

Jonathan Myrick Daniels '61 Humanitarian Award

Ambassador Andrew Young

Acceptance Speech, March 23, 2006

Thank you very much. It is indeed an honor and a privilege to be able to stand before you citizen soldiers called by Jonathan Daniels to be saints. It doesn't come any better than that and I would really like to volunteer if you will have me and I will ask Ketra Alexander [president of the Promaji Club] to make sure that I follow up on it. And I would like to try to come back here and spend an afternoon with you sometime, talking about some of the things that I have experienced trying to negotiate the difficulties of this world, in the tradition that we somehow in a strange way, share.

I studied George Marshall when I was about fifteen. I had to do a paper and someone suggested that I look up the Marshall Plan, and it was an experience that has shaped my life. What we are trying to do right now in Africa is fulfill, in the developing world, the kind of vision that George Marshall established at the end of the Second World War that has made Europe and Asia a successful part of our global economy. This was not done without vision, without a tremendous amount of courage, and without a kind of sacrificial commitment. American taxpayers gave their money voluntarily to their enemies to rebuild, to redevelop, and create harmony, brotherhood, and peace to replace the amity and violence and war that had plagued us in what we have come to know as the Second World War. That was an act of sacrifice - It was a small death. It was a death of the American ego and the beginning of a heroic vision which could only come from a citizen-soldier with the military credentials of a George Marshall.

And so you stand in that tradition, and Jonathan Daniels put me in that position for following in the footsteps of Martin Luther King. We were attempting to fulfill the vision of peace, brotherhood, and reconciliation of historic racial differences and to do so without violence. Jonathan Daniels embraced that as did Martin Luther King and he knew as did George Marshall on the battlefield that even though we were committed to non-violence that he was coming into an area that was known for its violence. Black women and men had been killed, thrown in the lakes and rivers, and forgotten and ignored. If Jonathan Daniels had not agreed to join in with us it might still be going on. When we attempted to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March the 7, 1965, we were beaten back. Two people were killed, that day the Reverend James Reeb, and a week later, Mrs. Viola Liuzzo. Before them we had killings in the cities of Alabama that had sparked little or no remorse and somehow people even blamed the students for getting themselves killed. But this was such a conscience act. This was such a determined commitment on the part of Jonathan Daniels and then Father Morrisroe. They were there not just as individuals. They brought the conscience of the church with them and they brought with that conscience a kind of power of good that lies within us all. There is a battle going within each of us. Yes we are called on to be saints, but there is one hell of a lot of devil in everybody. And on any given day, you don't know what's liable to prevail. But Jonathan Daniels stood up to represent the saintly America. The best that America and VMI has to offer, the valedictorian, someone with a tremendous future who put it all at stake and all was required. His life was required, but all of us are beneficiaries. The only thing that disturbs me about the progress and prosperity that we enjoy as a nation is that most people don't realize that it was bought with a price - That without Martin Luther King's death, without Jonathan Daniels' death, without all of the other unmerited suffering of hundreds, indeed thousands of citizens who determined that they were going to change America for the better and that they were not going to overcome evil with evil, but overcome evil with good - That has changed the world. It is the tradition of George Marshall; it is in the tradition of Martin Luther King, and of Jonathan Daniels. But you know the first person you gave this honor to also continued that tradition.

President Jimmy Carter was a citizen soldier, a Navy man who served as President of the United States, and ironically, was considered weak because he didn't kill anybody and he didn't get anybody killed, but everything he attempted to advance was advanced successfully. We were beginning to talk to the Chinese, and we were able to bring the Chinese back into the United Nations. And shortly after a war with the Vietnamese, the Vietnamese joined the United Nations and we welcomed them and we have had no trouble with either of them since. Even with the Soviet Union, the wall began to crumble because Jimmy Carter began talking and negotiating first of a non-proliferation of nuclear weapons treaty which holds up to this day and which instead of having the Russians on the side of a spread and building more weapons we've got the Russians actually as our allies trying to calm down the Iranians to prevent further nuclear expansion. That happened under Jimmy Carter and the only place in the Middle East where peace prevails is between Israel and Egypt. Since 1978 no Egyptian has killed an Israeli and since 1978 no Israeli has killed an Egyptian; and that was done without firing a shot but it was done with incredible risk, with incredible determination. Actually Sadat and Begin never even hardly met together. Sadat was in one cabin and Begin was in another. And Carter went back and forth between the two and got them to agree to something without the two ever facing each other. And they consider that weak because he didn't get anybody killed. It didn't cost a whole lot of money, and yet the small accomplishments quietly done by a man who, trained in war to run nuclear submarines, understood the power of risk and suffering and death in his defeat as president was more important than the acclaim that might have come. We should remember that he could have been reelected if he had dropped bombs on Iran. Oh the hostages might have been killed and he would have been reelected, but he chose not to sacrifice those 44 lives and instead give up his presidency.

