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Joseph Anton Walters Invested as a Knight in the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, Knights of Malta

HON. ALAN WHEAT

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, July 27, 1984

MR. WHEAT. Mr. Speaker, I should like to present to this representative body highlights of a ceremony conferring distinction upon one of Missouri's foremost veterans of World War II, and an expert in militia, Mr. Joseph Anton Walters of Independence.

The ceremony was celebrated recently at the Yacht Club in New York City. In the presence of a number of distinguished prelates, public officials, and business leaders, Mr. Walters was invested as a Knight in the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, Knights of Malta. The ceremony was presided over by his Excellency, Lorenzo Michel de Valitch, an Apostolic Delegate from the Vatican, Grand Chancellor and heir to the rich traditions of this noble order. His Excellency, Lorenzo Michel de Valitch, is also General Apostolic Administrator of the Ecumenical World Patriarchate, an Apostolic Church, dedicated to the reunion of all Christians under modern principles. Knighthood in the Knights of Malta is not one of the institutions created by a sovereign Pope. It derives from a genuine usage which unites two brothers of arms in an indefatigable bond of friendship by the exchange of their blood. Knighthood is not hereditary. It is the first and most last meaning of nobility, the poorest knight being the equal of a knight-king.

The Knights of Malta were founded in 1040 to protect pilgrims and merchants from brigands in the Near East. Early, in 1048, the Order erected a chapel—Santa Maria ad Latinos—and two hospitals at a site close to the Holy Sepulchre. Some years later the Order founded a hospice and a cloister for knights and soldiers—thus the name Hospitaller became

attached to Malta Knighthood. In 1124, King Baldwin I of Jerusalem recognized and confirmed the Fraternity of the Hospitaliers as a military-religious brotherhood. Within a short time, hospices and hospitals, all under the protection of Knights of Malta, were erected in Antioch, Acre and Caesarea.

Mr. Speaker, the history of the Knights of Malta is long and colorful. For now it is enough to relate that in 1522 Sultant Soliman II besieged the Island of Rhodes and, with a force of 140,000 and over 400 vessels, defeated the 5100 Knights of Saint John of Jerusalem. Some escaped to Malta. The Order rebuilt itself and continued, by example and expertise, to guide the pace-maker nations of Christendom, always holding honor and duty above all.

In 1530, through the intercession of Pope Clement VII, the Emperor Charles V granted the Order sovereignty over the Island of Malta.

Today the Knights of Malta include descendants of the most prominent Knights and Grand Masters of an earlier era. The traditions of the Knights of Malta and the Maltese Cross carry with them the designation "Chevalier de Malte" for Joseph Anton Walters.

Through the centuries, the Order has attracted to its ranks some of the most vigorous nobles of Christendom. These Knights shared a very noteworthy historical cultural and spiritual patrimony. They took an active interest in the affairs of the Holy Roman and Byzantine Empires, in addition to their defense of pilgrims and their charitable works. Under some of history's most able leadership, Headmaster Raymond de Puy, for instance, and Godfrey of Bouillon—who conquered Jerusalem in 1099—the deeds and influence of the Knights of Malta were enormous, and its members continue to play an important role in the stabilization of the cultural and political life of all ages, including our own.

Mr. Speaker, it is not difficult to comprehend why, through the centuries, totalitarian and atheistic states have been openly hostile to the tradition of chivalry, always by trying to destroy it, or by recasting it in a totalitarian image. But a soul cannot be destroyed, nor can an ideal founded upon the principles of love and charity be nullified.

The chivalrous ideal was not born suddenly. It came about because Christianity provided soldier-brothers with its greatest virtue, charity. To the first ideals of loyalty, generosity and moderation was added the most beautiful imperative of all—love!

The world, in which getting and spending towers above all, does not achieve instant comprehension of knighthood's mystique. Too many of the uninitiated see Knights as collectors of scrolls and medals. They understand only fragile vanity which is a cheap desire. Not many understand the seriousness of their commitments toward God and Christianity.

Living a life of active and protective love—that is what is demanded from members of a chivalrous order and the faithful maintainers who remain the guardians of the sword of justice. All around us, we witness attacks on, and decay of, what is nearest and dearest to us. Materialism dehumanizes and depersonifies man, eating away his spirit like a cancer. Raw hatred of God hides under the fungus of rationalism, and fundamental intolerances are masked with hypocritical words or appeasement.

It is therefore necessary to note that the Knights of Malta undertake as their task the defense of nothing less than Christian civilization itself, a dedication which involves courage and self-sacrifice. Accordingly, the Order seeks out and invites into its membership men of science who are still sensible, soldiers who are still human, teachers who still teach, thinkers who have not lost their mental acuity. It invites those