

Remarks by HE Governor Nigel Dakin CMG on the occasion of Jags McCartney Day

Good morning Turks and Caicos and a particularly warm welcome to the family, friends and past colleagues of the late, let's say it great, Honourable James Alexander George Smith McCartney – who our national day is named after – and who, in the shadow of his legacy, we are gathered here today.

You may recall that last year I used this opportunity to ask some questions about how JAGS would view the challenges of TCI today; how he would describe the challenge of today's diversity; how he would therefore nation-build, and; what leadership lessons we might take from him, as we all wrestle with these challenges ourselves.

My congratulations to our keynote speaker – Leo Lightbourne – for taking on those hard questions and answering them so comprehensively.

Beyond the keynote speaker the Premier, Leader of the Opposition and JAGS daughter have all spoken and so set against this somewhat crowded backdrop of expertise, perhaps you will allow me to both rest on what I said last year and allow me to tackle a slightly different thought, a thought that flows from any discussion of any 'national hero'.

That is, how do we make sure that the shadow any singular national hero casts, does not put others in the shade to the point that future heroes do not emerge – indeed multiply – but instead how do we harness heroic energy today, that draws on inspiration from our past and from JAG's life.

Given JAGS set the bar so high – what exactly do we mean by heroism and in defining it – how can we all encourage it – indeed perhaps teach it – in a practical sense to our children.

Many proud nations have an individual figure that towers over all others. My mind turns to George Washington in the United States, Nelson Mandela in South Africa and Mahatma Gandhi in India. Early days, perhaps, but on present showing Volodymyr Zelensky would appear to be starting to occupy this type of position in Ukraine.

But even countries that have 'a' national hero doesn't preclude them from having 'many' national heroes. It is quite possible to have both. Think of George Washington and you quickly think of Jefferson, Madison, Hamilton and from a different age Lincoln. And none of them have a day named after them – that is reserved for Martin Luther King. Think of Mandela and your mind turns to Desmond Tutu, Gandhi takes you to Nehru.

And of course not all countries have one towering figure. By way of contrast, in the UK, there is no equivalent to say Washington, Mandela or indeed JAGS. With a 2,000-year history that's perhaps inevitable – but an attempt at a popular poll in 2002, to find the one hundred Greatest Britons, included –

once the public had had their say – a relatively small number of genuine national leaders.

It did however include scientists, explorer's, mathematicians, physicists, biologists, artists, writers, poets, Generals and Admirals, athletes, entertainers, and monarchs and even a comedian. As an aside, it's worth reflecting that in Barbados one of their 10 National Heroes' is a sportsman – Sir Garfield Sobers.

My personal choice, of the Greatest Britain, came in only at number 76 – 'The Unknown Warrior' – buried in Westminster Abbey. However, the person the British people did place first in their poll was indeed a politician: Winston Churchill. But of course Churchill is not without historical controversy and having led us through the Second World War – a moment of huge crisis for us – he lost a landslide election at its conclusion, so his popularity was in question at the moment of his greatest achievement.

I think an important point that comes from this is acknowledging, as those who knew him well have acknowledged about JAGS, that national heroes aren't perfect – in fact they can't be perfect. They make mistakes – indeed as we will see in a moment – they are almost forced into making mistakes because they must take risks. There is a very significant difference indeed between a hero and a saint.

With that in mind, the point I think I want to land today – in the shadow of JAGS – is that for all our imperfections we have it in all of us to be heroic. So perhaps the most important thing I can hope to nail is to define what heroism is, because if we know what it is, we can be intentional in its pursuit and if we know what it is, we can properly honour it.

Heroism can of course be thought of in many ways. The notion of 'ultimate sacrifice' has a long history and is, for example, deeply rooted in myths, legends and antiquity as well as in present day military culture. Many globally recognised, let alone national heroes, like JAGS, have died at too young an age and that tragedy – the notion that so much more was yet to come – has helped consolidate their heroic status.

'John' Chapter 15 Verse 13, captures it all rather beautifully: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends". It's this quality that attracts me, for example, to my own choice in the UK of the 'Unknown Soldier'.

But this is a very focussed definition and not one particularly helpful for a society that wishes to be at peace and hopes its heroes enjoy longevity.

What we might instead say is that heroes exemplify cherished values; heroes display qualities we admire; heroes show us how to overcome challenges and heroes call us to stand up for others. And heroes do one more thing – heroes take risks – not risks at others expense – but risks that can seriously rebound on them.

