

## **Comments regarding Lincoln's Second Inaugural address**

**By**

**Gordon Bocher, Major USAF Retired**

About one week before the end of the war, Abraham Lincoln, our sixteenth president, gave his second inaugural address. The purpose of this commentary is to inform the reader of the circumstances which prevailed at the time he gave this particular speech. Our country was ending its fourth year of a truly bloody Civil War. The number of men killed from both sides exceeded 600,000. That does not include those who were wounded. All the casualties were virtually Americans whether they fought for the North or for the South. There were Unionist and Confederate villages throughout the country who did not have a single marriageable-age male available to the women of their respective towns. Many of these towns and their surrounding farms were decimated by the widespread and fierce fighting.

Lincoln in the first four paragraphs describes how the war is going, how both sides did not want the war, and how similar they were in many respects. Yet the war came. In the fifth paragraph, he tells the American people that they may not have suffered enough to pay for the sin of slavery. His own words:

The Almighty has his own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh." If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through his appointed time, he now wills to remove, and that he gives to both North and South this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to him? Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

I enjoy reading about history. To my knowledge, in the annals of all human history, there has never been a political leader who tells his people that they may have not yet fully paid for their sins... In this case, slavery. One of the reasons that Lincoln is so highly regarded as a political leader is that he'll always told the American people the true circumstances of what they faced

and how he felt regarding that particular topic. Another reason that he is so highly regarded was his compassionate humanity. This is demonstrated in the last paragraph of his Second Inaugural which became literally the written mission statement of the Veterans Administration. Again, in Lincoln's own words:

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations.

I believe that Lincoln's reign as our sixteenth president is a testament to the fact that our country is truly blessed.