

ADDRESS OF CONGRESSMAN JOHN E. FOGARTY
AT THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF VARNUM CONTINENTALS
EAST GREENWICH, RHODE ISLAND - SEPTEMBER 21, 1957

It is a distinct privilege to be invited to the hospitable town of East Greenwich and to share with Varnum Continentals and their friends in this golden anniversary of a proud military organization. I say proud, justly proud, because it preserves the distinguishing mark of the soldier -- his uniform -- in the fundamental glory of its colors and its trappings at that crucial time in our country's history when our colonies earned the right to be a nation. This organization preserved the uniform as we seek in this day to preserve the liberties and the opportunities that men who wore that uniform died to preserve for us. The courage and sacrifice of 180 years ago made possible this America of today.

In keeping with its patriotic principles and its basic obedience to the Commander-in-Chief of us all, it is a part of this celebration that we shall toast The President of the United States. That is the privilege entrusted to me and, conscious of all that it means in this troubled hour of world crises, I propose that toast -- THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

It is a happy coincidence that our President is our guest. He finds rest and respite from the cares of office in the city of Newport which is our common pride here in Rhode Island. There is nothing of party--there can be nothing of prejudice -- as we all wish him a happy stay -- and a refreshing return to the burdens of the White House to which the wishes of his fellow citizens -- expressed in the democracy of the ballot -- have called him.

The Newport upon which our President looks is a Newport of peace and plenty. He can hardly recognize in it the war-time Newport -- the Newport of the Revolutionary War. Only from the history books will he know that it felt the hand of the oppressor -- the British firebrand was applied to its homes -- and men, women and children were refugees from the cruelties of the invader.

But the East Greenwich of that time knew history at first hand. It was to this town -- a seaport town that the refugees of that winter came in their suffering. And it was here out of the scanty supplies that a war-time East Greenwich could gather, that the inhabitants shared the little they had with their fellow countrymen in need.

And it was from here -- musket in hand -- that citizen left his plow, his books, his leisure -- and set out for Massachusetts when the neighboring colony was hard pressed by the same British redcoat.

It was in that goodly throng that Nathaniel Greene marched as a private -- the while James Mitchell Varnum was in command.

This is the name you would perpetuate. And you have chosen well. For in the short span of his life it may be said that he summed up the ideals of obligation to his country -- and symbolized the opportunities of that country -- as almost a complete volume of duty and destiny.

America means opportunity for education. James Mitchell Varnum symbolized that as a graduate -- with honors -- in the very first class of Rhode Island College -- later to be known as Brown University -- in the year of 1769. He sought to repay this opportunity to learn -- by teaching others. He moved on to the study of law and the civil liberties that are dear to us -- he defended -- that they might pass untarnished from colonial court to the justice of a sovereign state in a confederation of states.

He was a citizen-patriot in the best sense that has given us a citizen army throughout all our history on the premise that if we are to deserve freedom, it shall be the duty of each of us to defend that freedom. He was a Colonel among his neighbors -- he was a General by choice of our Government -- he was a General by selection of the immortal George Washington.

It was no empty title he earned in a war that was long and cruel. The cause to which great men pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor -- was fought in agony and privation. The Battle of Rhode Island was bitter personal adventure to the men like Varnum who bore the brunt of it. It is hard for us to believe that our gentle state was ever the battleground of men's hates. But the American will never forget the name Valley Forge. It was more than a name to James Mitchell Varnum. It was the Gethsemane of the colonial cause. Amid its stark tragedy, no heart was braver than that of General Varnum. We can imagine the pride and satisfaction of General Washington as he named this lad of East Greenwich -- "the light of the camp".

We have seen Varnum as student, lawyer and soldier. His neighbors next chose the role of statesman for him and elected him to the Continental Congress in May 1780. To this day we are indebted to him for the boldness of his ideas, the courage of his convictions -- his outspoken advocacy of liberties to chart a new nation to its destiny. He gave an example of the private citizen with an awareness of public duty which has been the bulwark of our democracy -- the strength of our political system -- the source of our leadership as nation after nation has passed from the prime position they once held among world governments. It is startling to recall that there does not now exist in the world -- any nation in the same form it knew when James Mitchell Varnum raised his voice in that Continental Congress of 1780.

Next we see Varnum in the role of expanding America -- when what is now Ohio was proclaimed as the Far West. We of New England may have forgotten that we then considered the great state of Ohio as part of our territory and staked our claims there.

This was then our Northwest Territory General Varnum accepted appointment as Federal Judge for the Territory. It was truly a frontier with Marietta set for its capital and the white dwellers living behind stockades to protect them from the Indians. I mention this to indicate the sacrifice that Varnum made -- leaving the comfort and peace of the neighborhood where he was admired and respected -- the home that was the loveliest in all this colony -- and enduring the hardships of journey by horseback to the perils and privations which were finally to claim his life. As surely as the soldier on the battlefield, General Varnum died in what others might call exile from familiar scenes -- but what he deemed to be his duty and an honor conferred upon him by the nation he loved and served.

I have probably been telling you a familiar story; but I feel that here in the name of Varnum you commemorate more than the military -- you pay tribute to true Americanism -- to the qualities that we must be able to command in this hour if our nation is to survive.

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America has come of age in the 50 years that you mark today. The Twentieth Century has seen a world explode more than once and has seen our country break out of its isolation into world responsibility. The musket has given way to the missile -- yet the atomic age brings no more peace than the colonies knew. The great ocean has narrowed and distance is no longer a defence. Mountains are levelled as jet planes break the sound barrier. Refugees come not from Newport but from far off Hungary. We declare that we have in the atom the greatest possibilities for peace and plenty. Yet a great part of the world hungers for food -- and a greater part of the world hungers for security from war's alarms.

It is not my plan nor my privilege to settle here today all the problems of the world. But I submit that the security of America's future can lie in the pattern molded by the life of James Mitchell Varnum

In a world where science challenges the secrets of nature we must have schools. We must have educated men and women, trained to meet the threats of any nation as Varnum's education prepared him for both Congress and military command.

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We must have law and men to defend it -- or life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness will be the possession only of the powerful.

We must have military strength -- which must also be the pride and the possession of the citizen. We must be bold enough to mark time with no chip on the shoulder -- but we must be strong enough to surpass so that we may survive when our freedoms are assailed.

We must have public service -- the private life and public duty, of which I have spoken, must command the respect and the response of all of us.

We must have men prepared to sacrifice. This is a sacrifice of service. It can be by the man in uniform. It can be by the man in public office. It can be by neighbor working for love of neighbor -- for pride of the community -- for love of country. It is reborn in us as we appreciate the blessings God has bestowed upon this land of ours.

This is the kind of patriotism, I believe, that inspires this day. It reaches deeper than the uniform -- into the human heart.

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It reaches back farther than fifty years. It reaches farther back than the Revolution -- farther than the name of Varnum even. But it is the inspiration of this day. It reaches back to the time when men first learned that they should live as brothers under the Fatherhood of God.