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Presenter: Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld and Lt. Gen. John F. Sattler, Commanding General, I Marine Expeditionary Force

Friday, December 24, 2004

Secretary Rumsfeld Addresses Troops in Fallujah with Lt. Gen. Sattler

LT. GEN. SATTLER [In Progress]... and share a little bit of the holiday spirit and to look the warriors in the eye and to say thank you for standing on the wall and defiantly saying, "not on my watch." So without further ado, I give you our Secretary of Defense, The Honorable Donald Rumsfeld. A little hoorah to bring him out. [Cheers]

SEC. RUMSFELD: Thank you very much. Now you folks have made quite a name for yourselves, the whole world was watching and you did your job and you did it with a great deal of courage and a great deal of skill and, I must say, with superb results. I know it's still going on. I know folks have still be wounded there even very recently in Fallujah. But what's been accomplished is important and people will look back over the decades and take note of the contribution that you've all made to the history of the Corps.

The General said, I'm here to look you in the eye and say thank you and he's exactly right. That's why I'm here. We have so much respect for you, for your dedication, for your determination and for your courage. You're here for an important reason. What you're doing is noble work. It is work that in which you will be successful, let there be no doubt.

I must say I had a wonderful experience there earlier this month. If you think back three years ago to just about this time, Afghanistan was a training center for terror, the terrorists that launched the attack on the United States of America and killed 3,000 Americans. It was a country that had been occupied by the Soviet Union, had civil war, had drought, had local militias and warlords, had a series of difficulties, people that fled the country and left. Clearly, it was a country that had never had a democracy, that has never had a popularly elected leader. And we were in there for about two weeks when everyone said it was a quagmire, that it couldn't be done, that we would lose. But the Soviet Union had something like 2[00,000] or 300,000 people in there for years and lost tens of thousands of lives. And the people – the doubters said it couldn't be done.

And earlier this month, I was in Kabul. They had their first popularly elected president in the history of the country. They have a set of ministries and they swore in Hamid Karzai as the president. People came from around the world. Women voted. Forty one percent of the people who voted were women and they had young children dancing on the stage and singing. And under the Taliban in Afghanistan, it was against the law to sing or whistle or fly a kite, for women to go out unattended. So something truly breathtaking has taken place in Afghanistan. It is an accomplishment that the United States and the coalition forces can take enormous pride in.

I brought along a statement that Mr. Karzai said. He said to the American people – to all of us, to you and to the people back home – he said that “Whatever we have achieved in Afghanistan is from the help that the United States of America gave us.” He went on to say that “without that help, Afghanistan would be in the hands of terror, destroyed, poverty stricken and without its children going to school or getting an education.” “We are very grateful to put it in the simple words we know,” he said, “to the people of the United States for bringing us that day.”

This is a tough situation here in Iraq, it’s dangerous, people are being wounded, people are being killed. And I must say in that [Inaudible] within the last 10 days I have been out at Bethesda and Walter Reed and seen a number of your colleagues who have been wounded. I must tell you that their spirits are high, they’re strong. I met with their families and I never cease to be amazed it’s truly extraordinary the strength that you feel [Inaudible] their families and their loved ones. You come away from those meetings with a feeling of strength, with an optimism and an encouragement and an inspiration to get about the tasks we still have. So they’re receiving superb medical care and their thoughts are clearly with you.

But what’s taking place here is at a stage where a great many people doubt whether or not it can be accomplished. I’ve been around long enough to have seen the rise of fascism and Nazism and the fall and the defeat of fascism and Nazism, to see the rise of communism and the fall of communism, the building of the Berlin Wall and the tearing down of the Berlin Wall and numerous minor tyranny from – and dictators and oppressive regimes that have failed. And you ask yourself, well, why is that, what’s going on?” And I guess all I can say is that people basically want to be free. They don’t want to be repressed. They want to use their soccer stadium for soccer and not for beheading people. And the great sweep of human history is for freedom. And that is what you are about and that is what our country is about and we are on the right side of that. And I say therefore that there isn’t any doubt in my mind but that the work that’s being done here has an opportunity to create another 25 million people liberated.

To move from the Iraqi Governing Council with the Iraqi interim government ,to elections next month, to a constitution thereafter, it won’t look like the United States, it won’t look like Afghanistan. It’ll be an Iraqi solution by the Iraqi people and for the Iraqi people. And our test as Americans and as members of this coalition, it isn’t to do it for them, it’s to create a circumstance where they can know from where they’ve been decades under a repressive dictator, a dictator that used chemical weapons against their own people, against their neighbors, that filled mass graves across this land and to move from that to a system of government that is at peace with its neighbors, it’s respectful of its glorious diverse ethnic groups. It won’t be easy. It’s never been easy.

