

## What it Takes

Contributed by Wes Riddle  
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Sometimes in our day-to-day rush and familiar surroundings and cultural norms, we forget how truly amazing America is. Folks, who have been away for some time, almost universally feel the need to get back. They need to "recharge," in a sense. You know something's special here, if you consider that millions want to come. Millions more look to America from their homes for guidance, assistance or example.

Ignorant people in the world think we're soft, because they see the plenty and don't understand what it has taken—and what it takes—to have what we have. They don't understand the discipline we live each day, in terms of balancing hard work and family relations, and service to our country and to God. They don't understand our striving to be the best we can be, and I mean in every single capacity God has granted us: mental, physical, spiritual, social and emotional. We strive to be "whole" persons, and we strive to be good. We also strive to win, because we're good. That's actually pretty unique in this world of ours.

Our own countrymen often overlook the value we subconsciously place on "freedom"—the freedom to do things, to go places, to have fun, to start new enterprises. We also generally place emphasis on personal responsibility, on self-reliance, on dignity and yes, even on clean living. It's horse sense really: you reap what you sow. The Taliban and Al Qaeda certainly learned that. But they didn't have any American horses. They didn't know Middle America—or New York, for that matter. They sure as hell didn't know a Texan or they would have known we'd kick their rear end. They thought Americans were weak and cowardly materialists, but I suppose it's easy to mistake the love of freedom for lack of virtue, or the love of peace for cowardice.

It's a shame our attackers didn't read our history (it's a shame a lot of us don't), because then they'd realize what it takes to be American. What it takes, in addition to good education and tons of elbow grease, is one or more wars practically every generation. Now did we really think that the twenty-first century was going to be any different, perhaps more peaceful because of the victory "the greatest generation" won in World War II? Believe it or not, that's a sentiment made by the famous historian Stephen Ambrose, just two days before the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon! I guess the Cold War, Korea, Viet Nam, and the Gulf War were just chopped liver. Anyway, I am very grateful for the World War II generation, certainly the greatest of the twentieth century. But don't think their accomplishment means we've got less to do, because it doesn't. The principal of Somerville College, Oxford, said to his new arrivals in 1944 that all beginnings are hopeful. So the new century/new millennium probably invited optimism, and optimism is not all bad—indeed, it's essential. But as one of the great Free World leaders during the Cold War—Margaret Thatcher—said, "My generation remembers that we had such faith after World War I that there could never be another world war, we let our defenses down." Do you see a pattern? Again and again, we prove what it takes. The measure in blood, however, depends on our preparedness at the time.

Out of 150 countries in the world, only 72 are free. I'd say the odds are we're in for a few more challenges. History and prudence dictate that we be prepared. Again, Thatcher has the right advice for Americans:

We must keep our defenses up and we must have equipment  
Of the very latest technology. This is absolutely vital.  
I believe the first duty of any government is to protect the lives  
of its citizens. And we do that by having the latest technology  
in the United States. My friends, you're citizens of a wonderful  
country. You've built the greatest country in the world in terms of  
establishing the rule of law, defending the freedoms of others, and  
building a most prosperous future for your people. If those who do  
have liberty would be guided by your example, what a much  
better world it would be. In the meantime [you] must continue  
to keep up [your] reputation.

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