

Statement as delivered by

Secretary of the Navy, Donald C. Winter on Berry Park Extension

Littleton, CO

Wednesday - July 4, 2007

Patsy, Cindy, Dan and the rest of the Dietz family, Congressman Tancredo, Admiral Kernan, Mayor Taylor, Mike Thorton, ladies and gentlemen, I am greatly honored to join you in paying tribute to an American hero on a day when all Americans are called upon to consider the meaning of the American story.

231 years ago, with a stirring declaration of independence from the most powerful country on the globe, America was born and the world changed in ways that could not possibly have been imagined.

13 small, squabbling, weak mini-states stood up to their colonial masters and announced to the world that they would go their own way.

It was an audacious act of defiance.

Though young and in a position of extreme disadvantage relative to the great powers of the day, the people who called themselves Americans held a trump card that has always been underestimated throughout history—they had an irrepressible spirit.

It was a spirit of rebellion, and a spirit that simply could not abide restrictions on the liberties granted them—granted not by government, but by God.

Their rights were “inalienable”—no government could take them away.

And the truths that they put forward were “self-evident”—so clearly obvious that they needed no arguments in support of them.

What kind of people, the world must have wondered, would declare their independence in such an unprecedented manner!

Then, after detailing their specific grievances against their colonial masters, the signers of the Declaration pledged to each other their lives, their fortune, and their sacred honor.

In making that pledge, they made a solemn commitment to defend what they had created.

They knew that liberty had a price.

The republic would need to be defended, and it would require fellow patriots to sacrifice on behalf of freedom.

Today we honor the kind of patriot whom the Founders would have been immensely proud of, and would have extolled as a guardian of their hard-won achievement.

Gunner's Mate Second Class Danny Dietz was with us for only 25 years.

But Danny's short life was touched with greatness.

The people who knew him best—those with whom he served, those who grew up alongside him, and those who molded his character along the way in this very community—were not surprised that Danny was able to reach the greatest heights before his life was cut short by a terrorist enemy.

They were not surprised that the Navy saw in him something that they saw too—that here was a young man who had a special, rare quality that separated him from his peers.

He had an irrepressible spirit—and courage, and inner strength, and a devotion to the warrior ethos.

And so Danny was invited to follow the path of true warriors—that of a Navy SEAL.

The elite community of Navy SEAL's are the bravest of the brave, the most daring, and the most tenacious fighters to be found.

Indeed, SEAL's are famous the world over for their ability to accomplish the near impossible—on land, in the air, and at sea.

Only the best are qualified to join their ranks.

Danny Dietz, it was soon clear, belonged among them.

Danny Dietz's career as a SEAL took him on missions far from home, where he was assigned to take part in some of the most sensitive, important military operations of our country.

Having proven himself again and again as a Navy SEAL, Danny Dietz was assigned to serve in a four-man Special Reconnaissance element operating in a remote region of Afghanistan in June 2005 when fate intervened to reveal the full extent of his heroic character.

On 28 June, Danny Dietz and his team found themselves face to face with the enemy.

They took fire from a numerically superior force operating from higher ground, and Dietz was wounded in a barrage of enemy fire.

Despite his injuries, the warrior in him—his irrepressible spirit—would not allow him to take leave of the field of battle.

His teammates would come first.

And so he continued to fight on bravely until mortal wounds at last put an end to this heroic, final chapter of his life.

Danny Dietz' soul now belongs to God, but his acts of valor belong to history.

He was taken too soon from us, but he leaves behind a legacy that inspires us today, and serves as a shining example of heroism and courage for future generations to follow in his footsteps.

For his valor, Danny was awarded the Navy Cross last September in a ceremony in Washington, DC, I was deeply honored to have had the opportunity to present that truly distinguished award to his family.

Today, it is particularly gratifying to see that his sacrifice is being recognized by the people of Littleton with a statue that does justice to the heroic nature of his service.

We build monuments when we, as a society, wish to make a statement about the enduring values that we hold dear.

Courage, sacrifice, heroism, selfless service—these are values that led to our independence more than two centuries ago, and they are values that we will always cherish in the future.

This beautiful memorial, with echoes of that American icon—the Minuteman Statue on Battle Green Square in Lexington, Massachusetts—is a fitting tribute to a great defender of freedom.

Today we look at the Minuteman Statue and we are reminded of the heroes who made our freedom possible more than two centuries ago.

Years from now, people will look upon this statue and be reminded of the heroism of a son of Colorado whose country he was proud to serve.

On this day of our nation's birth, let us remember the audacious spirit of defiance and courage of our Founders—the same spirit that animated the life of an American hero who died to keep it alive: Danny Dietz.

Thank you for coming here today to honor one of your own, and one of our nation's finest.

May God bless the Dietz family, and may God bless America.