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APRIL 10, 1976

Office of the White House Press Secretary
(Dallas, Texas)

THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO BE DELIVERED AT THE
WAR MEMORIAL
EL PASO, TEXAS

It is a very special privilege for me to be here today dedicating this memorial which honors those men from El Paso who gave their lives for their country in Vietnam. Let me thank the Gold Star Mothers and the El Paso Bicentennial Commission for sponsoring this important occasion.

I extend my particular thanks to Mrs. Barney Barnes for her kind letter of invitation, and I commend her sons, Stanley and Mark, both of whom I understand are students at Parkland High School. It was their efforts which resulted in this bronze plaque we dedicate today.

They were motivated by the memory of their brother, Corporal Charles Barnes of the United States Army, who is listed among the 203 men whose memory and bravery we honor.

In a larger sense, we are paying tribute today to all those Americans who died in that bitter conflict, and to Americans throughout our history who paid the very highest price for the sake of our liberty.

This ceremony should make us realize how precious freedom is and how dearly Americans have paid for it, from the first battles for independence down to the present.

This ceremony should also make us thankful for the peace we now enjoy. Not one American serviceman is fighting in any part of the world today. Not one American -- mother or wife or daughter, father or brother or son -- lives in constant fear of losing their loved ones.

And today, as we dedicate ourselves to preserving the freedom for which these men died, we must also dedicate ourselves to preserving the peace they died to secure.

Peace today has a special significance -- because war today has a special terror. A thermo-nuclear war today would mean death and destruction on a scale so vast that we can hardly comprehend it.

We can avoid this holocaust -- and we will avoid it -- if we keep America strong. Not strong for the sake of war but strong for the sake of peace. This concept is as old as our republic. George Washington told us: "To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace."

We are prepared today, and we will stay prepared. We are strong today and we will stay strong.

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But true strength demands true responsibility. And keeping the peace means keeping our commitment to avoid constant and reckless confrontation. To weigh our words carefully, knowing what hangs in the balance.

In my very first words after taking the solemn oath of office to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, I pledged myself to an uninterrupted and sincere search for peace.

I said that America will remain strong and united, but its strength will remain dedicated to the safety and sanity of the entire family of man, as well as to our own precious freedom.

Today I repeat that pledge. To work for a world where the foundation of peace is mutual self-interest instead of mutual terror. To reduce world tensions through patience and perseverance, rather than increase those tensions with hot words or rash threats.

Where there is conflict, let us try conciliation. Let us attempt to work out our differences on the negotiating table, rather than in a desperate duel that would leave the world in ashes.

You have placed your memorial at the base of a flower bed. It is an appropriate setting, for these flowers are a symbol of life.

To honor the memory of those who fought for freedom, you will keep those flowers blooming--and together we will keep America strong, at peace, and forever free.

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