

Mayors' Column
July 5, 2016

I write this as I await the televising of the Macy's fireworks celebration after a weekend of friends and family.

What words can describe what we are celebrating this Fourth? – freedom, independence, sovereignty, heroism, bravery and probably most important by gratitude. FDR words of over 70 years ago resonate so clearly today. “Those who have long enjoyed such privileges as we enjoy forget in time that men died to win them.”

The men who signed the Declaration of Independence gave of themselves beyond measure. When the 56 men of the Second Continental Congress penned their signatures in Philadelphia, they were fully aware that it was an act of treason punishable by death. The famous John Hancock, wealthy merchant, President of the Second Continental Congress and first Governor of Massachusetts signed first so boldly so, “the British Ministry first can read that name without spectacles.” As he put the pen down he said, “May they double their reward.”

To a man, they were well educated, soft spoken and had security but as they said, “they valued liberty more.”

Their signing statement, written in unanimous accord read, “For the support of this declaration, with firm reliance on the protection of the divine providence, we mutually pledge to each other, our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor.”

And then they paid deeply on every level.....

Most were family men of considerable means who had a great deal to lose in person and property. Their document was a declaration of

freedom which required a long and arduous war to be fought before our nation declared was a nation in fact.

Of the 56 patriots who signed their names, nine died of wounds or hardship during the War of Independence; five were imprisoned for decades; five were captured as traitors and tortured and killed; several had wives, sons and even entire families killed. One signer lived to see all 13 of his children murdered. Every signer was a victim of manhunts with huge bounties on their heads. They lived on the run, leaving prosperous farms, shipping businesses and law practices. Twelve signers had their homes and property burned to ruins and 17 lost everything they owned, dying destitute. Yet not one defected or went back on his pledged word.

Despite the tragedies, John Adams felt the Fourth must be a festive occasion of remembering when writing to Abigail that, “the Fourth of July ought to be celebrated by pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations from one end of this continent to the other.”

With incredible poetic justice, on the 50th anniversary of their signing, Jefferson and John Adams died on the Fourth of July within hours of each other and five years to the day, James Monroe also passed on the Fourth.

Their history of heroism also exists in our small Village. On our roll of service to country, we have 1575 Bronxvillians and I know it is most assuredly double that number. Eighty five Villagers gave their lives for our freedom. One only has to walk by Christ Church and look at the beautiful stain glass windows to see one dedicated to Village resident Charlie Flammer, a modern day hero. A Bronxville School graduate, Princeton class of 1941 and a B25 Bomber pilot, Charlie maneuvered his plane in an air battle so that his entire crew could get out safely knowing he had to go down with the plane. His is still listed as MIA.

Village residents gave their lives in all theaters of freedom – at the bombing of Pearl Harbor, over the skies of Britain with the RAF, in the Battle of the Iwo Jima and on the beaches of Normandy.

As I write, Village residents are in harms way in Iraq and Afghanistan and on the world seas.

How do we process, honor and keep alive the greatness of the sacrifice of the Americans that we remember today?

Archibald Mac Leish speaking in the voice of a fallen soldier in the poem “The Young Dead Soldiers” wrote, “Our deaths are not ours. They are yours. They will mean what you make them mean.”

I believe General Patton said it best about holidays such as the Fourth of July. “We should not mourn the men who died while serving, rather we should thank God that such men lived.”