It wasn’t easy for the United States to move along that path and it certainly wasn’t easy for Afghanistan. It wasn’t easy for Germany or Japan after the end of World War II. So what’s happened here is free countries have sent their best people – you – to this country and you helped open the schools and you helped build hospitals and open the clinics. The stock market’s opened. They have a new currency. So many things have been accomplished that are positive and all along the way, it’s bumpy and it’s tough and there are setbacks. It’s not a smooth, easy, steady path to success.

But I will stand here and say to each of you that in five years, 10 years and 15 years, when you’re getting a little closer to my age, you’ll look back at what you’ve done and you will be proud of what you’ve done. You’ll be proud to feel that you’ve contributed to something that is important to this country and important to 25 million people, important for this region.

I was over in Korea, oh, several months back. We have, of course, a lot of troops still over there and I was in a high-rise building in Seoul. I don’t know – 18 stories up. And a young woman journalist came up to me and they had just voted in the Korean parliament as to whether or not they ought to send any troops into Iraq. And there was a big debate in the country. And she looked at me and she said, “Why should the Korean people

send their young men halfway around the world to be wounded or die in Iraq?" I keep a satellite photograph on my desk in Washington and it shows the Korean Peninsula and the demilitarized zone and south of the DMZ is all lights and electricity and energy. Same people south, the same people north, the same resources south as north. And north of the DMZ is just blackness, nothing, except a thin prick of light in Pyongyang in the capital city of North Korea. Now why is that? It's because in the south they have a free political system and a free economic system. In the north they have a repressive, vicious dictator that's starving their people. In the north, they had to lower the height for people to come into the military to 4'10" because of starvation and less than 100 pounds. They'll now allow people into the Korean military because of not enough calories as they're growing up. So people have a choice and if they choose free systems, the opportunity and the success that can come is just breathtaking and to the extent it's a repressive system, a dictatorial system, a system that denies freedom, the suffering [Inaudible].

So I'm here to say thank you. What you're doing is important. You're doing it brilliantly. The people in our country know you're doing it brilliantly and they're very much in your debt. They appreciate you, they honor your work and I know at Christmastime holidays it's hard to be away from your families. But know that they are thinking about you and know that they're proud of what you're doing, as am I, and as are the American people and may God bless all of you, your important work, your loved ones and in our country. Thank you very much.

[Applause]

LT. GEN. SATTLER: Mr. Secretary, we were going to give the warriors a chance to – if anyone had any questions, you might like to ask the secretary before we break off and we go into a photo opportunity. So...

SEC. RUMSFELD: Good.

LT. GEN. SATTLER: ... if you have that question, please raise your hand and we'll call on you and you'll have to belt it out. Here's one right here, Mr. Secretary.

Q: Good afternoon, sir. [Inaudible] BLT 3/8 [Inaudible] company. I would like to know the Marine Corps is going to be increasing its numbers here in the near future. How is that going to affect the funds on equipment i.e., NVGs, better com gear because obviously they're going to need money to sustain the numbers that the Marine Corps increases by?

SEC. RUMSFELD: The president has said that he is going to have a supplemental appropriations bill go to the Congress for fiscal year '05 and '06 [Inaudible]. And what that will be used for is to see that we do have the funds for the equipment that's necessary for the forces across the globe. And of course, the places where the usage is the greatest is here and if we're the ground forces, the Army and the Marines and I have no doubts in my mind, but that we will see the services come in with proposals that will meet the needs of the ground forces because of the difficult job they're doing and the needs that exist in that area. Thank you.

LT. GEN. SATTLER: Another question, please. Yes.

Q: [Inaudible] Sir, my question is now that the Third Marines has been allowed to show their abilities to the world, are we going to be entering into the combat rotations in the near future?

LT. GEN. SATTLER: Mr. Secretary, that's more of a Marine question. The question was now that the 1st Battalion of the 3rd Marines have shown the combat capability and fighting spirit of the Hawaii warriors will you be entered into the combat location and the answer is, I believe, there's a battalion right now in Afghanistan. Battalion commander? Right now, out of the 3rd Marine regiment, three battalions in the regiment. One is kicking - is stabilizing things - up in [Laughter] inside of Afghanistan the secretary alluded to, making sure that the [Inaudible] President Karzai is there, keeping things under control and the other one is just complete

and continue to kick butt outside the town of Fallujah. So I will tell you that two of the three are used right now. The third one is going to be into the fight. So the answer to your question is yes. Hoorah.

All right. Did someone have a question for the secretary now?

[Laughter]

SEC. RUMSFELD: Any other questions here? Must be.

LT. GEN. SATTLER: Mr. Secretary, no other [Inaudible] probably more cameras per capita inside this little room than there is on the [Inaudible] Fallujah, Mr. Secretary. So with your permission, is there's something that – anybody else has any for the secretary before we break and let the secretary go and shake some hands and we break out for photo opportunities here?

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