

Atheists in Foxholes Rally
Washington DC, Veteran's Day, Nov 11, 2005

Speech by Jim Heldberg

Atheists make America strong.

I served the US Navy as both a sailor and an officer. Yes, I went through 2 boot camps.

I'm proud that I served under President John F. Kennedy. But an hour after I was commissioned, he was assassinated. I still miss him.

I started a war. No, not by myself, but I helped start a war. I was a deck officer on the ship that put the first US troops into Vietnam at the Chu Lai landing in 1964. I came home safe, but the names of some of my shipmates are on that black wall a few blocks away.

I managed a large Navy school. I had 100 instructors and 1,000 students, working 2 shifts day and night, studying topics from mathematics to metallurgy, learning to operate nuclear-powered Navy ships.

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For most of us, the passing years have not dimmed the intensity of our time in uniform. Like you, I worked hard in the military. I worked hard as a veteran, too. I raised children, sent family members to war, worked 3 careers, paid big taxes, took part in government, and voted in every single election. I fly the American flag in front of my home every day, as I'm sure many of you do, too.

No one dare call us unpatriotic. Atheists make American strong.

Terrorism is today's threat. Terrorism isn't new. It has been used in every war. (pause) Today's religious terrorism is different, though. It's hard to stop people

who want to kill to prove who has the best imaginary friend. But the best solution to religious terrorism is on a bumper sticker on my truck. It says, "Atheism cures religious terrorism."

Atheism has been around much longer than religion. After all, we were here first. Strangely enough, American religion thinks they have Atheists pinned down. They do have us out-numbered, out-spent, out-organized, out-lawyered, out-advertised, and maybe even out-rifled.

That's what the British thought about the Continental Army, too. General George Washington's army spent several years ducking and running, learning and training, until they were big enough, strong enough, smart enough, and ready enough to take America away from England. I'm sure the Atheist Army assembled here today won't let religion take America away from us.

Against the forces of religion, today's Atheists are like Washington's army. We're still mostly Minutemen, dedicated amateurs doing a important jobs, sometimes on only a few minutes' notice. But, we're more than just Minutemen. We're recruiting, we're building, and we're training. We now have Special Forces to use for specific battles. Sometimes we win. More important, we're growing stronger, and we're learning to fight better.

We're much more powerful than we appear, because we have the ultimate weapon: the truth. Religion is really afraid of us. One Atheist can scare a thousand religious folks. You know that. So, multiply the number of people here today by 1,000, and that's how strong we really are. Veteran Madalyn Murray O'Hair scared millions, and she changed American history.

Unfortunately, much of today's Atheist manpower is still on the reserve list. We know that 30 million Americans are non-religious. But most of them are still waiting to join our fight. We need to mobilize our Atheist reserves. We need to cultivate our allies, too.

We need to get even better organized. Veterans can lead the way. The US military is the most organized group in the world. The military taught us how to organize a fight for land, water, air and space. Let's use those skills to organize a fight for America's brains and future.

Atheists make America strong. Stronger Atheists will make a stronger America.