

The American Presidency Project



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LYNDON B. JOHNSON

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Mr. Secretary, Admiral, ladies and gentlemen:

Occasions such as this are always a very satisfying experience for a former lieutenant commander.

When I went on duty in the Navy on the day after Pearl Harbor, I did not fully appreciate that my uniform completely concealed my status as a Congressman. The fact that I looked like any other junior officer, and that I was expected to salute my superiors, was called to my attention in a rather memorable fashion by an admiral whom I remember most fondly.

Since that time, Admiral Smith, I have had rather mixed reactions to the sight of an admiral's stripes, including an almost automatic reflex to salute virtually anything that moves.

Today, in a figurative sense if not a literal one, I am very proud and very happy on behalf of all the American Nation to salute you as a distinguished officer and a most distinguished American. In your 45 years of service to your country, you have written a record of leadership, and courage, and responsibility that has the highest respect among all your colleagues and all your associates in the service in which you have spent your adult life. So, it is a genuine pleasure to welcome you here today, to pay honor to you and to your outstanding career.

Admiral Smith was born in the month of February in the year 1904, when the first war of this century began between Russia and Japan. He entered the Naval Academy at Annapolis in the same year, 1920 that the League of Nations began its efforts to outlaw war as an instrument of national policy.

Since that time this century has seen many wars on many fronts for many causes. But this century has seen something else, also. It has seen the growth among nations, among all mankind, of a very steadfast determination to end this senseless, needless, hopeless use of war to settle differences among nations and peoples.

I am convinced that when the history of the 30th century is finally written it will be a century remembered throughout all the ages for the constructive efforts toward peace, rather than for the destructive enterprises of war. And if that history is written justly and objectively, very great credit will be given to the kind of military man that we in this Nation have produced, the kind of man that is epitomized by Admiral Smith. These are men who, because they have known war, have given their talents, their energies, their devotion, and their loyalties to the preservation of peace.

Admiral Smith represents a generation of American naval and military officers who were asked, back in the dark days of 1941, to do so much so suddenly, but they were then given too little too late.

The memory of that era is engraved on America's national conscience, and as a responsible and conscientious Nation we have determined ever since that no other moment of shame and sorrow such as this should come to this free and this strong Nation.

That is why this morning I assembled 200 of our leaders from the House and Senate in the East Room of the White House to ask them to neither deny nor delay funds that are needed to provide ammunition for guns, and to provide fuel for helicopters, and to provide protection for our boys that are there on the battlefield. And I am hopeful that before many hours or many days pass, the Congress, in its wisdom, will hear that evidence and will supply our men in uniform all that they need, and more than they require.

Today, we are strong; we are the strongest nation in all the history of mankind. We are at the same time a nation that is definitely determined to pursue a responsible course--a course to seek peace with honor anywhere, any time, to work wherever and however we can to make this a better world for all mankind--but always to be prepared and to be ready to resist those who would plunge humanity into the barbarianism of the Dark Ages.

So, it is with great gratitude this morning that this Nation pays tribute to this great man who has so distinguished himself and his chosen profession, both in times of war and in times of peace.

In the Pacific and in the Atlantic during World War II, Admiral Smith established a memorable record of courage and valor and leadership. Following the war, he held many important commands, both ashore and at sea. None was more vital than the one for which we honor him today--Commander in Chief, Atlantic; Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic--because in this capacity he has played a key role in building that great alliance of freedom-loving nations who have learned, I hope, the lessons of preparedness.

Combining in himself the finest qualities of the military man and the diplomat, Admiral Smith greatly strengthened the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the bonds of friendship with our European allies. That alliance is one of our great assurances that the failures of the first half of our century will not be repeated in the last half of our century.

I am proud now, on behalf of this Nation, to add the Distinguished Service Medal to the many honors that Admiral Smith has already so deservedly received, and with your permission I will now ask the Secretary of the Navy to read the citation.

Note: The President spoke at 12:30 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. His opening words referred to Secretary of the Navy Paul H. Nitze and Adm. Harold Page Smith.

For the President's remarks at a meeting with congressional leaders earlier in the day, see Item 227.

The text of Admiral Smith's response, following the reading of the citation by Secretary Nitze, was also released.

On the same day the White House made public the text of the citation:

"For exceptionally meritorious service to the people of the United States in a position of great responsibility from 30 April 1963 to 30 April 1965 as Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic; Commander in Chief, Atlantic; and Commander in Chief, U.S. Atlantic Fleet. By his comprehension of international affairs and his unique ability to combine persuasive diplomacy with astute military judgment, Admiral Smith has inspired unity and confidence in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and has earned and received the unqualified respect of all its members. His professional integrity, and the esteem in which he is held by our Allies, have made it possible for him to induce harmonious agreement in important naval negotiations associated with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. During a period of continued unrest and tension in the world, he has demonstrated exceptional judgment and political acumen. In an era of unprecedented weapon advances, he has played a key role in insuring that the forces under his command would reach their present stature as the most powerful and flexible array of deterrent forces ever present in the Atlantic. His vision, his brilliant leadership, his unwavering dedication, and his devotion to duty have been an inspiration to all and reflect the highest credit upon himself and the United States Naval Service."

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