



The White House

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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For Immediate Release
Office of the Vice President
July 27, 2004

Vice President's Remarks at a Rally for the Troops

Marine Corps Base Camp Joseph HR Pendleton
San Diego County, California

9:14 A.M. PDT

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Good morning. (Applause.) Well, thank you very much. Boy, this weather is fantastic out here in Pendleton, isn't it? It's a very pleasant day for us, and I have the opportunity to spend some time with all of you. We've been looking forward to spending some time this morning -- at ease. Please, everybody, you can sit down. And we're proud to be with all of you, with the men and women of Camp Pendleton.

I want to thank General Williams, Colonel Hampton, and Colonel Goodman, and everyone who prepared the way for our visit here this morning. It's a privilege to stand before so many who have served our country so well. And I'm honored to bring the personal regards of our Commander-in-Chief, President George W. Bush. (Applause.)

I also want to thank Congressman Issa, along with your local elected officials, who are here today.

Camp Pendleton is the busiest military base in America -- with more than 60,000 military and civilian personnel reporting for work every day. The base receives tremendous support from San Diego and Orange County -- from government officials, from business people, and from volunteers. And I want to thank the people of this community for their generosity, their patriotism, and above all for what you do to strengthen the Corps.

Above all else, the sailors and Marines of Camp Pendleton depend on the support of their families. Camp Pendleton is home to one of the closest, most active networks of military families anywhere in the world. You're the ones who send the letters and the packages, who look out for friends and neighbors in need, and give prayerful support to the men and women who serve. Military life is a family commitment, and this nation does not take you for granted. America is proud of our military families. (Applause.)

It's been a little over three years now since President Bush chose Camp Pendleton for one of his first military stops as Commander-in-Chief. That day he talked about the new recruits and the old Leathernecks, and the Marine tradition of being ready when the nation calls. On that morning in the spring of 2001, President Bush said these words, and I quote: "Because you are Marines, you are often asked to perform the most difficult and dangerous missions. Because you are Marines, you not only accept this challenge, you embrace it -- not for glory, not for self, but for God, country, Corps, and your fellow Marines."

A few months after the President spoke here, the United States came under attack. I was at the White House on the morning of September 11th, 2001, and throughout that day received reports on the situation in New York, and across the Potomac at the Pentagon. There were conversations with the President and our military commanders, decisions to be made about civilian flights, military air cover over major cities, and disaster response. In many ways, the attacks of that day brought out the best in people under difficult and extremely uncertain circumstances. America witnessed the calm determination of our firefighters, police, and medical personnel, who saved thousands of lives, and the heroes of United '93, who fought back at the cost

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of their own lives to defeat the terrorists and their plan to kill even more Americans in our Nation's Capital. At Camp Pendleton, and at our military bases around the world, we saw our Armed Forces rise to heightened readiness with great speed and efficiency.

That day changed everything for our country. In the space of a few hours, we lost 3,000 of our fellow citizens; we saw the violence and the grief that terrorism can inflict. We saw a foe whose hatred of us is limitless. This is an enemy, as the 9/11 Commission reported last week, whose purpose "is to rid the world of religious and political pluralism." They want to impose their way of life on the rest of us, and in pursuit of this goal, they are prepared to slaughter anyone who stands in their way. This is not a foe we can reason with, or negotiate with, or appease. This is -- to put it simply -- an enemy that we must vanquish. And we will vanquish this enemy. (Applause.)

To win this war, America is applying a doctrine that is clear to all: Every person, group, or regime that harbors or supports terror is equally guilty of terrorist crimes, and will be held to account. In Afghanistan, the Taliban found out what we meant. Within weeks of 9/11, American forces were on the ground in Afghanistan, teaming up with Afghan freedom fighters to destroy the terror camps and take down the Taliban regime. With swift, precise action, we and our allies captured or killed hundreds of al Qaeda fighters, ended Taliban rule, and liberated 25 million people in Afghanistan. Today, that country has a peaceful government; democracy is rising; the terror camps are closed; and the American people are safer for it.

Having -- (applause) -- having seen the devastation caused by 19 men armed with knives, box cutters, and boarding passes, we awakened to a possibility even more lethal -- that terrorists could acquire the capability to make weapons of mass destruction -- chemical, biological agents, or even nuclear weapons -- or gain such weapons themselves from an outlaw regime. If terrorists get their hands on that deadly technology, there can be no doubt they will inflict catastrophic damage on America and our allies. President Bush is determined to remove threats before they arrive, instead of simply waiting for another attack on our country. So America acted to end the regime of Saddam Hussein. And as with so many great missions throughout our history, our cause depended on the skill and the honor of the United States Marines. (Applause.)

In preparation for Operation Iraqi Freedom, the First Marine Expeditionary Force moved its flag forward from Camp Pendleton to Kuwait. And on the President's orders, the First Marine Division led the way over the Kuwaiti border and nearly 500 miles into Iraq, through Baghdad and all the way to Saddam's hometown of Tikrit. (Applause.) You drove through the resistance in your path, liberated a captive people, and helped force Saddam's regime from power less than a month after the war began.

In that historic 500-mile drive across Iraq, the First Marine Division was propelled by critical contributions from the First Force Service Support Group, also based at Camp Pendleton. (Applause.) Every unit in that group participated in Operation Iraqi Freedom, and together you amassed a superb record. In all, the First Force Service Support Group produced and delivered over 2 million gallons of water; repaired over 4,000 essential pieces of combat equipment; constructed a system to deliver almost 8 million gallons of fuel 62 miles into Iraq; distributed more than 5.4 million meals to soldiers and Marines; delivered almost 30,000 tons of ammunition; and treated more than 1,600 patients in Force Service Support Group Medical Facilities. And that was just in the first deployment to Iraq. The Force Service Support Group is back now, doing even more to help the First Marine Division make Iraq more secure.

