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For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
February 23, 2005

President Thanks U.S. Troops at Wiesbaden Army Airfield Base

Wiesbaden Army Airfield
Wiesbaden, Germany

4:56 P.M. (Local)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all. (Applause.) Thank you very much. Thank you for the warm welcome. Laura and I were in the neighborhood -- (laughter) -- and we thought we'd just drop by to say hello. Howdy. (Laughter and applause.)



VIDEO [Multimedia](#)

President's Remarks

[view](#)

It's an honor to be here with so many outstanding soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines from this base and others in Germany. Laura and I are proud to be with you. I'm glad to be with the men and women of the Third Support Command, and the 421st Medical Evacuation Battalion. (Applause.) I see a lot of Big Red Ones here in the crowd -- (applause) -- I know you've just back from Iraq. I'm pleased to say, "Job well done." (Applause.)

It's good to be at the proud home of the First Armored Division. (Applause.) Some of you Iron Soldiers might have seen me before. (Applause.) I was the guy serving turkey. (Applause.)

I arrived this morning from Brussels, where I was meeting with some of our vital allies in the war on terror. I came to Wiesbaden to meet the men and women fighting on the front lines of that war. You are carrying out challenging duties with skill and honor. And today I bring you a message from back home: The American people are grateful to you. Your communities are proud of you. And as you defend the cause of freedom, America stands with you. (Applause.)



I also want to thank all the military families who are here today. (Applause.) They tell me the quality of life here is really good -- (laughter) -- but it's a long way away from home, and it can be lonely when your loved ones are deployed on dangerous missions in distant lands, I know that. You built close-knit community here. You support all those who wear the uniform and you support each other through difficult times. The service and sacrifice of America's military families is vital to our success in the war on terror, and your President is here to tell you I'm proud of our military families, as well. (Applause.)

I appreciate Major General Marty Dempsey's introduction, and his wife, Deanie. I appreciate their leadership their leadership. Today we've got General Jim Jones, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe and his wife, Diane, with us. I'm traveling in some pretty good company. I like to be around strong women. (Applause.) I want your men listening to your wives just like I listen to mine. (Applause.) Laura is a fabulous First Lady for our country. I'm proud of her. (Applause.) This nation has got a great Secretary of State in Condoleezza Rice. (Applause.) I appreciate Ambassador Dan Coats and wife, Marsha. Dan has been our Ambassador from the United States to Germany and both have done a spectacular job on behalf of our nation. (Applause.)

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I want to thank Diana DeGarmo for helping to entertain you. (Applause.) I don't know if you know this, Laura and I were raised in West Texas. (Applause.) Three boys were raised right down the street from us there in West Texas. Those were the Gatlin Boys, and I'm proud they're here. (Applause.) Thanks for coming.

The First Armored and First Infantry Divisions are two of the oldest, proudest units in the United States Army. You predecessors fought the great battles of World War II, stood vigil through the decades of the Cold War, and served with distinction in Vietnam and Bosnia and Kosovo. And on this day 14 years ago, soldiers in both your divisions spent their final night in Saudi Arabia, before charging into Iraq to crush the army of Saddam Hussein. (Applause.)



On September the 11th, 2001, history brought new responsibilities to our nation, new challenges. That morning, America witnessed the violence and grief that terrorists can inflict. We had a glimpse of the greater destruction the terrorists intend. On behalf of our nation, I made a pledge: We will bring our enemies to justice -- or bring justice to our enemies. (Applause.)

And you are the ones who are carrying out this vital mission. Every one of you is a volunteer. You stepped forward to accept the hardest duties in this new war. And over the past three years, you have added to the great achievements of your divisions. You are part of the history of freedom and peace. You know that terrorists will not be stopped by negotiations, or concessions, or appeals to reason. Terrorists must be confronted and they must be defeated. In this war, there is only one option for victory -- we must take the fight to the enemy. (Applause.)

At this hour, brave Americans in uniform are protecting our country and others by hunting down the terrorists around the world, one by one. Since September the 11th, more than three-quarters of al Qaeda's known key members and associates have been brought to justice. The rest of them are on the run, and the world's greatest fighting force is on their trail. (Applause.)

The day our nation was attacked, I also made it clear that regimes that support terror would be considered equally guilty of terrorist murder. A few weeks later, the Taliban found out what we meant. With good allies at our side, America's military liberated the people of Afghanistan from one of the most brutal regimes on Earth. We destroyed the training camps where the attacks of September the 11th were conceived. We showed the terrorists that no cave is deep enough to hide from American justice.

Today Afghanistan is a free country, and an ally in the war on terror. (Applause.) After long years of oppression, women are participating in that society. (Applause.) Boys and girls are going to school. The Afghan Army and police are securing their country. And last October, more than 8 million Afghan citizens cast their votes in the first free presidential election in Afghanistan's 5,000-year history. (Applause.)

As our men and women in uniform helped to transform Afghanistan, we also confronted a growing danger in Iraq. One of the key lessons of September the 11th is that we must confront threats before they fully materialize. In Iraq, we found a threat to the entire world. Saddam Hussein supported terrorists, he pursued deadly weapons, he defied the just demands of the international community, year after year, resolution after resolution. The world gave him a final chance to disarm. And when he refused to comply, he met the might and the resolve of the United States military. (Applause.)



