



ANDREW W. COOK

POST 1479

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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*Delivered December 7<sup>th</sup> 2013, at*  
Andrew W. Cook American Legion Post 1479

### *“And Still They Serve”*

“These Mohawks have penetrated the far corners of the globe:  
Kenneth Herne crossed the Ganges River in India with the Army Engineers.  
Charlie Cook weathered storms on bleak Iceland.  
Johnny Cook saw all of Europe through a B-24’s nose gunner’s blister;  
Barney Rourke rode into Tientsin with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines,  
Skeezix and Art Lazore walked across Europe,  
Bob Cook was right behind the men who raised the colors on Mt. Suribachi;  
Alex Terrance walked ashore with the Marines the hard way at Cape  
Gloucester;  
Ta-ho-re-non-ton froze his posterior in the Aleutions; and  
Tehakie did duty on the Devil’s stove lid, called Peloliu.  
These are only 2 percent of the Mohawks who went on the warpath with them.”

It was with these words in 1949 that William Cook, Marine Corps Captain and pilot, ushered into existence the “Andrew W. Cook, American Legion Post 1479” on the St. Regis Mohawk Indian Reservation. Andrew and William were brothers, Andrew was Killed In Action in February of 1944 and William would later parish in a jet training exercise outside of Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point NC in 1952.

It is former NBC anchorman Tom Brokaw who has befittingly described their generation, the WWII generation, as the “Greatest Generation”. Therefore it is just as fitting that we gather on today’s date (December 7<sup>th</sup>) to commemorate what will hopefully be a new chapter in a continuing history. For today though, let us borrow from another social commentator who was popular with that generation, and look at: ‘The rest of the story’.

In what economists will call the ‘Macro level’, a clear majority of the ‘Greatest Generation’ returned home and became active participants in the post-war economy. Manufacturing plants were converted, power projects were constructed, highways were run, and a college education became a possibility for many of them.

The ‘Rest of the story’ also lies at the individual level, in what economists call the ‘Micro level’. For it is there that tax policy aligned with economic policy, and both aligned with banking practice. It was at this level that a VA home loan guarantee germinated and blossomed for the Greatest Generation. The individual Veteran now had the ‘where for all’ to acquire a home backed by the guarantee of the federal government.

This put into motion an economic boom. Lumber was needed, concrete was poured, plumbing installed, power hooked up, a move in date, and the work to fill up that new home with little faces was begun in earnest. Water lines, sewer lines, and power lines followed.

and American suburbia appeared out of the farmlands, and the American economy hummed along in a housing 'boom'.

Tax Policy helped foster this movement. There soon appeared a tax deduction for this process, and in particular, a direct dollar for dollar deduction for interest paid on mortgages. Including a VA backed home mortgage. Something accountants call an 'above the line' deduction. Therefore, the federal government supported, backed, and helped subsidize home ownership.

Economically the 'Greatest Generation' Vets could also 're-borrow' the mortgage based upon the equity of those Veteran's homes. Those little faces, which became the 'Baby Boom' generation, needed to go to college after all. Equity came in handy here, and the tax deduction certainly did not hurt either.

What of Akwesasne's 'Greatest Generation' though? What is the 'rest of the story' for Vets from the St. Regis Indian Reservation. Regretfully, and all too common, there would be work to convert the manufacturing plant but no work inside it, same would hold true for those power projects. The highway system projects provided structural steel work, but then it became simply a means to get from 'job to job' as many flocked to the only occupation that remained open and viable, the structural steel worker.

Perhaps the 'cruellest cut' for the St. Regis Vet would be the inability to acquire a VA loan to get a home. As such there would be no interest rate tax deduction, there would be no equity. This meant that there would be no housing boom in Akwesasne, materials and labor would not be needed, and suburbia would miss Akwesasne irrespective of how many served.

In its place family homesteads would be converted, mobile homes would be 'cut and pasted', and everything had to be done paycheck to paycheck, and week to week. 'Boom' simply came to mean 'booming out' which meant going to the next iron working job. Thus, the St. Regis Vet transitioned from the military 'Hurry up and wait' mentality to 'When you have the time you do not have the money, and when you have the money, you do not have the time.' In such a setting necessity is truly the mother of invention.

It was in such a context that American Legion Post 1479 was borne. After Marine Corps Captain Cook spoke those words included here, the 'Blue House' would finally be completed by 1964. From its earliest days forward, American Legion Post 1479 quickly became the place where custom and tradition melded together to foster a community ethos very unique to Akwesasne.

