

My Address for the Purple Heart Jewel Ceremony

Fredericksburg, Virginia, USA, June 15th 2008

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you all for coming and thank you very much for attending today's event here in Fredericksburg, a town with great history and the town of President George Washington's childhood. - George Washington who became the first President of the United States of America in 1789.

It was in the year of 1782, on August 7, when George Washington, then commanderinchief of the Continental Army issued the order from his Newburg, New York headquarters awarding the first Purple Heart, then known as the Badge of Military Merit with the phrase: "Let it be known that he who wears the military order of the purple heart has given of his blood in the defense of his homeland and shall forever be revered by his follow countrymen."

Since then the Purple Heart was always a sign of honor, a very special medal to honor soldiers who gave their health, or who even made the ultimate sacrifice in the fight for freedom, liberty and justice.

Your soldiers fought not only for their own freedom and the freedom of the American people, they also fought for my freedom, for the liberty of my home town, Dachau, and for the justice of my people here in Germany. This makes their deeds even more honorable.

It was the 42nd Rainbow" Infantry Division which on April 29, 1945, liberated my hometown of Dachau which had suffered so much under the infamous Nazi regime, and by the liberation saved many people from sure death. Those proud troops fought against the unspeakable Nazis, a regime which brought so much incredible horror over Europe.

In knowing this it is my wish to say "thank you". To show my and my peoples friendship, I've made this Purple Heart Jewel, which I present today to the veterans of the 42nd "Rainbow" Infantry Division who served then and today are represented by the Rainbow Division Veterans Memorial Foundation. To express this thankfulness,

I've made the Purple Heart Jewel out of 18 karat gold and diamonds, always having in mind the ideal and meaning of the original Purple Heart as created by George Washington.

My gift shall be a sign of thankfulness and remembrance to the 42nd Rainbow Division. It is also my wish, that this Purple Heart Jewel is understood as sign of friendship between the people of the United States and Germany, a friendship that I want to affirm herewith.

And it shall be also a sign of thanks and honor of all those who fought and presently fight for freedom, liberty and justice. Please let me also take this opportunity to remember the many victims murdered by the Nazis, those who were murdered in the

Concentration Camps, the victims of all colors, Jews, Germans, all nationalities, all those who refused to knuckle under the oppressive Nazi government, and all those who were persecuted only because of their nationality or race.

Let me remember all those who risked their lives and died for their commitment to freedom, liberty and justice, let me remember and honor also those sincere Germans who did so, let me remember General-Major Hans Oster, member of the Resistance who held the highest military rank, let me remember also Admiral Wilhelm Canaris and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who were all murdered on April 9th 1945 in the Concentration Camp Flossenbuerg. I want to remember also those other upright and brave Germans in the Resistance who gave their lives in the fight against the unjust Nazi regime.

Let me also mention and honor General-Major Achim Oster, son of Hans Oster, who showed his whole lifetime to be a strong advocate for liberty and justice and a strong opponent of fascism or any possible rebirth of such an ideology. Mrs. Anna Oster, wife of Achim Oster and daughter in law of Hans Oster authorized me to sends you her thanks and greetings, with the wish that General-Major Hans Oster and her husband General-Major Achim Oster will never be forgotten.

Because not to forget is the best we can do, it is highly important to remember. Remembering is the only way to let these brave and honest people live in our memories forever. To remember is essential to ensuring that such horrible conduct and mistakes are never made again. To remember is something I'll expect and I'll ask from my people in Germany.

And exactly in this way I ask that the deeds and much good done by the proud 42nd "Rainbow" Infantry Division be remembered so they will never be forgotten and they will live forever in our memories. This I request from all.

To be a cherished symbol of this remembering, my Purple Heart Jewel will now be handed over and forever a hallmark sign of this remembrance, friendship and thankfulness. In addition to my gift I am also handing over a letter and personal remarks from Mrs. Anna Oster to the Veterans of the 42nd "Rainbow" Infantry Division, in behalf for the RDVMF.

But just let me finally mention something also very important for me:

Attached to this Purple Heart Jewel is a donation program for the benefit of troops and family members of the current 42nd Infantry Division, which consist also out of New York National Guard citizen soldiers. My wish is, that this donation program would receive as much attention and success as possible.

I'd highly appreciate it, if today's attendees would assist this program.

Thank you all, and thank you for your attention.

Ludwig Stoeckl