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OCTOBER 7, 1975

Office of the Vice President  
(Kings Mountain, North Carolina)

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REMARKS OF THE VICE PRESIDENT  
AT THE  
KINGS MOUNTAIN BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION  
KINGS MOUNTAIN, NORTH CAROLINA

October 7, 1975

First, let me say how delighted I am to be here today representing President Ford. The President sends you all his best wishes and he is sincerely disappointed that he could not be here personally. And the President also asked me to express his warmest congratulations on this imaginative and exciting approach to the Bicentennial. I agree absolutely with that opinion.

What we are witnessing here today is the Bicentennial spirit at its best. The same character traits that motivated our ancestors are evident today in what you have achieved. This celebration has really been an initiative of the people. Individual citizens, civic groups, business groups and local leaders from this region have joined together to recreate this brilliant page from our past. Without any help from the Federal government or any state government; you gave of your own time; you put in your own talents; you paid with your own resources to make this historic moment live again. This is a perfect example of what the American character is all about. It is made up of initiative, hard work, imagination, caring about each other and loving this country.

If a foreign visitor were to ask where did such a great, free Nation begin--it began here -- in places like this historic border area of the Carolinas where a famous battle was fought. Our country began with men like those 900 mountaineers who left their farms; who left brave, strong, women behind to carry on; and who marched across the mountains to face a tough, disciplined, professional enemy.

What sort of an army were these mountain men? The British smugly referred to them as "backwater" men -- but that was before the battle. The guns they carried were their own. The blankets they slept on, they took from home. The horses they rode had been hitched to plows just days before. So let's think of that kind of sacrifice the next time we face a hardship. These citizen soldiers didn't have a general officer. They had no orders from the Continental Congress. They didn't have an army doctor. They had no uniforms. They had no paymaster -- and they got no pay. But I will tell you this -- they had courage. And they loved freedom more than life itself. Their Colonel Shelby commanded them to "shoot like hell and fight like devils!" That is just what they did. And because they did, the well-trained, well-led, well-armed redcoats were defeated.

The Battle of Kings Mountain became the turning point of the Revolutionary War in the South. The war was now headed down the road which led eventually to the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown. Colonists then became free people -- and the colonies then became a free Nation.

How can we remember these events without knowing that we are the luckiest people on Earth -- because we live in the greatest nation on Earth and because we are free. And how can we remember what our ancestors went through without recognizing that we are the same kind of people -- we have the same tough genes in our national character. And recognizing that fact -- we ought to recognize that there is no problem that we cannot conquer.

(MORE)

A Britisher with American blood in his veins said it best. Speaking of our common heritage, Winston Churchill once said: "We have not journeyed all this way across the centuries, across the oceans, across the mountains, across the prairies, because we are made of sugar candy."

Let us never forget that we are a people who found a wilderness and, out of it, carved a nation. We fought for our freedom from colonial masters. We survived the Great Depression. We defeated tyrants in two world wars. And we have achieved the highest standard of life on Earth -- all in less than 200 years.

I don't think there is anything we Americans cannot accomplish if we put our hearts and our minds to the task. There is nothing wrong with America that Americans cannot right. And let us never forget that we began as a deeply religious people. And we must continue to lead our lives from strong spiritual foundations. Yesterday, Chaplain Elson put it beautifully in his prayer opening the U.S. Senate. "In Thy power and by Thy grace", he said, "make us better than we are that we may do our part in the shaping of a better world."

I am optimistic about the future. And I have absolute faith in the American people. We have vast, untapped natural resources and the unlimited strength, vitality and creativity of a great, free people.

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