

A Soldier's Pledge

Every Veterans Day, we as a nation stop to think about the courage and sacrifice shown by the men and women who have served our country. We visit the graves of family members who gave literally all that they had to defend our shores and uphold our freedom. And we remember the words of President Ronald Reagan, who said, "The price for freedom at times has been high, but we have never been unwilling to pay that price."

We were reminded of those words recently when we came across passages from Reagan's First Inaugural Address. In his first speech as president, Reagan gave tribute to all the heroes who have paid freedom's price. He highlighted one hero in particular by recounting the story of Martin Treptow, a young American who fought in World War I. Treptow never made it home from that awful conflict, but before he died, he made and lived a solemn pledge—a pledge to do everything within his power to serve our country. We feel his pledge speaks for every man and woman who has ever worn a uniform. For every hero who never came home.

This Veterans Day, it's worth taking a minute to read both Reagan and Treptow's words. It's worth a few minutes more to quietly ponder their meaning. Below is an excerpt from Reagan's speech in which he quotes Treptow's pledge. We hope you find it as moving as we do.

President Reagan's First Inaugural Address

If we look to the answer as to why, for so many years, we achieved so much, prospered as no other people on Earth, it was because here, in this land, we unleashed the energy and individual genius of man to a greater extent than has ever been done before. Freedom and the dignity of the individual have been more available and assured here than in any other place on Earth. The price for this freedom at times has been high, but we have never been unwilling to pay that price.

Those who say that we are in a time when there are no heroes just don't know where to look. Directly in front of me, [stands] the monument to a monumental man: George Washington, father of our country. A man of humility who came to greatness reluctantly. He led America out of revolutionary victory into infant nationhood. Off to one side, the stately memorial to Thomas Jefferson. The Declaration of Independence flames with his eloquence.

And then beyond the Reflecting Pool the dignified columns of the Lincoln Memorial. Whoever would understand in his heart the meaning of America will find it in the life of Abraham Lincoln.

Beyond those monuments to heroism is the Potomac River, and on the far shore the sloping hills of Arlington National Cemetery with its row on row of simple white markers bearing crosses or Stars of David. They add up to only a tiny fraction of the price that has been paid for our freedom.

Each one of those markers is a monument to the kinds of hero I spoke of earlier. Their lives ended in places called Belleau Wood, The Argonne, Omaha Beach, Salerno and halfway around the world on Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Pork Chop Hill, the Chosin Reservoir, and in a hundred rice paddies and jungles of a place called Vietnam.

Under one such marker lies a young man—Martin Treptow—who left his job in a small town barbershop in 1917 to go to France with the famed Rainbow Division. There, on the

western front, he was killed trying to carry a message between battalions under heavy artillery fire.

We are told that on his body was found a diary. On the flyleaf under the heading, "My Pledge," he had written these words:

"America must win this war. Therefore, I will work, I will save, I will sacrifice, I will endure, I will fight cheerfully and do my utmost, as if the issue of the whole struggle depended on me alone."

The crisis we are facing today does not require of us the kind of sacrifice that Martin Treptow and so many thousands of others were called upon to make. It does require, however, our best effort, and our willingness to believe in ourselves and to believe in our capacity to perform great deeds; to believe that together, with God's help, we can and will resolve the problems which now confront us.

And, after all, why shouldn't we believe that? We are Americans.

This Veterans Day, all of us here at WHP Financial wish to say "Thank you" to our heroes. Thank you for the pledge you gave and the pledge you fulfilled. Thank you for working, saving, sacrificing, and enduring.

Thank you for paying the price that freedom demands. And to you, we wish a happy Veterans Day!