I'm talking about sacrifice. I'm talking about risk. I'm talking about death because it is something we can't avoid. During the Civil Rights Movement, I was always nervous and Martin Luther King would always sense that and the way he dealt with your nervousness was to start pointing you out and say "yea I know they are after me and I know that I've got to go but they are going to catch you instead. You will be jumping in front of the camera trying to get your picture taken and you will take the bullet. And then he said don't worry - I will preach the best funeral that anybody ever had." And he would start cracking on you, preaching your funeral, and saying all the embarrassing things that you never want to have said even amongst your best friends. And before long he would turn a moment of death into a moment of joy and celebration and life. He always said you don't have to worry about death - everybody is going to die. The only thing you have to decide is what you are going to die for And he said you are better off out here dying for something worthwhile than you are getting hit by a truck. And sure enough we used to read Albert Camus a lot, and Albert Camus used to talk about the absurdity of life and yes for him, life was absurd. For at the height of his career, he ran his Ferrari off the road and wasted a talented and creative and brilliant life in the pursuit of absurdity.

Jonathan Daniels didn't do that. Jonathan Daniels stood in the tradition of freedom. He stood in the tradition of love. He stood in the tradition of Jesus of Nazareth. If you have a little time and want to pick up a good little book; a fellow by the name of Gary Wills has written a nice little book, just about a hundred pages, and the title of it is What Jesus Meant. He talks a lot about death; and he talks about life; and he talks about love. He talks about non-violence. He talks about the importance of knowing what you are living for and being willing to run the risks and make the sacrifices knowing the inevitability of death that - that the life of Jesus, the life of Jonathan Daniels is a meaningful life, a life that continues to be celebrated, because it gives life to others.

When I see the skyscrapers of Atlanta when I see the young black people coming out of colleges and universities, joining major corporations, building big churches, building homes and going to the finest universities in the world when I see them making contributions that are unimagined, I realize that that would not have been possible without the sacrifice, the love, and the death of

others. I don't know what the future holds in Iraq, but I know that those young men and women who are there whether they are there for right reasons or wrong reasons as far as they are concerned they are there for the freedom, for the dignity and for the preservation of opportunity in a world of freedom. It is misunderstood. It is misinterpreted. It is distorted by all kinds of critics, but nothing can defile the purity of their sacrifice. For they are doing the best that is available to carve out of the tragedy and humiliation all the confusion of centuries of bad politics in the Middle East. They are there to try to create harmony. Ultimately it must be created in the manner of George Marshall, and Jimmy Carter, but their sacrifices are not in vain.

We will be able, as Martin used to say, to hue out of this mountain of despair a stone of hope and somehow that stone of hope will come from the leadership of your classes. It will come from the vision that you bring to a troubled world. It will come from the example that you followed from your classmate who would now be an elder statesman if he had not answered the call and run the risk and given his life that we might all have a better life. I am one of those idealists, one of those visionaries that believes that if you can conceive it and believe it, you can achieve it. I'm not saying that you will be successful. I'm not saying people will reward you, but I am saying that if you give your life to some impossible dream you will be amazed at how many of them come true. Birmingham and Selma were impossible dreams; and even as we marched from Selma to Montgomery, if I had said to Martin Luther King, "You know I want to be mayor of Atlanta one day but I would also like to go to Congress and maybe serve at the United Nations and I have always wanted to go to the Olympics and I'm too old now but maybe we could bring the Olympics to Atlanta." He would have said, "Boy you are really crazy. This won't happen in your life time. It might happen in the lives of our grandchildren." But even the dreamer of the 20th century could not see the dreams that we have already realized in the 21st. And so, I say to you Dream big...Dream big and run big risks! Don't be afraid or ashamed of failure. And above all, never fear death. You don't have anything to say about it. It is inevitable. That is the one certain factor of your life. The only thing you have is a choice of what it is that you will give your life for. Make great choices as Jonathan did, as Martin did, as Jimmy Carter still continues to do, plugging away even though it has not cost him his life. He is constantly humiliated - as a peace loving dreamer who is going around the world curing Guinea worms, and building houses, and trying to help people who don't understand each other and disagree with each other to come together and learn to live with one another.

And the world is a better place because people of this institution and those to come have been willing to give their lives for noble and glorious dreams. This is a wonderful, glorious tradition. It is the best of the Christian tradition. It says where there is no cross there is no crown. But it also says that where there are crosses there will be resurrections, and the dreams and the promises of God will be fulfilled in and through your life, your vision, your service and indeed, your suffering in death if it so be required. Go in peace and again that was a great yell. If you can just yell AMEN for me I will sit down and shut up. AMEN.