A MESSAGE FROM RICHARD R. KELLEY TO OUR OUTRIGGER ‘OHANA

Honoring those who served

At Outrigger and OHANA hotels, we have a long tradition of supporting the men and women who serve our country in the U.S. armed forces – Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard and National Guard – and, during the past week, on Veterans Day, November 11, we renewed that dedication and thought about how we, as a company and as individuals, owe so much to those who dedicate their lives to preserving the freedoms so many take almost for granted.

This year’s Veterans Day celebrations were particularly meaningful because they came just two days after the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, an event that was the direct result of significant sacrifice by several generations of servicemen and -women. (See article on page 2).

Our personal and corporate loyalty to servicemen and -women dates back to before the “official” birth of our company in 1947, the year the little Islander Hotel opened its doors on Seaside Avenue in Waikiki. In 1941, our founders, Roy and Estelle Kelley, were operating apartments in Waikiki and invited two of their tenants, Commander John Shultz and his wife, Martha, to join them for breakfast on the morning of Sunday, December 7. Cmdr. Shultz arrived in his dress-white Navy uniform and, when the bombs began to fall, he rushed to his ship in Pearl Harbor, the cruiser USS Honolulu, which was damaged by a nearby explosion. Plunging into World War II in his gleaming whites made Shultz possibly the “Best Dressed” officer on duty that tragic day. (That tale may be amusing now, but at the time nobody was laughing.)

I remain in touch with John and Martha’s son, Jack, a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, who later earned a Bronze Star while serving in Vietnam.

Likewise, our company continues to support our armed forces in many, many ways. Recently, the Honolulu Navy League honored Outrigger President and CEO David Carey with its prestigious American Patriot Award for his commitment, unparalleled service and contributions to the United States and our men and women in uniform.

At that event, held at the Ala Moana Hotel, Capt. Carlyle J. Devoe, Honolulu Navy League president, also recognized Outrigger’s military liaison, Mildred Courtney, a past American Patriot Award recipient, for her tireless and continuing efforts on behalf of the Navy League and members of our armed services.

During the coming year, let’s continue to recognize and support the men and women of our armed forces in the U.S. and in every other free country where our company does business.

As we go forward, remember the words of Father Denis Edward O’Brien, USMC, who said:

“It is the soldier, not the reporter,  
Who has given us freedom of the press. 
It is the soldier, not the poet, 
Who has given us freedom of speech. 
It is the soldier, not the campus organizer, 
Who has given us the freedom to demonstrate. 
It is the soldier, 
Who salutes the flag, 
Who serves beneath the flag, 
And whose coffin is draped by the flag, 
Who allows the protester to burn the flag.”

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A memorable day behind the Berlin Wall
By Dr. Richard Kelley

In May 1982, my wife Linda VG Kelley and I had a close encounter with a totalitarian government when we toured East Berlin while that part of the city was the capital of Soviet-dominated East Germany ("German Democratic Republic" or GDR). Looking back now, it was both a frightening and hopeful day because it gave us personal insight into what those living behind the wall and elsewhere in the GDR and the rest of the Communist Bloc – including the Soviet Union itself, which the great Russian writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn famously called the first victim of Communism – had been enduring for decades. It also gave us hope that someday the wall might come down, as indeed it did seven years later.

At the end of World War II in Europe, a defeated Germany was divided into four occupation zones as outlined in the Potsdam Agreement between Soviet leader Josef Stalin, U.S. President Harry S. Truman and British Prime Ministers Winston Churchill and Clement Attlee – Attlee replacing Churchill in mid-conference when his Labor Party defeated Churchill's Conservatives in an election. About 100 miles inside the Soviet Zone, the city of Berlin was also divided into similar sectors – three "free" zones in the western part of the city and the Soviet zone in the eastern part of the city.

In the Soviet zone, property and industry were "nationalized" – that is, everything but small personal possessions was forcibly seized by the government – and anyone who spoke out against this was severely punished. The occupying Soviets eventually set up a nominally independent government, the GDR, in their zone. However, the economy of this Soviet "satellite" state, burdened by the heavy hand of absolute government and Communist Party control of every aspect of production and distribution, always lagged far behind the economy of West Germany, the economically and politically free nation that was formed out of the U.S., British and French zones of occupation.

In West Germany, post-war reconstruction moved ahead rapidly, helped significantly by assistance from the Marshall Plan, an American initiative to help Europe recover from the war's devastation.

After some 3.5 million East Germans had for years "voted with their feet" and left the Soviet Zone for freedom and better opportunities in the West, the leaders of the GDR closed the border and erected a fence around West Berlin in 1961 to prevent any further departure by East Germans. Over time, the fence was replaced by a formidable concrete wall behind a wide "death zone" (for anyone trying to escape) of barbed wire, minefields, anti-vehicle trenches and watchtowers with searchlights – all guarded by armed troops with dogs. Over 200 East Germans were killed trying to escape but the precise death toll is not known.

About 20 years after the wall was built, in 1982, the year that Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev died, the situation in East Berlin relaxed somewhat and tourists from the west were allowed to visit more easily than before. Linda and I took advantage of this and applied for visas. Our wish was granted but we still had many doubts and apprehensions as, riding in an automobile driven by a West German, we approached the wall where so many had died trying to escape.
At “Checkpoint Charlie,” the only opening in the Berlin Wall where non-Germans with appropriate visas could pass, our hearts raced as a gate lifted and we inched forward into the East Berlin. Then, two gates came down, one in front and one behind us, and we realized our vehicle was now trapped!

An armed guard told us to get out of the car and take our passports and visas to a dark opening in a wall a few feet away. While two or three other guards inspected our vehicle, we put our documents on a small sill at the opening. A hand reached out and grabbed them and then the opening shut.

I took a deep breath and evaluated our situation! Our car was trapped and unknown persons had just taken our passports! Panic!!

After about 10 minutes, which seemed like an eternity, our stamped documents were returned and our vehicle released. We drove away slowly, not wanting to do anything that might cause us to be called back. We drove to a park featuring a memorial dedicated to the Soviet soldiers who died in the fight to defeat Nazi Germany.

We arrived a few minutes before the time set for the changing of the honor guard. This was accomplished with a precision ceremony complete with goose-stepping soldiers – which seemed ironic in light of the fact that the Nazis were famous for the goose step. (I later discovered that the goose step had not died with Nazi Germany, but was practiced for decades by Soviet and East German soldiers and continues to this day in Russia. Many other nations, including all remaining Communist nations – China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba – also goose step. The English writer George Orwell once said the goose step is practiced only in countries where people are afraid to laugh at their military.)

Later, we drove to an open grassy area. Our driver pulled off the road and offered us a picnic with sandwiches and soft drinks while sitting on the lawn.

As we sat there recounting our experiences of the morning, a couple with two young children arrived in an old, battered vehicle, opened their doors and sat down about 30 feet away. They looked at us and we looked at them. Finally, the man came close to us, looked around to be sure no one else was watching, and nervously said in broken English, “May I speak with you? I want to know what is happening in the world but there is so little news available here. I assure you, I am not a spy.”

We chatted pleasantly for several minutes and then went our separate ways.

That all happened over 32 years ago but it left such a tremendous impression on me that I still remember almost every minute of my brief time behind the “Iron Curtain.”

My thanks and blessings to all who helped make freedom ring in that part of the world – and so many other places.