

I AM THE NATION

I was born on July 4, 1776, and the Declaration of Independence is my birth certificate. The bloodlines of the world run in my veins, for I offered freedom to the oppressed. I am many things and many people. I am the Nation. I am 350 million living souls and the ghosts of those who have died for me.

I am Nathan Hale and Paul Revere. I stood at Lexington . . . and fired the shot heard round the world. I am Washington, Jefferson, and Patrick Henry. I am Lee and Grant and Abe Lincoln.

I remember the Alamo, the Maine, and Pearl Harbor. When freedom called, I answered and stayed until it was over, over there. I left my heroic dead in Flanders Fields, on the rock of Corregidor, on the bloody hills of Korea, in the steaming jungles of Viet Nam, the sands of Iraq and the mountains of Afghanistan.

I am the Brooklyn Bridge, the wheat fields of Kansas, and the granite hills of Vermont. I am the coalfields of the Virginias and Pennsylvania; the Golden Gate, and the Grand Canyon. I am Independence Hall, the Monitor and the Merrimac.

I am forest, field, mountain, and desert. I am the quiet villages and the cities that never sleep. I am the ballot dropped into the box, the roar of crowds, and the voice of a choir in a cathedral. You see the lights of Christmas in me, and hear the strains of Auld Lang Syne as the calendar turns.

Yes, I am the Nation, and these are the things that I am. I was conceived in freedom, and God willing, in freedom I will spend the rest of my days. May I possess always the integrity, the courage, and the strength to keep myself unshackled . . . to remain a citadel of freedom and a beacon of strength to the world.

This is my wish, my goal, my prayer – 250 years after my birth

Words extracted from I AM THE NATION, WRITTEN IN May, 1955, for the Norfolk and Western Railway by Mr. Otto Whitaker, 4512 Laurelwood Drive, Roanoke, Virginia 24018, and revised by Colonel Dougald MacMillan, USMA 1975.