

*BRO Reunion 1997 Speech at the 1<sup>st</sup> Division Monument*

*Gordon Sullivan: ...distinguished military career retiring as a four star general.*

*Scholar. Those of you who have been around to all the displays down at the hotel in your command posts see books that he has written, books that he has written about you, about us. He is still giving of himself—for us, in our society and in our division. Soldier, warrior, scholar, statesman, American citizen, willing to give of himself for his country. It's my distinct honor and pleasure, to present to you, General Paul Gorman, Infantry, 26<sup>th</sup> Infantry, United States Army, General Gorman.*

This is indeed a very special place, part of our nation's capitol.

It is a place that will be forever yours and mine.

For four generations, Ladies and Gentlemen, members of the Society of the First Division, members of the Regimental Associations have gathered at this place, year after year, in symbolic reunion with our wartime dead. This is our place. A place to remember them. To speak *of* them. To reaffirm our community *with* them.

This monument was raised in 1924, as General Sullivan observed, amidst skepticism that it would never come to pass. A subscription was taken among the veterans of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, a modest amount of money was collected, representations were made in Congress that a monument should be erected in the nation's capitol for that division that was *first* in France, *first* on line, *first* to engage the enemy, *first* to suffer casualties, *first* to gain ground, *first* in the length of time spent on the line, *first* to enter Germany but *last* to return home.

Despite the skepticism, despite the reluctance to put yet one more monument in Washington, the Division's dream came true in 1924. The war to end all wars was over. Congress, the people, yearned for closure, and so they supported the erection of this monument.

One of the leaders of the drive to bring this place into being was Charles B. Summerall, who had been commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division during WWI. He was one of the two principal speakers in 1924, when this place was dedicated. His remarks on that occasion foreshadowed the more enduring impact of this monument on this city, and on our country. On that occasion, the dedication of 1924, General Summerall spoke at length of what those men whose names are recorded here had contributed to our country and its future. But he honored as well the living members of the division, the veterans and its serving members. Let me repeat, just a few of the words that he said on that occasion because I think he foretold what this place will mean for future generations of Americans. Here are his words from 73 years ago.

“Today veterans of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division in every part of the land are maintaining the ideals of their old command as patriotic and industrious citizens. The members of the active division, wearing its insignia and emblems of valor are worthily upholding the traditions created by the living and the dead. They are a priceless asset for the stability of our nation institutions and for the preservation of our liberties.”

General Summerall was followed by the President of the United States, Calvin Coolidge, who has an undeserved reputation for lack of eloquence. What President Coolidge said applies in our era, and will apply in future eras as well. Here are the words of the President:

“We cannot claim that our institutions have reached perfection, but we are justified in saying that our institutions are the best for the promotion of human welfare that the ingenuity of man has ever been able to devise.

“We cannot claim that our government is perfect, but we have the right to believe that it is the best there is.

“We do not claim that we have been able to discharge our full duty towards the other nations of the earth, but we have the right to believe that we have been the most effective agency in helping to restore Europe.

“If anyone doubts the depth and the sincerity of the attachment of the American people to their institutions and government; if anyone doubts the sacrifices which they have been willing to make on behalf of those institutions, and for what we believe to be the welfare of other nations, let them gaze upon this monument, let them look upon this represented gathering of our veterans.”

Now neither General Summerall nor President Coolidge could have foreseen this marvelous day, this particular gathering of great veterans, but they knew at the time that the 1<sup>st</sup> Division transcended WWI and they knew that this monument was different in kind of all the others in this city. Walk around and look at this neighborhood’s statuary. On all sides of the White House, you will see monuments of past wars. All those monuments, except this one, commemorate one hero, one particular individual, one single great man. All of them but this one are frozen in time, static. Only this place honors individually and collectively tens of thousands of average Americans. They who are remembered here gave their lives for their comrades, for the preservation of American institutions. Here, each has his name engraved in bronze that Americans of this era—and all Americans of tomorrow—can remember him with gratitude. Here are the names of those who died in WWI and WWII and Vietnam and in the Persian Gulf, serving with the 1st Division. This is a monument then to an army organization that has become a living force in American society. General Creighton Abrams described this division as an uplifting and cohesive institution when he addressed the members of the division upon their departure from his command in Vietnam. Let me read to you what he said.

“In a changing world, changing time, changing attitude, going back to 1917 and up to the present, through the various fads and interests, the various political motivations that have thrust themselves upon our country— in all that time, and to this moment, the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, more than any other division in our army, represents a constancy of those essential virtues of mankind — humility, courage, devotion, sacrifice. The world has changed a lot I chose to feel that this is part of the cement and the steel that holds our great country together.”

And then, his voice husky with emotion, General Abrams closed by quoting the division’s own great motto: “No Mission Too Difficult, No Sacrifice Too Great--Duty First.”