

Remarks at the Dedication of the Veterans Memorial

August 17, 2003

Manning Iowa

Major General Jeff Musfeldt

Thank you Dan for those kind words. It is truly a privilege to be here. When Ken Jensen called me a month ago to speak today, I replied it would be an honor. Since that time I have been the envy of all my colleagues in the Pentagon. I did warn Ken, there are few combinations more dangerous than a general officer and a microphone and asked him if he was sure he still wanted to do this. He said, “yes” but I guess he passed that on because in Dan’s follow-up call to me he was adamant about keeping my remarks short.

Actually, this isn’t the first time I’ve been back to the area in uniform. Many years ago when I was a young captain, I had a cross-country mission in an A-7 that took me over Manning. I called my Aunt, Phyllis Opperman, and said I would like to make a flyby of their farm just north of town. We agreed and as I arrived, my Mom and Dad and others were waving enthusiastically. When I came around for the

second time, however, I noticed the waves were more than enthusiastic, they were almost frantic. I didn't think I was that low or that fast or that noisy but, unfortunately, Bill's feedlot full of cattle did. They knew the noise was coming from the west and they were going east, fences were not a factor. At least they didn't make it to Templeton.

I would be remiss if I didn't personally thank Dan Peters and the committee for their initiative. I also commend the efforts of the VFW and American Legion for their contribution. The energies of these groups coupled with the design and artwork of Clint Hansen have made this a world-class monument. On behalf of all of us who have worn the uniform, a very special salute for what you've done.

As I began to put my ideas together on what to say today, it occurred to me this monument was one about stories. Stories....what is it about stories that fascinates us so much. From the time we are small children we all like stories. I'm sure if you think back, you can probably remember your favorite stories as a child. I can still remember my Mom reading the "Ugly Duckling."

We like stories because they are entertaining. But stories are more than that, stories give us moral lessons, stories help provide us our identity. The subject of the story, determining who are the heroes and heroines, the villains, and the outcomes all help us define our values. So what kind of stories do I see in this monument? Essentially, I see four different types or categories of stories I would like to base my remarks on today.

The first category I see in this monument is a community story.

Manning is rich in these. The Hausbarn and Hassler farmstead are prime examples, one dating our heritage back to the 1800s and the other our history through the 1900s. This corner has a history of community stories as well. It was on this corner the Children's Day parades would end and the activities began just down the street at the old Fireman's Hall. I remember my mom would make me dance every year, so I would find my second cousin and dance the Bunny Hop...once. Needless to say my dancing is not a story worth retelling.

And, now we have this monument to tell another community story, the story of how we have supported the defense of our great nation. I think

the location of this site is well placed. Being on a heavily traveled corner, coupled with a slower traffic pattern, it will provide a constant reminder of the sacrifices our town has made over the years to insure our freedom. There are those who would argue this may be our most significant community story, how fitting to have such a magnificent monument to remind us of our contribution to such a noble cause.

The second category of stories I see here is that of support. For everyone memorialized here there were many who stayed behind and provided moral support. As I look across the audience today, it's apparent most of you are not named on the monument, yet you're here. Why did you come here today? You came to honor someone, maybe more than one, listed on the wall behind me. Every member on this wall had parents who were proud of their son's or daughter's choice to wear the uniform; but, still were apprehensive as their child embarked on a journey of many unknowns and the anxious times of separation that followed. When I read the newspaper article of Glen Jensen returning to Omaha in his B-29 following WWII, he was greeted by not only his parents, but by his grandmother as well. I'm sure his grandma had said a few prayers for his safety and she too looked forward to that day.

During WWII, Manning led the nation in the victory clothing drive with an average of 17 items given per person. That's one and half times the rate of the nearest other community in the nation. Some would say this is a story about clothes; I say it's an indicator of the level of support by individuals who were supporting those in harms way. We in uniform couldn't serve without the support of friends and family; and, if the truth be known there are more untold stories of courage and perseverance by those left behind than we'll ever realize.

The third category of stories I see is that of the individual servicemen and women honored here today. For all of us who have worn the uniform, our time in the military was an experience we will never forget. Some of our greatest friendships and greatest moments occurred while on active duty. The places we've seen, the events we've been a part of, the emotions of pride and accomplishment we've felt, all were great stories in and of themselves. For those of you in the audience who are being honored here today, I know you're thinking, " we can't tell ALL the stories that went on while in uniform, its best we leave a few of them untold".

