



Perspective

By Jamie Buckingham

The tall trees stood gaunt and bare against the gray November sky. A chill autumn wind whipped through the silent gravestones outside the little community of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. It was 106 years ago and the President of the United States had come to dedicate the cemetery that marked the spot of the bloodiest battle in the history of the nation.

Lincoln had scribbled his message on the back of an envelope while riding the train from Washington to Gettysburg. He was to follow the illustrious Senator Edward Everett, whose magnificent oratory had just brought the crowd to their feet with a thunderous ovation.

In contrast to the senator's lengthy speech, Lincoln only spoke four minutes—and then sat down. Silence prevailed. The people were dumfounded. Never had they heard a man speak like that. "Four score and seven years ago, our fathers . . ." So simple yet so profound.

The newspapers, many of them hostile to the President, castigated him in print. They were mad because he had not condemned the South. The Chicago Times said: "The cheek of every American must tingle with shame as he reads the silly, flat, and dishwatery utterance of the man who has to be pointed out to intelligent foreigners as President of the United States." The London Times said, "The ceremony was rendered ludicrous by some of the sallies of that poor President Lincoln." And the Patriot And Union of Harrisburg commented, "We pass over the silly remarks of the President."

But Lincoln was right and his Gettysburg Address has become one of the foundation stones of the "American Way." I've been thinking about some of those foundation stones this morning as I contemplate the death of David Greeson, killed when his helicopter was shot down in Vietnam. David's brother, John, was killed just a year ago in Vietnam action. I remember David as the cadet commander of the Civil Air Patrol unit where I was chaplain. He loved to fly and he loved his country—a combination that was to lead him to Vietnam even though his brother's blood was still moist on the Asiatic soil.

"That from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain . . ."

I cannot agree with the Peaceniks and the shaggy headed moratorium marchers who probably wouldn't defend their own sisters from a sadistic rapist. But on the other hand I cannot agree that men should fight and die for a cause that even they don't understand . . . and even worse be forced to fight in a battle that the politicians back home have decreed we must not win.

" . . . that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that the government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth."

The President says that's what we're fighting for in Vietnam. But we're not fighting to win. We're just fighting. With David Greeson it was "my country, right or wrong, but my country." But something says that in this endeavor we're more wrong than we are right. And if we continue on as we are, then these dead, like the Greeson brothers, will surely have died in vain.