

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY,
AMERICA!
July 4, 2012**



On July 20, 1969, the first human being since the beginning of time stepped out into the heavens of space and of time and on to the surface of another planet. The name of that man is not so important as the deed he performed or the human endeavor which he represented. And perhaps nothing is more important, not only in contemporary times but for the future of all mankind, than the fact that this man was an American. His efforts were not a symbol of conquest but a tribute to the courage, dedication, effort, and self-sacrifice of those millions of Americans who made those steps possible – and the Banners of our nation which fly from Tranquility Base to the Valley of Taurus Littrow are now and forever more a symbol to all mankind of a heritage that has endeared for two centuries providing all Americans opportunity and freedom never before seen in the history of the world.

As we proudly celebrate the 236-year anniversary of the birth of our country, it might be well to remember that the rights which we have fallen heir to have never been a gift but have had to be earned; and the freedom which we often take for granted, while others cherish the thought, is not simply an opportunity but a responsibility. Perhaps in reality, “freedom is the burden of our heritage.”

Let us also remember that this heritage represents to people everywhere reality to their visions of freedom – we as a nation must accept the responsibility to protect that reality so that this vision never blurs – for in fact we are the only nation in the world today with the strength, the wisdom, and the idealism to do so.

If we face the challenge of the next 100 years in the growth of our yet young nation with the same fervent dedication of our forefathers – with a belief in that which is bigger than ourselves, our God and our country – we will truly be making another giant leap for all mankind.

Perhaps Senator Everett M. Dirksen’s reflection upon a birthday many decades ago has the most appropriate meaning for America’s Birthday anniversary: “Somehow, to me, birth anniversaries are high ground in our journey through life, for it gives us an occasion to pause, and rethink the past, assess the present and utter cherished hopes for the future.”

With pride I offer my salute to America. This is a pride which our country so righteously deserves – a country to which we all owe our very existence.

**Eugene A. Cernan
Captain, USN
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