

THEY SIGNED FOR US

Of all our national holidays, ***Independence Day***, or the ***Fourth of July*** is the most favorite of most Americans. *Memorial Day* and *Veterans Day* are more sober events, but the ***Fourth of July*** usually brings forth nostalgic thoughts of happy days past. I still remember those fireworks, picnics, and parades of days gone by.

Today it seems that people have to hit the road and get away in order to celebrate the day. I also remember one ***Fourth of July*** back in 1945. We were sitting at anchor in a transport area named Kerema Retto, a small group of islands a little south of Okinawa when the Kamikazes flew in low. The fireworks display was quite impressive, but we didn't have a picnic.

I always liked the fireworks displays we used to have sitting at anchor in my boat off of Navy Pier Chicago much better as we watched the splendor.

What about that first ***Fourth of July*** back in 1776? The events that unfolded in Philadelphia changed the political thinking of the world and were placed on a piece of paper we call the ***Declaration of Independence*** had never been tried. I am amazed that those early patriots could come up with the far-fetched ideas of *truth* and *inalienable rights* to be *self-evident*, that *all are created equal*, deserving *life, liberty*, and entitled to the *pursuit of happiness*, with governments deriving their *just powers* from the *consent of the governed* and so on. We should take the time to re-read the *glorious document* that made it possible for us today to live our lives in such plenty. What a piece of magnificent thinking!

I keep thinking of those men who had the indomitable courage to sign the document. These were not an anarchist rabble, but men who had wealth, substance, and much to lose if the revolution fizzled. If you delve into the history of the signers, you will find that they "mutually pledged to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor." Many lost their fortunes and ended up penniless. Thomas Nelson Jr., a signer from Virginia, ordered troops to shell his own mansion when he learned it was a British headquarters. He was left in financial distress as a result of the war. Two signers, Hayward and Rutledge, were captured by the British and imprisoned. Arthur Middleton's homes were ravaged by the British. Philip

Livingston of New York had his home used as a British barracks and hospital. They confiscated his business interests. John Hart from New Jersey had his farm and mills wrecked by the redcoats and was driven into hiding. On returning after American victories at Princeton and Trenton, he found his wife sick and dying and his family scattered.

Thus was the plight of many of the signers. Not all of them signed on **July 4th**, but there were a total of 56 signers. The **War for Independence** had already begun. The British Army was a brutal force to be reckoned with. It was an experienced military and used all the tactics an invading army uses. There was no Geneva Convention in those days. No video cameras recorded their atrocities. Hanging was a common thing for them, as well as the firing squad. They had little concern for humiliation of the prisoners. Of course, they didn't have news media to report their indiscretions.

Today, there are disagreements and dissensions amongst Americans. But, just think what it was like in **1776**. A great segment of the population remained loyal to the King. Not all were in favor of an **Independent Country** and were content with the indiscretions of the King. Fortunately, the *patriots* had greater zeal. The army of George Washington was hardly a match for the professionally trained British army, yet with all their handicaps, they were able to persevere and prevail over the British. What developed from that grand effort was our great country. And I repeat that! **“Great Country!”** We have every right to celebrate and remember how it all happened, and to remember those who had the indomitable courage to put their name on that great document we refer to as the **Declaration of Independence**.

Remember, they signed for us.

Stan Parks