

OLD GLORY IN TATTERS

“Each American embassy comes with two permanent features—a giant anti-American demonstration and a giant line for American visas. Most demonstrators spend half their time burning Old Glory and the other half waiting for green cards.”

P.J. O’Rourke

Is there anyone else out there getting sick and tired of the garbage that is being shoved down our throats these days?

I love baseball with a passion.

The same kids’ game that pampered professional baseball players get paid millions of dollars to play, I would gladly do for free.

Indeed, I’ve played the game since I was old enough to run.

As a youngster, after being run over by a truck, I remember how an essential part of my recovery was the hope of being able to pitch from the mound and get back on the Little League ballfield. I spent long hours throwing a baseball to my mom in our tiny backyard—in between the outhouse and the outdoor water pump. The local Little League granted a special waiver for me to have a pinch runner during my time at bat. As a kid, I would convince my mom that I was sick and needed to stay home from school (so I could listen to the Cincinnati Reds play a daytime game against the Chicago Cubs at Wrigley Field). Among my best early memories were the once-a-year trips my dad and I took to watch the Reds at old Crosley Field. In our house the foul ball that dad caught off the bat of Wally Post was featured prominently on our mantle.

Sigh.

In later years, I cherished the dream of being able to pitch in the Major Leagues.

I wasn’t good enough to make the grade.

During the military years, I played outfield for an All-Star team from Kadena Air Force Base that participated in an Asian softball tournament held in Misawa, Japan. The trip is my fondest memory from those years.

In short, many of the formative experiences of my life took place on a ball field.

As you can imagine, I’ve always loved the game of baseball.

I love everything about an evening at the ballpark. I love the sights, sounds and smells of the stadium. I love watching others in the crowd, eating the hot dogs, bags of peanuts, having a drink with a friend and trying to answer the scoreboard quiz. I have played the game enough that I look for the strategy of the game-within-the-game unfolding on the field.

There is no bigger baseball fan in America than I am.

No longer.

I had been mildly excited—despite all the COVID-related problems—for the start of a truncated baseball season this year.

Then I saw all the players—except one—collectively take a knee during the national anthem.

What would these young men be doing otherwise if not for the game of baseball?

Turning hamburgers?

Actually working for a living?

What would happen to them in another country if they so flagrantly dishonored the flag of that country?

I found their complete disrespect for our country's flag to be disgusting.

Sickening.

As is their total lack of appreciation for the opportunities offered by this great country.

I'm not sure I will watch one inning of professional baseball the rest of this season.

Perhaps never.

What I saw on the field on Opening Day—in stadiums across the country—is just the latest indicator, in my eyes, that a moral and spiritual darkness is descending over our land.

Everything that is decent and good is being turned upside down.

All common sense is being abandoned.

If I was king for a day, all congressmen and congresswomen—and certainly the President—would have to spend a meaningful period of service in the military.

Why? In the military you learn about honor. You learn respect for the flag.

I can remember vividly my own experience in this regard.

I was in my early twenties and on my way to flying combat sorties over Vietnam and the Tonkin Gulf. I was not a pilot but rather would serve as a Chinese linguist in the flight crew in the back end of a RC-135. To prepare us for the possibility that we may be shot down over the jungle terrain of Southeast Asia, we were required to attend a number of survival schools: water survival, altitude decompression survival, and, eventually, jungle survival school in the Philippines.

I could write a book chapter about each of those stops.

But one survival school in particular stands out in my mind. The land survival course at Fairchild AFB near Spokane, Washington. The goal was to teach us survival techniques in the event our plane was shot down and we were captured. As a result, we were exposed to a variety of interrogation techniques, our bodies were folded and stuffed into tiny lockers while anti-war propaganda and music played in the background, and we were subjected to a variety of psychological and physical pressures.

And that just scratches the surface.

The final part of our training was a simulated bail out where we were shot down and on the ground in unfamiliar terrain: we had to crawl under rolls of concertina wire (with live gunfire over our heads) and were eventually captured by the “bad guys.” Dusty black hoods were shoved over our heads, our hands were tied and we were led to small, darkened cells. Eventually, we were sent to a simulated concentration/work camp.

We were forced to work throughout the night.

It was tough.

It was cold.

I started to confuse the training regime with reality.

On the final morning of the training exercise—during a crisp, beautiful, majestic mountain sunrise—the camp loudspeaker system crackled.

I expected more work orders.

Instead, the loudspeaker blared out the national anthem.

Old Glory was raised on a flagpole.

I was tired and dirty. But I remember clicking my heels together and slapping the sharpest salute I could muster.

After what we had just been through, I have never been prouder to be an American!

Even now, there is an indescribable rush of emotions as I remember that morning.

You see, that's my memory of Old Glory.

And why I feel so passionate about it.

Our flag represents the incredible sacrifices made by millions of veterans to preserve our freedoms. It is a symbol of their blood.