At a decisive moment in the history of freedom, America once again turned to the First Armored Division -- and once again, the Iron Soldiers answered the call. You moved into Iraq in April of 2003, and you stayed for 15 months. (Applause.) You waged an innovative, disciplined campaign, and because of your skill and sacrifice, Iraq is sovereign and Iraq is free. (Applause.)

Before the Iron Soldiers left for Iraq, secret police held the population in fear. By the time you came home,

you had trained thousands of Iraqi security forces who are now on the job defending their free country. Before Iron Soldiers left for Iraq, a terrible regime had decimated the country's education and health care systems. By the time you came home, you had repaired hundreds of schools and hospitals. When the Iron Soldiers left for Iraq, Saddam Hussein was sitting in a palace. And by the time you came home, he was sitting in a prison cell. (Applause.)

You have served with honor and distinction -- and a little longer than some of you expected. (Laughter.) Some of you were boarding the plane home to return to your families when you got word that we'd extended your tour. I know that was a trying time. But no change in plans could shake your resolve. As a sergeant I met last year put it, "We're soldiers and we drive on." (Applause.)

In your final months in Iraq, you drove on to seven major cities, defeated Sadr's militias decisively, you restored control of Iraq's holy sites to peaceful citizens. With your victories in Najaf and Karbala, you helped the Iraqi people take critical steps toward freedom. And you proved to a watching world that the United States of America will never retreat before a band of thugs and assassins. (Applause.)

The Iron Soldiers built the foundation for democracy in Iraq, and to help finish the job, we turned to the Big Red One. From Kirkuk to Samarra to Tikrit, the soldiers of the First Infantry Division worked around the clock to prepare Iraq for free elections. Your challenges were unprecedented, and so was the outcome. More than 8 million Iraqi voters defied the terrorists by lining up at the polls, dipping their fingers in ink, and casting the first free vote of their lives. (Applause.) Their courage was noteworthy and inspiring. One voter came to the polls in a wheelchair pushed by her grandson. She said, "I am here to cast my vote. Saddam killed six members of my family. This is the best revenge." (Applause.)



The Iraqi people have now taken rightful control of their destiny, and that would not have been possible without the First Infantry Division. By helping the people of that country turn back the enemies of democracy, you have acted in the great liberating tradition of our nation. And like generations of soldiers before you, you have shown that America's military is one of the world's greatest forces for good.

Together, the First Infantry Division and the First Armored Division have helped to bring freedom and hope to a suffering people. (Applause.) These units have a few other things in common. They both count on the fearless soldiers of the "Dustoff Europe" battalion for medical care on the battlefield. (Applause.) They both rely on the Third Support Command to deliver just about everything else they need. (Applause.) In a year of service in Iraq, the Third Support Command delivered more than 185 million gallons of fuel, issued more than 50 million meals, and logged more than 25 million miles on the road. That's the equivalent of more than 1,000 trips around the world. The Third Support Command carried out these duties on tight deadlines, and often under enemy fire. Your courage is appreciated by every soldier at this base, every soldier in the theater, and I keep you -- I thank you for "keeping the force for the fight."

In the war on terror, all of you have taken great risks on my orders, and your service reflects the best qualities of America. You have been brave in the face of danger, unshakable in the times of testing, and generous to those in need. Some in your units have survived terrible injuries, and a grateful America will do everything we can to help them recover. Some of you have said farewell to some fine Americans. They represent a new generation of heroes, as great as any who have come before. Their example of unselfish courage inspires all who serve. And America will honor their names forever. (Applause.)

The sacrifices you have made will change the world for decades to come. By fighting terrorists in places like Baghdad and Karbala and Tikrit, you are making sure we do not face those enemies at home. By helping captive peoples gain their freedom, you have made a critical contribution to the history of liberty. And that means the world will be more peaceful, and our children and grandchildren will be more secure. Your success is sending a clear message throughout the Middle East, that the only force powerful enough to stop the rise of tyranny and terror, and replace hatred with hope, is the force of human freedom. (Applause.)

You are serving in a critical period in freedom's history, and there will be more difficult work ahead. Yet I'm

optimistic about our future, because I know the character of freedom's defenders. I know the history of those who have defended our freedom. Fifty years ago this summer, the Soviet Union imposed a blockade on West Berlin. Keeping free Berlin alive seemed an impossible task, yet America and our allies refused to give in. From this airfield, American pilots launched dangerous missions to supply Berlin, and they continued those flights, at great risk, for 11 months. The heroes of the Berlin Airlift saved that city. And with their early resolve, they helped freedom triumph in the Cold War.

Today, America is again called to defend freedom. And once again, our military is answering the call. I have hope for our country, and faith in our cause, and great confidence in the men and women who wear our nation's uniform. (Applause.) With your courage, with your determination, and with your skill, the cause of freedom will prevail, and we'll achieve the peace that we all want for future generations to come.

Thank you for letting us come by. Thank you for serving our great land. May God bless you, may God bless America. (Applause.)

END 5:18 P.M. (Local)

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