

Liberty and Responsibility – To Be or Not To Be

by Thom Ernst

Within the United States Navy and Marine Corps, ‘shore leave’, also known as ‘liberty’ is the time sailors and marines get to spend on dry land, exempt from their daily routine and out from under the rules and regulations of the US Navy.¹ In much the same way, Christians enjoy the liberty granted by Jesus Christ: “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”² Yet another example, and one we all share in is the commemoration of our liberty that we celebrate every July 4th. That national liberty from the controls of a tyrannical English monarch, King George III, is the primary reason for this nation’s fight for independence; independence, declared on July 4th, 1776 and fully secured by 1783. No statement exemplifies more the innate thirst for liberty than the words spoken by Patrick Henry to the Virginia Convention in 1775, “Give me liberty or give me death”. His words and the passion with which he delivered them are credited with having swung the balance in convincing Virginia to send troops to the Revolutionary War.³

Liberty – personal, spiritual or national while enjoyed by some and envied by others, is a sacred trust. Unfortunately, too many see liberty as a chance for expression without restraints – freedom from rather than freedom to. What do I mean? Take a Marine on liberty as an example: he may look at his liberty as freedom from the constraints of all the rules aboard ship or on his base. Freedom from having to answer to a commanding officer. Freedom from having to follow orders whether he likes them or not. And so he may indulge his wild desires without restraint by getting smashed or delving into moral depravity – a no holds barred decent into debauchery. Or, he may look at his liberty as freedom to be who he truly is. Freedom to display, without orders to do so, The three Corps Values: honor, courage, and commitment.⁴ The choice is his - display liberty without boundaries or liberty within boundaries. While both choices use the word liberty only one is true to the concept of liberty while the other exploits it. Another way to express the latter concept is freedom without fence posts.

A recent study of preschool age children was conducted in order to determine the best scenario for their playground. The group was first exposed to a large area with no borders or fencing. While there they remained in the middle of that plot as close to their teacher as they could get. The same group was then taken to a playground which was bordered with a fence. The change was dramatic as the children ran and played all within and up to the fencing of that particular area.⁵

The application is clear. The fence posts for the Marine are his Code of Conduct. The fence posts for the Christian are the Ten Commandments (although they certainly work amongst non-Christians also – in fact they are the foundation of Law in the United States), and the admonition stated above to not get entangled again in bondage. Also, the fence posts for those of us that are American Citizens is the US Constitution. Remove any of those, and liberty fades into chaos and confusion. Therefore, in order to enjoy the full benefits of liberty, its responsibilities must be adhered to. Stand fast in your liberty and be who you are designed to be – to do less is to be less!

“Time is the very lens through which ye see—small and clear, as men see through the wrong end of a telescope—something that would otherwise be too big for ye to see at all. That thing is Freedom: the gift

whereby ye most resemble your Maker and are yourselves parts of eternal reality.”— C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (1946)

1. Wikipedia
2. Galatians 5:1 King James Bible
3. Wikipedia
4. http://www.usmcpres.com/heritage/corp_values.htm
5. <https://www.asla.org/awards/2006/studentawards/282.html>