Above the battlefield in Iraq, Miramar's Third Marine Aircraft Wing carried out missions lending critical assistance to the liberation efforts on the ground. Helicopter squadrons helped escort convoys, provided close air support to fighting forces, evacuated wounded soldiers and Marines, and moved large quantities of supplies, and, when necessary, transported troops preparing for combat.

From various locations in Iraq and Kuwait, the Headquarters Group of the First Marine Expeditionary Force has made countless contributions to the mission. For almost two years, personnel have carried out reconnaissance, collected and analyzed intelligence, managed communications, and coordinated operations with our allies, especially the Royal Marines from Great Britain.

The record of the last several years -- the swift action, the flexibility and skill of our units, the superb performance of duty in the toughest of circumstances -- constitutes another great chapter in the history of the Marine Corps, of the U.S. military, and of our nation. (Applause.)

We see the spirit of the Corps in men like Lance Corporal Joseph Perez, who sustained multiple gunshot wounds in a fight outside Baghdad, yet still directed his platoon's fire to destroy the enemy and seize their position. His actions earned him the Navy Cross. While recovering from his wounds, Corporal Perez expressed but one wish: "To get back to my unit and back to training."

We see the spirit of the Corps in men like Major Calvert Worth, Jr., who led a command group that seized a palace in Baghdad, and whose rapid actions destroyed an approaching counterattacking force. After receiving the Bronze Star, Major Worth said this: "Marines, regardless of the task, always accomplish the mission." (Applause.)

As one sergeant major recently observed, "This generation of Marines is as good as any generation we've ever had in the Corps." He is absolutely correct, and here at this historic military base, I want to congratulate the Marines for yet another job well done. (Applause.)

Throughout the First Marine Expeditionary Force, we also find brave, dedicated members of the Marine Reserves. These men and women put their lives on hold, and leave their families behind, to accept assignments in Iraq, here at Pendleton, and elsewhere in the world. We're grateful to the Marine Reservists, and to all of their families. (Applause.)

There is still important and difficult work ahead in Iraq. Freedom still has enemies in that country. Yet thanks to the accomplishments of every unit in the First Marine Expeditionary Force -- and other members of our military -- Iraq has undergone a historic transformation. Sixteen months ago, Iraq was under the control of a dictator. Today, Saddam Hussein is in jail. (Applause.) Sixteen months ago, 25 million Iraqi people lived in repression, fearful of torture or death. Now they are free, and protected by an Iraqi bill of rights, and preparing to elect their own leaders. Sixteen months ago, Iraq was a gathering threat to the United States and the civilized world. Now it is a rising democracy, an ally in the war on terror, and the American people are safer for it. (Applause.)

Many of you here today will soon begin a rotation in Iraq. Marine units are still vital to securing Iraqi democracy, supporting the government as the country moves toward free elections, and helping the liberated people of Iraq to live in peace and safety. You are being deployed to a country whose new president declared, in his inaugural address a few weeks ago, the "profound gratitude" of the Iraqi people toward the American-led coalition that freed them from a dictator. And your mission in Iraq is critical to the future security of the United States. To fully and finally overcome the threat of terror, we are encouraging hope and democracy in the Middle East as an alternative to the hatred and the despair that lead to violence. As Americans, we believe that everyone has the right to live in freedom. And we know that when men and women are given the rights and opportunities of a free society, they will turn their energy toward the pursuits of peace.

I want every one of you to know that in the work ahead, President Bush is going to back you up 100 percent. Our job is to provide you with the best possible equipment to do your mission; to make sure you receive the pay increases you deserve; and to support military families at home. We will keep that commitment to you. (Applause.)

Because our nation has been strong and resolute in the cause of freedom, the countries you have helped liberate will never go back to the camp of tyranny and terror. And America will never go back to the false comforts of the world before 9/11. Terrorist attacks are not caused by the use of strength. They are invited by the perception of weakness. (Applause.)

This nation has made a decision: We will engage the enemy -- facing him with our military in Iraq and Afghanistan today, so we do not have to face him with armies of firefighters, police, and medical personnel on the streets of our own cities. (Applause.)

Every person in the United States Armed Forces can take great pride in the work you do for America. And the people of this country are so very fortunate to have men and women like you serving in freedom's cause. Your fellow citizens know that your work is hard. The days are hot, and the burdens are many. And you have said farewell to brave friends who did not come home. These men and women, last seen doing their duty, brought great credit to the uniform and to the flag -- and our nation will honor their names forever.

(Applause.)

In these last three years, many great challenges have come to our country. Much has been asked of us, and, as with the other great challenges in our nation's history, the greatest burdens have fallen on the men and women of our military. And yet this time of testing is also a time of promise. The United States is a good and a decent country -- a nation that is making the world a better place by defending the innocent, confronting the violent, and bringing freedom to the oppressed. We understand the threats before us; and we have the resources, the strength, and the moral courage to overcome them all. Our President has made clear to all the terrorist enemies that they will fail -- because the direction of history is toward justice and human freedom. The terrorists will fail -- because the resolve of America and our allies will not be shaken. And the terrorists will fail -- because men and women like you stand in their way. (Applause.)

I thank each and every one of you for your great service to America. It's an honor to be here. You are worthy of the title you hold, the uniform you wear, and the code you live by. Your Commander-in-Chief is proud of you. On his behalf, and on behalf of the people of the United States, I thank you all. Semper Fi. (Applause.)

END 9:33 A.M. PDT

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