

Some people in our free society want to believe that freedom can be defended without sacrifice, without the loss of life and the firing of guns. These are people too young to know of the great wars or too prone to forget the reasons for which they were fought.

Some people in our free society believe we can escape the cruel reality of power conflict by picking flowers and writing poems, by growing beards and singing songs. These are people who say war at any price is bad and peace at any cost is good.

Some people in our free society think it will all just go away once we stop thrusting our ideas on other nations and begin to practice at home the freedom we preach abroad. These people are well meaning and sensitive Americans but forget that what has driven men to *evil before has not yet been totally conquered and might never be.*

Most people, and perhaps even all of us here tonight, have different ideas and yet it always seems to come to this. *When nations fail, nations fight. When words fail, guns fire. The bullet inevitably carries the message that somebody else would not or could not deliver.*

We know that our experience in war is not without lessons. As sensible men we protest war but as veterans we do so with greater understanding of its causes and effects. No longer are we so naive as to believe we can fight one war to end all wars; nor are we so unsophisticated as to believe that when peace was signed at Versailles or on the U.S.S. Missouri or at Panmunjon, all the battles were over, all tyrannies were defeated and all freedoms were permanently won.

The right of the individual to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is contested as much today, at home and abroad, as it was in 1917 and 1941 and 1952. While we have not become so cynical as to believe that war is an inevitable and irrefutable product of the human condition, neither can we delude ourselves that the forces of tyranny and evil will retreat without continuous opposition.

Today, we are veterans — we have won our victories and earned our right to pursue our lives as citizens rather than soldiers. Yet an honorable discharge from our military responsibilities does not imply that our civic responsibilities have been lessened. *In a free society, all citizens are, in a sense, soldiers without uniforms.* Our membership in this organization indicates that we have recognized and accepted this obligation.

There are wars to be fought and battles to be won at home by citizens, as well as abroad by soldiers. Victories abroad become hollow