But there are a few stories I would like to tell. The first is from WWI about my great uncle Hans Musfeldt, serving from 1915-1917. For those of you who knew Hans, you'll remember him as a man of few words...very few words. If you got a story from uncle Hans, it was a short story at best. But I remember him talking about his military experience, how he traveled to Washington state for basic training, the boat trip to France and how he was just days from going to the front lines when the cease fire was called. After the conflict, he had an opportunity to view the German's Big Bertha, the largest artillery piece of the war mounted on a rail car and designed to bombard Paris. He remembered how the supply chain had somehow gone awry and there was literally a mountain of boots dumped on the ground and you could climb on the pile and pick out a pair if you could find the right size. For Hans I believe this was one of the most memorable experiences of his life. When he passed away in 1970, over 50 years after his discharge from the army, he still had his official army, oval framed portrait and a bag containing his helmet, gas mask, leggings, canteens, and blankets. After his death I ended up with these items and because of them his story may be unique. Now my wife was never as enamored with Uncle Hans's artifacts as I was and so they never made the decorator cut in

our home. But when I moved into my current office in the Pentagon, I inherited several WWI aviation art pieces. So now I have a WWI wall with those pictures and Uncle Hans's portrait as well. In a cabinet next to this collage I have displayed all the other items I just mentioned. With additional postcards and letters I have received to round out the collection, his story gets told many times over.

Another story I'd like to share with you is that of Wilmer Ranniger. I met him through his twin daughters who were in my graduating class. I knew him for almost fifty years but never knew his military story. He recently passed away, but fortunately Pam Kusel interviewed him for her newspaper about a year ago and was able to retell his story.

Wilmer served with the 82 Air Borne Division during WWII. Still today, it remains one of the army's most elite divisions. He was assigned to glider duty, one of the most dangerous duties of the war. He was involved in the invasion of Sicily and the invasion of Italy. He stood 100 feet from General Eisenhower as he rallied the troops the night before D-Day and the Normandy invasion. When his glider landed in the French countryside the following day, 2 of the 14 aboard were killed. From there his division participated in the Battle of the Bulge

and eventually met up with the Russian army at the end of the war.

Altogether he was in 6 campaigns, only half of his unit returned home, and he did it all for the pay of \$21 per month.

Another honored here today is Col Irene Galloway. She was truly one of the pioneers of women's inclusion into the military. She was in the second class of officers trained in the Women's Army Corps in 1942. She eventually attained the rank of Colonel and became the 4th director of the Women's Army Corps . She not only had to deal with the normal sacrifices of service, but carried the additional burden of convincing others that women had a role in the military. Because of leadership such as hers, women today provide 20% of our military personnel and are fully integrated throughout the operational spectrum.

These three stories I've mentioned are abbreviated versions of how these men and women served our country. There are over 800 more stories left to tell. How do we pass on those stories? I think there are several ways. The library has a scrapbook of press clippings and provides the media perspective of those honored today. One of the most fascinating for me is David Kusel's web site. By going to

davidkusel.com you can find a wealth of information about Manning and from there you can link to each of the individuals on the monument and read their stories. If you have a story of someone, I encourage you to provide it and we can all enjoy it.

The fourth category of story I see in this monument is what these individuals contributed collectively to our nation's defense. None of them went off to fight by themselves, they were all part of a bigger team and involved in large operations. Many on the wall answered the call in times of heightened conflict. Even those who served in times of peace contributed to our ongoing readiness. During my 34 years of service, I've had 21 friends and acquaintances die in the line of duty. All were peacetime accidents except one who is enshrined on the Vietnam Memorial in Washington DC. Many of our troops sacrificed, 15 on this wall gave the ultimate sacrifice, in winning the great struggles of the 19th and 20th Centuries. Now we are engaged in another global struggle, one against terror. Just as the contributions of those who have served brought us victory in the past, I am convinced that those who serve today will insure we prevail in the future. Let there be no doubt we will win this war on terror. This fourth category is the story of freedom, a

tribute to 800+ men and women who have risked their lives to insure we enjoy the freedom that makes our country the greatest of any in the world. That freedom is ours to keep or lose. It is the duty of every American to ensure the liberty we inherited is passed on to our children and grandchildren. The men and women honored here today have taken that responsibility seriously. Their stories should never be forgotten.

Next week, as I do on occasion, I will be the officiating officer for a funeral at Arlington National Cemetery. Even though today is not a funeral, I think the words I will convey to the grieving family are appropriate here. After the honor guard crisply folds the American flag that's been draped over the casket, he or she will hand it to me, and I, on bended knee, will present it to the widow and family by saying these words, "On behalf of the President of the United States, the Chief of Staff and a grateful nation, please accept this flag. Your husband served his country well, you should be very proud." When you consider all the conflicts of the past century and a half and the contributions represented here, we are rightfully so a grateful nation. All on this wall

have served their country well and should be very proud of their time in uniform.

In closing, I look at this monument and see stories. The conversation will always come back to the stories. The stories of our community commitment, the stories of those who provided the support we needed to serve, the incredible stories of those who wore the uniform and finally the story of our freedom. I encourage each of you to come back sometime in the days ahead and reflect on the stories that are symbolized by this memorial, they're great for our nation, great for our community and great for our soul. Thank you again to the committee for making this monument a reality and for allowing me to be with you today. God bless America and the wonderful community of Manning.