The 'Blue House' became the place where the St. Regis veteran, their families, and others from their community could: Host a 'Buck and Doe' dance to raise money for the young couple, then hosted the wedding reception of that young couple! It was and is where fundraisers for the local sports team occur, and where fundraisers were held to help those facing a health issue.



Yet, in cruelty that only irony can provide. When wood stoves in those converted homesteads could only create so much warmth, or when those furnaces in patched mobile homes had enough, fire would strike. It would then be another fundraiser at American Legion Post 1479. For there was no insurance to build into a mortgage payment that did not exist, there was no way to show credit worthiness, and there was no equity to point to. One did what many farmers in Akwesasne learned: 'You do with what you got', and what Marines, including those from Akwesasne come to know, 'You Adapt. You Improve. You Overcome'.

In addition to these functions, it is also when those members of Akwesasne's Greatest Generation had completed 'Fighting the good fight', after the flag had been folded 13 times, and after the words 'On behalf of a grateful Nation' have been spoken, that we return here to American Legion Post 1479 and have 'the family meal'. A meal prepared so many times by so many caring hands that they joined together and created an Auxiliary for Post 1479.

How often has this occurred? Should we be surprised by the failure to find anyone in Akwesasne who has not done these things. Or one could simply take a look through an Akwesasne family photo album to see its proofs.

So it is fitting that we recall these things on today's date, yet there is something more, something just as interesting for the 'Rest of the story'. For that part, let us look upon the sons, daughters, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and cousins of Akwesasne's 'Greatest Generation'. Should it be surprising to discover that many of them have followed Akwesasne's 'Greatest Generation' by also serving in the Armed Forces. It is as Captain William Cook once said:

"Our boys visited every major town in the United States and touched every main port, base, battlefield in the world. There are more than a score of these Mohawks whose blood spilled in contact with the enemy."

What has been included in those visits? How about the Akwesasne service members who were part of the 'Frozen Chosin' in Korea, or Norman Tarbell who was on the USS Brewster when the first radar 'pinged' indicating a Russian sub headed to Cuba. Then Clifford Tarbell (USA) did not return from NAM, the same place where Bruce Jackson (USMC) got his Purple Hearts, and where dozens of others from Akwesasne served. Then there is the dozens upon dozens of Akwesasne's 'Cold Warriors' who reminded everyone that indeed 'someone has got to be on that wall'. To today, when we must note Ash Cook and his 2 tours in Iraq with the Army, and that LCpl Kwekon Mitchell is currently with the Marines at 29 Palms.

If we could amend any of Captain Cook's comment, let it be to recognize the young women from Akwesasne who also served, and are serving. Like Army Captain Erin Cook who was just reactivated and may be headed to the Mid-East, or PFC Patricia Martin who just left Parris Island after being meritoriously promoted at graduation.

Yet, for many of these Akwesasne Vets their history would come to resemble that of Akwesasne's 'Greatest Generation': The struggle for work, the difficulties in trying to build a home, and the un-availability of a VA home loan program. So like the 'Greatest Generation' there would be no tax deduction or equity to borrow for them either. And for these Akwesasne Vets, American Legion Post 1479 has come to serve many of the same functions it has for Akwesasne's Greatest Generation.

We could struggle to find words to describe such a social phenomenon, let us simply borrow what Senator John McCain said when talking of all Native American Veterans: "And still they serve".

It is therefore appropriate that on today's date (December 7<sup>th</sup>), at this place (American Legion Post 1479) that a new chapter has been afforded the opportunity to be written. For it is on this date and place that we get to commemorate that the United States Veteran Administration has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe. And for the very first time, the VA is going to offer direct loans for Veterans from the St. Regis Mohawk Indian Reservation to acquire a home.

What will the 'rest of the story' involve? We cannot predict such things, but what can be said with certainty is that in the future a young man or woman from Akwesasne is going to be sitting down with an Armed Forces Recruiter.

As they review the benefits of enlisting, let us hope that the VA/ St. Regis MOU will be noted. And should that young person from Akwesasne ask 'What is this for?' Let us hope someone can tell them:

"Because, Kenneth Herne crossed the Ganges River in India with the Army Engineers;  
Because Charlie Cook weathered storms on bleak Iceland;  
Because Johnny Cook saw all of Europe through a B-24's nose gunner's blister;  
Because Barney Rourke rode into Tientsin with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines,  
Because of them, and the hundreds of them before you,

You have the opportunity to receive assistance from the VA in acquiring a home on the St. Regis Mohawk Indian Reservation."

**Thank you for attending today's commemoration event.**