

# Remarks of Senator Daniel K. Akaka, headstone unveiling for Private John Rowe

Senator Daniel K. Akaka Papers

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REMARKS OF U.S. SENATOR DANIEL K. AKAKA  
HEADSTONE UNVEILING FOR PRIVATE JOHN ROWE  
OAHU CEMETERY

May 27, 2002  
11 AM

Aloha! Aloha kakahiaka and Good morning! Members of the Rowe ohana, General Correa, American Legion Commander McCloskey, American Legion Adjutant Lee, members of the Royal Order of Kamehameha, Director Lewis, guests and friends, I am privileged to be here with the Rowe, Silva and Higa families to honor the memory of Private First Class John Rupert Rowe, Hawaii's first son to lose his life in defense of the United States during the First World War. I am honored to join you here at this remembrance and dedication ceremony today in this solemn and peaceful place to offer prayers and tribute to Private First Class Rowe and all those who have responded to our Nation's call in times of war and now rest in hallowed ground in cemeteries here in Hawaii, across the United States, and beyond our shores on all continents.

Since annexation, Hawaii has sent her sons to fight in every one of America's wars. Today we honor the service and sacrifices made by ordinary men and women who lost their lives in defense of freedom and democracy. Their heroism and patriotism reminds us of the fundamental truth our nation has understood since the Revolutionary War, that the freedom, liberty, and peace we cherish carries a dear price.

When John Rowe left the islands over 80 years ago, he went to the mainland to take advantage of his talents, share the Aloha spirit, and seek his fame and fortune as a musician and entertainer. On February 12, 1918, he answered his nation's wartime call and enlisted in the Army and was assigned to Co. H, 39<sup>th</sup> Infantry American Expeditionary Force, 4<sup>th</sup> Division. Less than six months later, Private First Class Rowe was instantly killed by an enemy shell on the Western Front, near Chary Chartrouse, France, July 31, 1918, a day after his 26<sup>th</sup> birthday and four months before the Armistice signed on November 11<sup>th</sup> ended "the war to end all wars." When Private First Class Rowe was laid to rest here in 1921, the people of Hawaii were reminded of his sense of honor and duty to country. Newspaper articles recounted his gallantry, the sorrow and pride of his ohana, and his eloquent last message to his mother, "If I do not return, always remember me as having done my full duty for my country." As an enduring

reminder of his quiet courage, on his memorial marker is inscribed, "I have done my full duty for my country."

Today, few Americans recall the horrible events or recall heroes of World War I, with the exception of families, generations removed, who lost a loved one in that war over 80 years ago. Today's ceremony honoring Private First Class Rowe is also a remembrance of the sacrifices made by hundreds of Hawaii's sons and daughters. Our freedom has been preserved, strengthened, and consecrated because of their great sacrifices, and we remember each of them with respect and gratitude.

On this Memorial Day, we honor all of the men and women who have paid the ultimate price of freedom and security throughout our country's history; we honor those Americans who helped change the course of history and helped preserve a world in which freedom and democracy could flourish. Let us also remember that today, as we honor our Nation's fallen heroes, we have called upon our Armed Forces to stand alert to the new challenges that threaten our freedom and security in the war against terrorism. Service members from Hawaii and those stationed in Hawaii are deployed in the war on terrorism, keeping the peace in Bosnia, safeguarding American airspace and shipping lanes, and successfully carrying out many important missions. We must not forget that these young men and women, like John Rowe, are on the frontlines to protect our security, our freedom, and the peace and prosperity of our great country.

And today, as we recall the sacrifice and noble legacy of those who have died defending our country, those service men and women from all generations and from all wars, let us also heed the example set by Hawaii's first Gold Star mother, Mrs. Rebecca Rowe, who having lost one of her three sons to war, urged her fellow citizens to work and pray for peace.

Mahalo nui loa for including me in your memorial service today. God bless you. God bless Hawaii. God bless America.