

Enlistment Oath

As I was reading Facebook comments and posts about our enlistment oath, I decided to do some research. I remember taking the oath at the induction center in Fargo on 23 July 1964 when I entered the US Air Force and remember how important an oath it was. However, I could not remember the exact words. I'm guessing other Veterans can't remember either. Here, is the oath as administered in 1964.

"I, _____, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God."

From the National Archives, I downloaded the Bill of Rights included in our Constitution. The first article states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." Here is my understanding of what it means, with a bit of family history.

My cousin, Harald in Oslo, Norway traced our family tree back to 980 in Norway. My 22nd great grandfather was killed in the Battle of Stamford Bridge in 1066 which according to many ended the Viking Age. In that battle, King Harold of England defeated King Harald Hardrada of Norway. My ancestors were Vikings and my family tree goes back to a time of the Old Religion in Norway, prior to the introduction of Christianity by King Olaf II, later canonized as St. Olaf.

As an example of freedom of religion, I submit the following. If I wanted to follow the teachings of the Old Norse Religion, I may do so. If I want to live my life with the ultimate goal of entering Valhalla, I may do so. If I want to follow the teachings of the old Norse Sagas, I may do so. If I want my day of worship to be Thor's Dag (Thursday), I may do so. If I want to celebrate the Winter Solstice as the rebirth of the Earth, I may do so. All are protected by the first article's free exercise of religion. If I want to make speeches about my beliefs, I may do so under our freedom of speech. If I want to print pamphlets expressing my beliefs, I may do so under our freedom of the press. If I want to construct a building where I and others may gather to study and discuss our beliefs, I may do so under our freedom to assemble. If I am denied these rights, I may petition the Government to protect these rights. If, however, I want to make my beliefs the religion of the country, I can not. It is prohibited in the very first phrase of the first article "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." These freedoms and rights apply to all religions, something many in our country are ignoring today.

Our enlistment oath also includes "I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me." This means the President, a civilian is our Commander in Chief.

The final part of our oath states that we accept the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). It means that we give up some of our Constitutional rights and agree to abide by the UCMJ and

military courts. It is why military personnel are often tried by military courts rather than civilian ones.

PBS has a documentary, *First Freedom, the Fight for Religions Liberty*, “is the human story of how the Founding Fathers viewed faith, and how they radically broke with the Western tradition of religion-by-law to create a nation in which belief in God is a matter of choice.” It is well done and worth watching.