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Kalispell - Disabled Veterans in America

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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DISABLED VETERANS OF AMERICA

June 3, 1939

Kalispell

Comrades:

On Memorial Day at Missoula, I witnessed the parade in honor of the war dead. The occasion was splendidly observed as one could readily see in the size of the parade and the number of spectators. But - the one thing which impressed itself on me was not the different organizations, the music or the uniforms. No - it was the marching feet given out by the R.O.T.C. regiment of Montana State University as it went along - left, right - left, right - left, right. I didn't hear the music for the time being, I heard only the tramp, tramp, of youthful feet. The cadence forced itself into my consciousness and I visualized those young men - splendid fellows - going off to war. I didn't stop there but saw them also going into battle - against gas, bullets, and bayonets; I saw the planes strafing the lines and the men - they were men now - falling like flies. Some were killed outright, some were slightly wounded, some had lost an arm, a leg, or an eye. Not a pretty picture, is it? The picture didn't end there, thought, and I saw the men coming home after the war was over. They were welcomed as heroes - those who could still walk or limp - others were visited by relatives, friends, and bodies of citizens at hospitals and sympathized with. Nothing was too good for them. "Don't worry, Jack, your job will be waiting for you. We'll take care of you. You saved us, didn't you? Your life blood was given to make the world safe for Democracy, wasn't it?" Comrades, are those words familiar to you? Don't they have a familiar ring? Of course they do. It was only twenty years ago that you heard them. Have

you been heroes during those twenty years? The answer is obvious - you have not. Nevertheless, you haven't whined or begged. You've done your duty as Americans as best you knew how. You had a hard struggle because your job wasn't there for you when you came back, you had to re-orient yourselves to a new state of affairs, to a world which was not the same one you had left. You had to tear from your memory - if you could - the terrible sights you had seen and suffered. Some of you succeeded and were able to enjoy a measure of what this world calls success - others adapted themselves only in part and were forced to ask the government for aid - others have been unable to fully accommodate themselves to the new order because of war injuries and diseases and are now in Veterans Hospitals scattered all over the country - and some have given up the fight entirely and are now with their Maker in the peaceful land to which all good soldiers go.

You, as members of the D.A.V., stand as living examples of heroes twenty years after. Because you are members of this organization you represent that group of Americans which has been hardest hit physically and perhaps mentally by the war. You offered your lives for America and democracy. You were prepared to make the supreme sacrifice as so many of your comrades did.

Today you represent a group dependent on your government to a greater or lesser degree. That is your rightful privilege and the honorable obligation of your government. Nevertheless, there is at present and has been for some years past an attempt to picture you and other veteran organizations as being groups of parasites organized only for your own benefit and wholly oblivious to the needs

of the rest of the country. You are draining the treasury, they say, you are the cause of tremendous governmental expenditures on veterans, and other like arguments. My only answer is this: where would this government be today if it had not been for its veterans. You are responsible for the continued existence of the only democracy left in the world - your country. "By their sacrifice, ye shall know them" applies to all veterans organizations but especially to the D.A.V. Your organization is getting smaller as your comrades pass on but the ideals which you fought for will continue to survive when there is no more D.A.V. and your handiwork, the democratic United States of America will be the never-to-be-forgotten monument which you have erected.

Walter Washler
74. Rock

Jim O'Connor
Bill Hards

Mini Callaghan
526 Clark
Material on Fourth

C E Butler
412 - No. 4th