



Lukewarm Patriotism

By **Pat Norton**, Golf Course Superintendent, Nettle Creek Country Club

Let us briefly review the state of affairs that resulted in the America that we know today. If you pay attention to and analyze American history...the figure that you'll arrive at is 230.

Two hundred and thirty years ago, the American colonists had had enough of British rule...and were at a crossroads. Their future was extremely uncertain. They could safely continue as British subjects...and obey British laws, taxes, customs, duties, and be ruled by a king, their military, and their Parliament. Their lives...and those of their children...would be oppressed, but not in jeopardy. Many American colonists chose to not support the American Revolution...kept their fortunes intact...and ended up as British subjects in Canada. There are countless true stories of wealthy American colonists who supported the war effort financially and ended up as paupers as a result. Imagine the sacrifices that were faced by these colonial people!

Imagine the feeling of watching your son or sons go off to war in 1775 or 1776. The American military was only just beginning to organize. The chances of your son returning unharmed were highly unlikely. Everybody knew that the dangers were real. The colonists were going to war against the most powerful country...with the most powerful army and navy...in the world!

No parent, not the American colonist, nor the modern American citizen, wants to send their offspring into danger. It is against basic human instinct. Human instinct and logic blended together ask only that the old die before the young. No parent wants to survive their son or daughter. War, unfortunately, upsets that natural balance.

Yet these Americans had the courage to commit themselves to an uncertain course of action that could very easily have led to disaster and certain death for all involved. In those days, mercy, especially British mercy, was not expected and not given.

In a time when Americans needed to support the government and the military...they made the difficult choice to support the cause and be more than lukewarm patriots. Countless individual sacrifices resulted, in the end, in a great collective good...the birth and independence of a new country.

Early Americans, including your ancestors and mine, sacrificed in many areas to embark on the course of government 'by the people, for the people',

to be truly controlled by citizens.

Repeatedly throughout our two centuries as Americans, our people have been asked to sacrifice to preserve our freedom and our democracy.

Examine the years before and during the Civil War. Americans then, as now, were a mixed lot. Some believed fervently in abolition, and many others felt that slavery was an acceptable practice. There was a huge amount of anti-war, anti-draft feeling back then...as evidenced by the draft riots in New York and other eastern U.S. cities.

Parents then, as now, had to be extremely uneasy about the fact of their sons going off and fighting in such a prolonged, intensely fought affair. The average parent probably had no idea of the intensity and the bloodshed involved in that conflict. The medical prac-

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tices of the day were very rudimentary, with sickness, infection, and disease contributing to the overall death toll of that great American conflict.

But, people of both North and South believed in their cause, and did what was asked of them, and much more. Again, your ancestors and mine were asked to sacrifice.

Hanging in the living room in a certain little house in Monroe, WI is a certificate of 'Honorable Discharge' from the Ohio National Guard in which Pvt. John O'Naughton is thanked for his service in the years 1863-1865...signed by Pres. Abraham Lincoln before his death. After the war, O'Naughton migrated west with his parents and brothers to southern Wisconsin and began farming there. Your family probably has similar history and heirlooms in their possession...

Fast forward to the 20th Century. America in the late 1930's was preparing for war...although the average citizen didn't really know that and certainly wasn't ready for it. Paraphrasing the history books a bit, as it became more and more likely that war was on the horizon, Americans strongly expressed their displeasure at the idea of going to war again after only approximately twenty years of peace.

Many people, such as my grandfather, made sure that his two sons didn't have to be drafted and acquired agricultural deferments for them. Grandpa John was an Army lieutenant in WWI in France, saw too much combat, and could not make the sacrifice of sending his sons off to war.

FDR, Churchill, and the Allies knew, in a strategic sense, that the stakes were very high. They were all asking their people to make a huge sacrifice, oftentimes the ultimate sacrifice, in order to preserve life as they knew it. They made the choice for freedom and for a world ruled by governments of the

people...and had to destroy those governments ruled by oppressive dictators.

As we all know from our reading of WWII...those years were not easy. I believe the total casualty figure for American soldiers of all types was about 300,000. Three hundred thousand! But, those

300,000 men and women died to help America and her allies defeat brutal governments that were responsible for the deaths of millions of people. So again, individuals were asked to sacrifice for the collective good. And, Americans responded.

In Korea and especially Vietnam,



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our military had the task of putting the brakes on Communist Chinese expansion. Concurrently, the U.S.A. had to be the leader in standing up to the Soviet Union. I remember feeling, as a kid, that the Soviet Union was an immortal and unbeatable foe. In the end, the Soviet Union that arose at the end of WWII and was ruled by Stalin and a dictatorial Communist Party...collapsed in the late 1980's and has been trying to find some sort of democracy since that time..Maybe we need to remember the fact that a resolute U.S. government and military helped create the collapse of the U.S.S.R. Maybe we need to remember that our government and our military right now is being resolute in the face of that dictator in North Korea. His regime will collapse sooner or later, and a democratic form of government will slowly take root there.

To do all of that, the U.S. needed and still needs a strong military consisting of sons and daughters, even mothers and fathers, who certainly didn't, and do not, relish the unpopular task before them. Anti-war sentiment throughout the 1960's and 1970's was, like pre-Civil war days, very strong. Anti-war sentiment today seems to be growing as the call to withdraw the troops from Iraq strengthens.

As the situation unfolds daily in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is in simple terms a test of our national resolve. Are we beginning to again display our lukewarm sense of patriotism? Do we, as a nation of free citizens, value our freedom enough to continue the course and defeat these Islamic fundamentalists?

Do we forget so easily that these terrorists, who are now flocking to Iraq to fight against us, came into our country four years ago and killed over two thousand innocent civilians? How many terrorist plots have been foiled since then by civilized countries worldwide? We must make these terrorists understand that we will not leave Iraq or

Afghanistan until these two countries are strong enough to support themselves against the inevitable backlash once the U.S. military is ready to leave. As citizens, we also need to understand that very basic concept.

There will not be a simple and easy solution to the Iraq War. It will take more time...and will unfortunately engulf more people and more soldiers...than most people realize. That is the very nature of war.

And, are we naïve enough to believe that Bin Laden and his terrorists will ever leave us alone? Their mission is to try and destroy Israel and America. If we leave Iraq or Afghanistan now...they will have won the war. They will have a sponsoring state, a base of operations, and continue their fight with us from a position of strength.

There are plenty of Iraqis who support us over there. They want and need us to stay until they are strong enough to resist their enemies. They are laying their lives and their families on the line in

their struggle for some sort of freedom, somewhat like our ancestors who laid it on the line in the years 1775-1783...struggling to be free from oppression.

I do not understand what is happening lately on the national scene. Americans are so guilty of lukewarm patriotism. Lukewarm patriotism is simply what it says. It means that when life is good...we tell ourselves that we support our government and our military. As Iraq casualties start to mount...the Cindy Sheehans of the world gain news media attention...everybody questions and doubts...and the call for withdrawal begins.

Maybe we need an old fashioned history lesson. Maybe we need a bit of the resolve of our collective American ancestors.

It is during the tough times...that we are just beginning to enter into...that every responsible citizen of this country who likes to think of himself or herself as being a patriot...needs to begin to act like one. ♣



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