

Headquarters Second Military District

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Families and Friends of the Second Military District,

This morning, as I sat down to write you, my mind was stirred with the many thoughts, which flow so freely at this joyous time of year, and I was reminded that so many of the most common traditions, now practiced in America, developed during the years of the Civil War. Our ancestors have left us so much more than just the memory of war and sacrifice; for we are also the inheritors of such rich traditions as the Christmas Tree , Christmas Spirit, and yes even Santa himself. In the darkness of war and destruction soldiers both north and south found a moment to spread forth a light, which pressed back the darkness and revealed the humanity of all mankind. Alfred, Lord Tennyson, England's poet laurite once wrote:

The larger heart, the kinder hand; Ring out the darkness in the land.

I believe that in the midst of darkness our ancestors took it upon themselves to put words such Tennyson's into action and in many small and private ways provided light to a world wrapped in the darkness of war and strife.

Today the world still contains many a dark place and as we go out into our communities, I pray that we will emulate the spirit of those men and women who struggled in the darkness of 1861-1865. When you hear the gentle peal of Christmas bells ringing softy in the dark, remember the voices that rise to sing the hymns in vacant stillness on the distant fields of war and picture the family gathered round the hearth with a chair left empty for the missing son. Be a light in the world for light is needed today just as it was in the past.

I leave you with the words of a true Christmas Carol of hope, written in 1864 by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:

"I heard the bells on Christmas Day  
Their old familiar carols play,  
And wild and sweet  
The words repeat  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!  
  
  
And thought how, as the day had come,  
The belfries of all Christendom  
Had rolled along  
The unbroken song  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!  
  
  
Till, ringing, singing on its way,  
The world revolved from night to day,  
A voice, a chime  
A chant sublime  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!  
  
  
Then from each black accursed mouth  
The cannon thundered in the South,  
And with the sound  
The carols drowned  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!  
  
  
It was as if an earthquake rent  
The hearth-stones of a continent,  
And made forlorn  
The households born  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;  
"There is no peace on earth," I said;  
"For hate is strong,  
And mocks the song  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"  
  
  
Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:   
"God is not dead; nor doth he sleep!  
The Wrong shall fail,  
The Right prevail,  
With peace on earth, good-will to men!"

May each of your Christmas celebrations be filled with peace and joy. Merry Christmas and Happy New year

Mark R. Day, Major

Commander 2nd Military District