

**REMARKS BY
ADM. MICHAEL MULLEN, CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS
OF STAFF
AT THE ARMED FORCES FAREWELL
IN HONOR OF PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH**

**FORT MYER, VIRGINIA
TUESDAY, JANUARY 6, 2009**

ADMIRAL MULLEN: President and Mrs. Bush; Mr. Vice President; Secretary and Mrs. Gates; members of the Cabinet; distinguished members of Congress; fellow members of the Joint Chiefs; members of the Armed Forces of the United States, past and present; ladies and gentlemen: Thank you for honoring us with your presence, and welcome to the grounds of the Old Guard, which both sanctify our past and herald our future.

On behalf of the 2.2 million uniform men and women of our Armed Forces, I am humbled to be able to formally thank President and Mrs. Bush for all they have done for our military and for our nation. More than 280,000 are walking point right now on the front lines. They stand tallest with us on this day, and it is right to thank them for making this celebration possible. (Applause.)

Truly it is not my privilege alone to tell the story of the Bush name -- a story that waits not only to be said in volumes, but one carried in the hearts of those patriots out there; a story which rushes with the oral history of life, warm with gratitude, flush with inspiration; a story best told by the voices of our service members themselves, who recently had an opportunity to place in a journal their thoughts to President and Mrs. Bush. Deborah and I passed that journal to the troops as we recently traveled around the world.

And so if you don't mind, Mr. President and Madam First Lady, I wanted to share a few handwritten lines from them.

"Mr. President, thank you and your family for your service. I am proud to serve under you, sir. You are awesome, and made a difference in the world." Staff Sergeant Ward, Queens, New York.

"Sir, nice to see that our President is still quick on his feet after eight years in office." (Laughter.) "Next time, pick up the shoe and throw it back." (Laughter and applause.) "We got your back." Master Sergeant Michael Frazier, United States Air Force.

"Sir, you truly set the standard to uphold the peace and our very way of life so our kids can grow up in a peaceful world. We will always stand tall, one great nation and one great state -- Texas." (Hoo-ah.) Sergeant First Class Claude Corey, Waco, Texas.

"Mrs. Bush, your class and dignity were an inspiration to us all." Lieutenant Colonel Scott Rainey, United States Army, Baghdad.

"Sir, thank you for your service, example and leadership. We have not faltered, we will not fail. With greatest respect and honor, we serve." Signed simply, Your Soldiers.

Those voices are an answering volley to you for your high regard and great respect for every single man and woman who serves this nation.

After this nation was attacked by a rising evil, the same evil which later murdered many others in places like London, Madrid, Islamabad and Mumbai, you quickly led us from the grip of fear to a serenity of purpose and unity of action -- serenity well beyond our dreams on September 12th, when all thought further attack was not only likely, but gravely imminent. And through your vision, a new national security was rendered to reach our enemies where they hid and trained and celebrated deadly crimes.

We sent our forces to hills and caves, alongside tribesman on horseback to root them out and hunt them down. We liberated Iraq from tyranny, now on the road to renewal. And we are shifting our focus to Afghanistan. We applauded as you, Mrs. Bush, worked for the freedom and education of young women, and gave hope to children scarred by hate. And always, sir, we felt your unmatched confidence in us, which only made us better.

Yes, we know these images well and we treasure them. But what wasn't always often an image was how you, as our First Family, fully embraced our military family with words of love and prayers of hope. For you have proven that how well we care for our wounded and the families of the fallen defines who and what we really are as a nation. You made it personal, and that has made all the difference.

With quiet dignity, you stretched out hands to those touched by loss, unimaginable loss that can never be made whole so they might be touched yet again.

There are many moments I will never forget, such as when you, Mr. President, presented Michael Monsoor's family with the Medal of Honor, and how in that very presidential setting you were so visibly moved. We will never know of all the private embraces and words of healing that you provided, but we do know the wholeness they created. For with every minute which melted into many gracious hours spent with our veterans and families, you gave something precious to us all -- gifts which will forever adorn our chords of memory.

Indeed, not far from these grounds where both Union and Confederate soldiers lay in white, tented hospitals, President Lincoln also walked through the lines and personally brought the meaning of hope and sacrifice to those straining to touch it from every side. So true today. A reporter who followed Lincoln wrote, "From the outset, he was the personal friend of every soldier he sent to the front, and somehow, every man seemed to know it." So true today.

In my 44 years of wearing this uniform, I have never seen the American public and our military as bonded in understanding, purpose, and spirit as I do right now. For this, Mr. President, we owe you our greatest gratitude.

Finally, sir, I want to personally thank you for your trust in me as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and, honestly, a trust I do not hold alone, a confidence every other uniformed member also holds so dear: the honor to serve and represent the American people.

Mr. President, you have selected a tremendous civilian leadership team in Secretary Gates and the Deputy Secretary, our former Secretary of the Navy, Gordon England. It is a great personal honor to serve alongside them.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to introduce to you the Secretary of Defense, the honorable Robert Gates. (Applause.)