
EULOGY

by

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
BRIAN MULRONEY

*to commemorate
the life of*

PRESIDENT GEORGE HERBERT
WALKER BUSH

WASHINGTON NATIONAL CATHEDRAL
WASHINGTON, D.C.

December 5, 2018

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(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)
EMBARGOED UNTIL WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 5th AT 12:00 P.M. (ET)

Do you remember where you were the Summer you left your teenage years behind and turned 20?

I was working as a laborer in my hometown in Northern Quebec, trying to make enough money to finance my years at law school.

It was a tough job but I was safe and secure and had the added benefit of my mother's home cooking every night.

On September 2, 1944 – as we have just heard – 20 year old Lieutenant George Bush was preparing to attack Japanese war installations in the Pacific.

He was part of a courageous generation of young Americans who led the charge – against overwhelming odds – in the historic and bloody battle for supremacy in the Pacific against the colossal military might of Imperial Japan.

That's what George Bush did the Summer he turned 20.

Many men of differing talents and skills have served as President and many more will do so as the decades unfold, bringing new strength and glory to these United States of America.

And 50 or 100 years from now, as historians review the accomplishments and context of all who have served as President, I believe it will be said that, in the life of this country – which is in my judgement, the greatest democratic republic that God has ever placed on the face of this earth – no occupant of the Oval Office was more courageous, more principled and more honorable than George Herbert Walker Bush.

George Bush was a highly accomplished man who also had a delightful sense of humour and was a lot of fun.

At his first NATO meeting as the new U.S. President, George – who sat opposite me – took copious notes as the heads of governments spoke. We were limited in time.

It is very flattering to have the President of the U.S. take notes as you speak and, even someone as modest as me, throw in a few adjectives here and there to extend the pleasure of the experience.

After President Mitterand, Prime Minister Thatcher and Chancellor Kohl had spoken it was the turn of the Prime Minister of Iceland who – as President Bush continued to write – went on and on and on and on – ending only when the Secretary General of NATO firmly decreed a coffee break.

George put down his pen, walked over to me and said: “Brian, I have just learned the fundamental principle of international affairs”. “What’s that?” I asked. Bush replied, “the smaller the country, the longer the speech”.

In the second year of the Bush presidency, responding to implacable pressures from the Reagan and Bush administrations, the Soviet Union imploded. This was the most epochal political event of the 20th century.

An ominous situation that could have become extremely menacing to world security was instead deftly channelled by the leadership of President Bush into the broad and powerful currents of freedom, providing the Russian people with the opportunity to build an embryonic democracy in a country that had been ruled by czars and tyrants for a thousand years.

As the Berlin Wall collapsed soon thereafter and calls for freedom cascaded across central and Eastern Europe, leaving dictators and dogma in the trashcan of history, no challenge assumed greater importance for Western solidarity than the unification of Germany within an unswerving NATO. But old fears in Western Europe and unrelenting hostility by the military establishment in the U.S.S.R. and the Warsaw Pact rendered this initiative among the most complex and sensitive ever undertaken. One serious misstep and the entire process could have been compromised, perhaps irretrievably.

There is obviously no more knowledgeable or competent judge of what really happened at this most vital juncture of 20th century history than Chancellor Helmut Kohl of Germany himself. In a speech to a parliamentary commission of the Bundestag , he said categorically that this historic initiative of German reunification could never have succeeded without the brilliant leadership of President Bush.

Much has been written about the first Gulf War. Simply put, the coalition of 29 disparate nations assembled under the aegis of the United Nations – including for the first time many influential Arab countries – and led by the United States will rank with the most spectacular and successful international initiatives ever undertaken in modern history, designed to punish an aggressor, defend the cause of freedom and ensure order in a region that had seen too much of the opposite for far too long. This was President Bush's initiative from beginning to end.

President Bush was also responsible for the North American Free Trade Agreement – recently modernized and improved by new administrations – which created the largest and richest free trade area in the history of the world, while also signing into law the Americans With Disabilities Act which transformed the lives of millions of Americans forever.

President Bush's decision to go forward with strong environmental legislation, including the Clean Air Act that resulted in an Acid Rain Accord with Canada, is a splendid gift to future generations of Americans and Canadians to savour in the air they breathe, the water they drink, the forests they enjoy, and the lakes, rivers and streams they cherish.

There is a word for this: it is called "leadership" -- and let me tell you that when George Bush was President of the United States of America, every single head of government in the world knew they were dealing with a true gentlemen, a genuine leader - one who was distinguished, resolute and brave.

I do not keep a diary but occasionally I write private notes after important personal or professional events. One occurred at Walker's Point in Kennebunkport,

Maine, on September 2, 2001. Mila and I had been spending our traditional Labor Day weekend with George and Barbara and towards the end he and I had a private conversation. My notes capture the moment:

“I told George how I thought his mood had shifted over the last 8 years. From a series of frustrations and moments of despondency in 1993 to the high enthusiasm of the Houston launch of the Presidential Library and George W.’s election as Governor in November 1994, to the delight following Jeb’s election in 1998 followed by their great pride and pleasure with George W.’s election to the presidency, to the serenity we found today in both Barbara and George. They are truly at peace with themselves, joyous in what they and the children have achieved, gratified by the goodness that God has bestowed upon them all and genuinely content with the thrill and promise of each passing day.

At that, George, who had tears in his eyes as I spoke, said: “Brian, you’ve got us pegged just right – and the roller coaster of emotions we’ve experienced since 1992. Come with me.”

He led me down the porch at Walker’s Point to the side of the house that fronts the ocean and pointed to a small, simple plaque that had been unobtrusively installed some days earlier. It read: “CAVU”.

He said: “Brian, this stands for “Ceiling and visibility unlimited” When I was a terrified 18-19 year old pilot in the Pacific those were the words we hoped to hear before takeoff. It meant perfect flying. That’s the way I feel about our life today – CAVU – everything is perfect. Bar and I could not have asked for better lives. We are truly happy and truly at peace.”

As I looked over the waters off Walker’s Point on that golden September afternoon in Maine, I was reminded of the lines – simple and true – that speak to the nature of George Bush and his love of family and precious surroundings.

There are wooden ships,
There are sailing ships,
There are ships that sail the sea,
But the best ships are friendships
And may they always be.