



## Aloysius Boyle

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## This July 4th

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*"The future doesn't belong to the faint hearted; it belongs to the brave."* -- Ronald Reagan, President of the United States

This quote, and the conversation it stimulated, began germinating on July 4th, 2008 on the Haditha Dam, in Iraq. I was travelling via convoy to the dam on a resupply mission when I bumped into a friend from college, Miles Bower. Our convoy engines hummed in the background as we greeted each other in a sweaty embrace. It seemed bizarre, standing with a friend I had known for almost a decade, talking about the holiday, and what our buddies were doing at the beach that weekend while looking out over the Euphrates River.

We spoke about friends headed to Afghanistan, those getting out of the military and the heroes who never came home. We exchanged thoughts and ideas on ways to continue contributing to the mission both in and out of the Marine Corps. The shared camaraderie of the military and our experiences in combat had come to define us, and we knew there was still much work to be done at home and abroad. Ultimately, we said our goodbyes. I climbed back into my Humvee as sand and plumes of "moon dust" clouded inside the vehicle. That conversation lingered in my mind, and has for the past three years.

235 years ago, a consortium of patriots gathered in Philadelphia, probably having similar discussions to what we spoke about on top of the dam, and ended up changing the world. This is what makes America so great, and I believe what our founding fathers dreamed of happening when they declared Independence. This Fourth of July, we acknowledge the past, celebrate the present liberties we utilize daily, and recognize the efforts and sacrifices of the men and women who stand, ever vigilant, protecting those rights. The freedom we declared on July 4th, 1776 was wrought with patience in creating policy, determination against a seemingly unyielding foe and the unequivocal spirit of putting words into action.

This determination and fighting spirit, that emboldened Francis Marion and Thomas Paine, has been handed down to our leaders fighting in the cities of Iraq and the mountains in Afghanistan.

Like our founding fathers, today's guardians of freedom continually apply their sweat and blood to preserve this as the land of the free and home of the brave. Daily, they are making a difference in the lives of so many Americans.

Jonathan Kuniholm is also familiar with Haditha and the Euphrates. While on an operation there, he was blown up by an IED and [lost](#) his arm. Since his injury, he has dedicated his life to research in prosthetics; advocating for our wounded and bringing technology of today to assist amputees. His efforts have enabled so many other wounded to return from Iraq and Afghanistan to pursue life, liberty and happiness.

Graduating from college, Paul Rieckoff enlisted in the army. In 2001, he would earn an officer's commission and on September 11th he was at ground zero participating in rescue efforts. He would continue his training, then deploy to Iraq, conducting combat operations in Baghdad. Returning home, and recognizing the myriad issues facing our service members, he [founded](#) and became the Executive Director of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), an advocacy group dedicated to improving lives of veterans and their families who fought in those wars.

Captain Greg Galeazzi is the youngest of seven children. Service and sacrifice are a part of his family's genetic code. His father served in the navy, and his three older brothers are all combat veterans who fought in Iraq or Afghanistan. Greg always admired his brothers, and knew in college that he, too, would serve in the Army. It was only natural that he followed their example. It was two weeks before he was due home from Afghanistan and would finish his career when he was struck by an IED, losing both legs and severely wounding his arm. Greg will recover, he will keep fighting; this is the man he is, and the caliber of family and support he has around him. Even at home, he continues to lead from the front, inspiring me and so many others. His dogged persistence to push through his traumatic injuries will not impede his progress to achieve his life goals.

Travis Manion grew up outside of Philadelphia, not far from where our founding fathers met. He was a three-sport star athlete who attended the Naval Academy and graduated a Marine Corps officer. He deployed back to Iraq in 2006. He served side by side with the Iraqi army on a transition team. They fought during the surge to help crush the insurgency and bring the opportunity of these unalienable rights to a country that never had it. Travis never came home. He pledged his life and sacred honor for his brothers in arms. In his death, his family [founded](#) the Travis Manion Foundation, impacting lives and honoring the fallen by challenging the living. Travis' selfless sacrifice was recognized this past Memorial Day by our president.

Throughout history, during times of injustice, our brave citizens and service members have not sat back, but rather stepped up. Many of them have immersed into society, continuing the mission. Others names have joined our heroes of the past and are etched on marble slabs at Arlington. At each historic moment, there was the power of one voice that brought us together, capturing our spirits and energizing us to make a difference.

It is Jonathan, Paul, Greg, Travis and their families, and countless others who fought to preserve the freedom we enjoy this weekend. It was one voice that was heard on July 4th, 1776, declaring

our independence to the world. It echoed again on September 11th, 2001, as we mourned the loss of our loved ones, declaring relentless termination of terrorism. This pursuit spanned years of war in distant countries and recently culminated under the cover of darkness by our elite SEALs; further supporting our American ethos that if we say it, we *will* do it.

During these moments we are born again; as a united nation. We can never lose this spirit and we can never, ever forget the sacrifices of so many. The promulgation of this sentiment is powerful. In one voice, with one action, our founding fathers, our presidents, our citizens and our nation's young warriors have impacted so many others, and so can you. Don't allow patriotism to be a trend exhibited over a weekend, but rather a continual manifestation of a thought transferred into action.

*The views presented are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Defense, the Department of the Navy or the United States Marine Corps.*