

**JOEL D. SOLLENDER
REMARKS
VETERANS MEMORIAL SERVICE
MIRAMAR NATIONAL CEMETERY
24 MAY 2015**

My thanks to all of you – dignitaries, mourners, friends and comrades – for being here, today, and paying your respects to our troops.

I am from New York, but have lived here for 20 years, which makes me sort of a quasi-native. I grew up in Manhattan, went to school and worked there most of my life. It was a gentler time, before all the conflicts we have endured since then.

I consider myself as both lucky and fortunate to have lived so long in this blessed land, with my loving wife and lengthy career.

A brief bio: I attended a wonderful high school for gifted boys, with some illustrious graduates – including Doctor Jonas Salk, whom I met while here in San Diego. The school exposed me to literature, and our history. I had finished three years of college before being drafted at age 18 – a smart, wise-assed kid from the big city.

Last summer, I met with Louie Zamperini, the subject of the book “Unbroken.” We spoke about our experiences as P-O-Ws – mine in Germany, which was like a walk in the park, compared with his experiences in Japan. But, what interested me the most was his humility and forbearance by pardoning his cruel captors after the war.

Based on our meeting, there was some local publicity, and so now I am here to speak with you.

I am more than grateful for my years in the military, which taught me so much about myself, our country and its people. We are aware of would-be immigrants, who die seeking freedom, and a better life.

You do not know what freedom is, until you lose it.

--- 0 ---

I lost track of him, but in 1993, I reconnected with an old Army buddy, Bill Carter from Clinton, Missouri, and for a time when we were both young, we bonded. With my New York sense of humor, I called him and announced, "This is Joel, Bill, what's new?" I heard

his phone drop and then his cry,
“Momma, it’s Joel.”

We spoke briefly, there was now a lifetime between us, but arranged to meet in Yuma, Arizona, when he had moved to his winter home there for his health.

All those years were bridged as we rushed across a parking lot in Yuma, Arizona, to greet each other with hugs and tears, while our wives stood by, and strangers wondered what was going on.

So, here were two 68-year-old men acting like long-lost brothers...which indeed we were. We were brothers-in-arms who had fought in Europe...been captured by the Germans... liberated by the Russians...held as hostages by the Russians... escaped from them...and walked 30 miles to American lines,

through a Germany still at war in late April 1945.

The Army created its own melting pot during the War...and our small platoon was a crucible...with boys from Missouri, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Georgia, Virginia, Massachusetts, New York and Oregon all living together... learning what America was all about, and learning about ourselves as well.

We were from small towns and big cities with all the accents of the United States. We were one...and our world was one... despite the different backgrounds, origins, education and religion.

Our world became even closer in combat, especially for Bill and me, when we had over-extended General Patton's Third Army lines by capturing a German pill-box on the Siegfried Line. We saw

the rest of our platoon shattered and destroyed, when they tried to reinforce us.

We ultimately ran out of ammunition, and had to surrender to a German Tiger tank with its infantry support. Our own tanks failed to show up, but our attack up a hill continued as planned.

We suffered through a transport to prison in a locked boxcar, jammed with prisoners, with one bucket in the corner for our wastes. We were abandoned on the tracks when Allied planes bombed the train and the engine sought cover in a tunnel.

We endured frozen feet, and malnutrition, and being bombed by the RAF on Christmas eve, killing over 40 of us who were locked up in the prison barracks in Limberg. And then we were

moved to a larger camp in Luckenwalde near Berlin, through the coldest winter of the century, without heat and with only scanty rations.

Yes, Bill and I lived in one world then.

Our worlds once again resumed their separate orbits after the war. I went home to New York City, and Bill returned to Clinton, Missouri.

We pursued our own careers, raised our children, and both retired shortly after each of us underwent by-pass surgery.

But, over the years, our thoughts often returned to that special time and place.

And, when I met Bill Carter on that reunion day in Arizona, our world was once again one.

It was 70 years ago, and yesterday.

Thank you.