OF THE 522ND, HERE WITH US TODAY, ACTED UNSELFISHLY AND COMPASSIONATELY IN LIBERATING THE PRISONERS OF DACHAU AND RESCUING OVER 5,000 SURVIVORS OF THE INFAMOUS DACHAU DEATH MARCH. LET ME EXTEND TO YOU TONIGHT MY GRATITUDE.

TOO OFTEN, THE MILITARY IS ASSOCIATED WITH DESTRUCTION IN THE PUBLIC EYE. BUT THESE BRAVE JAPANESE-AMERICANS REMIND US OF THE VALIANT ROLE SOLDIERS CAN PLAY IN LIBERATING PEOPLE FROM DESTRUCTIVE FORCES.

I AM SURE THAT THOSE HERE TONIGHT JOIN ME IN THANKING THE SUGIHARA FAMILY AND THESE BRAVE VETERANS FOR REMINDING US OF OUR SHARED HUMANITY AND MAN'S ABILITY TO BRAVELY TRIUMPH OVER EVIL.



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