

Sacrifice in the modern world

By Valentin Le Blanc

We have been asked in this essay to determine: how meaningful do those fateful words spoken 75 years ago remain to this day? The village around it has changed with the inexorable passage of time, yet the rock where the fallen remain commemorated lies unshaken. Despite this somber melody that exudes from this memorial named after Richard Kemper and those like it elsewhere, the real message humanity can glean from them is one of life and its value.

Life is the sum of all experiences, the loves, the joys, the trials and tribulations, and the sadnesses. It is the sum and totality of a human being, with individual memories and experiences weaving together a shared narrative on the scale of the globe. Yet every generation, millions of lives flicker out into the darkness, everything making them unique being lost to time in most cases.

Knowledge of the impermanence and absoluteness of life has weighed on humans since before the first eons of recorded history. This time was when nearly all other aspects of life had few commonalities with now, highlighting the universal constants which have guided thought in cycles since the first philosopher. Knowledge of the waning glow of life is demonstrated in the art of the ancients, as mortal souls passed from one plane to the next in search of peace from such fear.

The lifetime of childhood and adulthood is a time of possibilities, invincibility, of passion for the vast opening and expanse that lies before us. Yet the teenagers who walked the halls of the high schools knew their oblivion was a distinct possibility.

True heroism described by the memorial is standing firm and stepping up not only when the conscience demands an intervention, but when one has everything to lose from that fateful

action. The war happening in Europe and the Pacific was distant throughout the conflict. Who could not understand the desire to live a life without losing the brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers to killing grounds thousands of miles away? Indeed, before and even after pearl harbor, many were vehemently opposed to such a conflict. Tolkien once declared that “All we have to decide is what to do with the time given to us.” Yet some chose to gamble the time given to them in that way. Those that yet survive through the Kempler memorial tablets have been remembered for their willingness to risk everything to risk their time left in life to put down tyrants, those they deemed to be threats to world peace.

So how does this make the Kempler memorial and its hundred brave exceptional? How does one honor the fulfillment of such a prophecy without idealizing the tendency of war and invasion? The designers of this pensive memorial chose to focus not on winning of war but on those that paid the ultimate price for it. They decided to engrave a collective memory about humanity instead of national pride, and individual worth over utilitarianism.

My experiences and history as a French-American help me understand this from the perspective of other cultures. Through my history, culture, and heritage, I feel and live the effects of the one hundred brave men and women who gave their lives every day.

My Great-grand-uncle narrowly escaped while being transported to a concentration camp.

My Great-grandmother risked her life helping the French resistance by being a nurse.

Her brother; was taken by German soldiers during the invasion.

All people in France know their versions of these stories. They know them as their own and that of all other peoples that have suffered defeat and subjugation.

To these men and women, to the elderly and the children of France and Europe, those who had chafed under the boot of repression and horror, this mere stone pillar meant and still means everything.

It meant an end to a long nightmare, to a world where it seemed the sun itself had died out and darkness reigned. It was a rekindling of the flame of pride, intellectuality, of joy. In those hearts and those of the future generations, you will find a debt that can never expire long after the last veterans of the war will have slept for the last time. Today in the European community, the desire for remembrance extends to both their own and the dead that died to save them. The

I asked my father to speak to me about this long remembrance of the Kempler 100 and the millions of others similar to them, and he merely placed an old CD in our CD player. It began to sing with poetry from the great French poet Aragon, verses in “Ils Ne Revienderons Pas” (They Shall Not Return) that describes a man he knew. It follows him from his childhood through his loves and tribulations in life. It tells us of his entry into the army and finishing with his untimely death in a mass grave. He left behind a great void in the hearts of his friends and family, a snapped thread in the great web of existence.

Finally, we must glean from the messages this memorial resonates with in the world that war as a basis of conquest is an institution that should be of the past. Respect for the sacrifices of those that gave their lives and time in society to achieve such goals is paramount towards appreciating and striving for better in our own lives and society. The Kempler 100 live on today not in name, but their symbol of sacrifice given for a wave of peace continues to inspire new generations of heroes and citizens. The recollection of these past heroes has not only turned into the critical introspection of our current society, but it has also become a catalyst for hopes and dreams of a better future.