So let me try and define heroism so we can intentionally pursue it and we can

recognise it when we see it. Fortunately, there is a reasonable consensus that heroism needs to be made up of at least four criteria, all of which must be fulfilled.

First, it's performed in service to others who are in need—whether that's a person, group, or community—or in defence of certain ideals.

Second, it's engaged in voluntarily. This is true even in military or policing contexts; heroism is an act that goes well beyond that required by normal duty.

Third, it is performed without any gain anticipated at the time the act occurs.

Finally, and this is the crucial difference between altruism and heroism, a heroic act is one performed with recognition of possible risks and costs. Those may be to one's well-being or perhaps more pertinent to us today, to one's reputation. The actor is willing to accept anticipated sacrifice in pursuit of a larger goal.

The good news, I believe, is we have far more potential heroes around us than we might imagine and so the next question is 'how do we encourage more potential heroes to perform heroic acts'.

I suggest the first thing is that we need to know – and in particular our young people need to know – is that heroism is alive and well and being a hero is achievable right here, and right now.

Now, to lighten the mood, and accepting the verse I'm about to use isn't quite as beautiful as the John: 15:13, I want to delve into popular culture for a moment. The final line, of the first verse, of "Something Just Like This" – the collaboration between the American band 'The Chainsmokers' and the UK's 'Coldplay' – rather nails the point I want to make...now bear with me.

If you haven't heard it, I'm afraid my own 'risk taking' doesn't extend to me singing it for you – although there may be others here who would relish the opportunity. But the lyrics go as follows...

I've been reading books of old

The legends and the myths

Achilles and his gold

Hercules and his gifts

Spider-Man's control

And Batman with his Fists

And clearly I don't see myself upon that list.

It's that last line "And clearly I don't see myself on that list" that I want

to hover over because my contention is, we do need to see ourselves on that list, young and old alike.

We all need to see – in this Territory – heroic role models living amongst us. They are there, for sure, we just probably need to do a better job in acknowledging them. Given the complex circumstances we are in – complexity that I'm not sure JAGS could have imagined we would face within 40 of his untimely death – we are not going to build a nation without living, breathing, everyday heroes walking amongst us that we recognise as such.

The good news is that I, and you, see them every day, in multiple walks of life, including some close to me on this stage and some I see in the audience, and many I know who are watching or listening. In politics, for sure, but also in sport and culture, in uniform and without, on land and at sea, in the church and in secular life, in the private sector, public and voluntary.

Beyond that I see disabled people living an almost daily life of heroism, I see parents of children with special needs and – in terms of taking the personal risk, to reach for the stars (because the risk of perpetual failure stalks those with such high ambition) – I see world class athletes, artists and performers from TCI making it on the world stage and I'm in genuine awe of them and I think you are too.

Acts of heroism though don't just come from truly exceptional people but from people placed in the right circumstance and given the necessary tools to transform compassion into action. The key point is that they have to be prepared to take a personal risk to do that, and that behaviour of sacrifice can be encouraged.

A first step we can take is to quietly say to ourselves that we are willing to be a hero 'in waiting'. When we see wrong, we won't look the other way, we will take a risk, and we will step up. We can pledge to act when confronted with a situation where we feel something is wrong, to actively develop our heroic abilities and believe in the heroic capacities within ourselves and others.

If you are a parent, teacher or youth leader, you might want to talk about so called: 'Giraffe Courage'. A good up bringing, that teaches right from wrong, is of course the foundation, as is encouraging empathy, compassion and altruism. But to turn that to heroism – just like a Giraffe – we need to have the inner confidence to stick our neck out – and to stand tall.

No one can be a hero every day of their life, that would be literally exhausting, and most heroes are remembered for a relatively small number of actions – perhaps a singular act of bravery. But if every day we hide in the crowd we will, in the end, however good our thoughts, only be part of the problem because a lack of positive heroic action tends to work in favour of those who do harm, not those who do good.

We need to honour our first national hero and at the same time demystify what it is to be a hero. Being a hero is an opportunity open to us all.

So finally, standing in the shadow of our national hero, and paying my own respects to him as I will shortly in laying a wreath, I also want to acknowledge, as I'm sure he would, the unsung, quiet heroes—the men and women who put themselves in some form of jeopardy, defend a moral cause, help someone in need.

I thank our national hero for leading the way and I encourage us all to be inspired by his example, to not only live our best life, but to live the most heroic life we can.

And with that, may God Bless these heroic Turks and Caicos Islands.

Honouring the Nation's Hero