The War Hero Who Warned Against War

Those in the know were not particularly surprised to see Kaitlin Bennett come on campus around graduation dolled up as she was—her mortar board daringly decorated with a dare, and her brother's assault rifle, with scope, slung over her shoulder. News stories claim that she was an outspoken 2nd Amendment advocate during her tenure as a student and that she wasn't at all shy about shooting off her mouth about guns.

Still, there was enough in the photo—she hired a photographer—to grab online attention: that gorgeous blond mane flowing mightily over her back, and a doll-like, sleeveless dress, hemmed up sweetly from mid-thigh. The assault rifle made it an odd getup, but then, sex and violence never really going out of style.

The photo went viral, more than 40 thousand retweets and twenty thousand likes. Some would say her commencement get-up was drop-dead gorgeous. Got her a gig on *Fox and Friends* too.

But I couldn't help thinking of the meditation chapel on the grounds of the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, Abilene, Kansas, President Dwight D. Eisenhower's hometown. He's buried there, as is his wife, Mamie, as well as their son, Dowd, or "Ikky," as they called him, who, in 1921, died at just four years old from scarlet fever. The biers of Mom and Dad are outlined in the floor of a quiet place lit mainly by what hues come in through the stained glass.

Those of us who remember him or have spent much time thinking about World War II know Ike as not only as the 39th President of these United States, but also the Supreme Commander of the Combined Allied Forces in Europe during that war. If you remember that, you will also remember D-Day, the operation he commanded to keep Hitler from world dominance.
On June 5, 1944, the day before many of the GIs would travel across the English Channel, Eisenhower walked among them, greeting them, encouraging them, blessing them really, all the while knowing full well that many of them were going to die on the beaches of Normandy. He knew that sad truth far better than they did, because he knew what lay in store for them when they came off those amphibious landing craft in the biggest sea-going operation in the history of mankind. Ike knew war.

And that's why it shouldn't be ironic, I suppose, that someone who knew death--knew death at his own hands--better than almost anyone, would have, up there printed in stone on the wall of his own tomb, and that of Mamie, these lines from a speech he gave.

Every gun made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed. . .This is not a way of life at all. . .Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of gold.
"The Chance for Peace" Address, Washington D. C., April 15, 1953

The story of the young college grad shouldering an assault rifle to her college graduation reminds me of those words, of Ike in England, one night in early June, waiting for the skies to clear over the English Channel, waiting and hoping and praying. And then, I'm sure, praying some more.

And the words of peace this incredible man of war, a hero, chose to have scripted on the wall of his tomb.