

Remarks by the  
Acting Principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence  
Lieutenant General Ronald L. Burgess, Jr.

Operation Salute  
The Pennsylvania State University  
State College, Pennsylvania

September 10, 2006

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Thank you very much. On behalf of the President, I would like to pass his personal wishes and thanks to you for being here today – sir, for hosting, and sir, you also – for having such a great event in honor of our service members and their families. (Applause)

Governor Rendell, President Spanier, Major General Wright, elected members, families, and fellow service members, thank you for inviting me on behalf of the President to such a great event. To the selflessly serving men and women of the Pennsylvania National Guard, it's an honor to be in your company and the company of your families – it's also a great day to be a soldier – HOO AH!

My apologies to those of you sitting back here. They are probably going to get my best side as I go through this (Laughter) – and I noticed General Honoré didn't say anything to that down in front – thanks Russ.

This date is no stranger to heroes: 87 years ago today, General John J. Pershing led a parade of 25,000 American soldiers back from World War I down New York City's 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. It was the first parade in history when a full division marched with full combat equipment. And from news accounts at the time, it looked like a scene straight out of the movies: streets thick with flowers, confetti falling from the windows, a true hero's welcome to those who deserved nothing less.

Today, though, we have no flowers, no confetti to offer here. But on the plus side, I don't see anybody here in full combat gear, so I think we will call it even as we go about doing this. Now, today we offer more than flowers and confetti: today, we offer the eternal gratitude and a commitment to never forget your sacrifices, be it in Ramadi, Bagram, Biloxi – helping neighbors here in the Northeast, and also protecting our borders in the Southwest.

After September 11<sup>th</sup>, inspired by a sense of patriotism and loss, some donated money; others gave blood or volunteered their time to charities. Looking deep inside yourselves though, you committed your lives to freedom's frontline for volunteering for the Pennsylvania National Guard in the time-honored tradition of citizen soldiering; a tradition that reflects the very best of our core values – duty, honor, and country. And the Pennsylvania National Guard is indeed one of our finest.

The 2/28 Brigade Combat Team (BCT), whom we welcome back today, was assigned to the Multi-National Forces – West, beginning in July of 2005, tasked with stemming the active insurgency around the greater Ramadi area. With this action, 2/28 became one of the only National Guard Brigades with its own battle space in Iraq and operated in truly what is one of the hottest spots in Iraq.

As I prepared for this event, and thought about what I would say to the families and to the service members that are represented here today – based on my nine different visits into the country since the end of hostility in a formal sense, I found myself at a loss for what it is I might say in terms of your service and your accomplishments. So, I reached out to an old friend to see what he would say about your service in Iraq. I called General Casey a couple of weeks ago and told General Casey what I was going to do, and told him that I thought it would be fitting if the families and soldiers today heard from him directly, in terms of what his thoughts were on your service, and I quote:

*“The 2/28 Brigade Combat Team performed superbly during their year in Ramadi and the Western Euphrates Valley. Anbar Province is one of the toughest areas in the theater and the Soldiers of the 2/28 faced an enemy, terrain, and weather conditions every bit as challenging as their forbearers did in the Huertgen Forest and the Kall Valley over 60 years earlier. Thru their year in Iraq, the Soldiers of the 2/28<sup>th</sup> acquitted themselves with the honor and professionalism the Nation has come to expect from the Pennsylvania Guard. I am sure that when the history of Iraq is written, the exploits of the 2/28 will be prominently recorded.*

*Among those accomplishments:*

- Captured over 791 insurgent weapons, 3,257 artillery rounds, and 730 pounds of explosives*
- Discovered 1,083 Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) emplaced by insurgents before they could be used against Iraqi civilians, Iraqi Army Soldiers, or Coalition Forces*
- Killed, wounded, or detained over 3,168 insurgents*
- Attained an Operational Readiness Rate of 97% while in theater (Applause)*
- Recruited / trained over 2,000 Iraqi Policemen and trained and employed 3 Iraqi Army Brigades, which is over 5,000 Iraqi Army Soldiers*
- The BCT C MED trauma unit at Camp Ramadi treated 880 trauma cases, performed 232 surgical operations, and saved at least 50 lives and 53 limbs.”*

And that kind of track record is getting you noticed. HOO AH! Well done. You are going to get so well notice that in 2008 the Pennsylvania National Guard will be the only National Guard unit in the country to build a Stryker Brigade.

Your many successes, however, have not come easily or cheaply, and not all returned home to their communities and families. Along the way, you have lost some of our nation's finest: all heroes from the Pennsylvania Guard. They and their families made the ultimate sacrifice; they gave the last full measure of devotion. But sacrifice is nothing new to the Pennsylvania Guard. You've all had to endure time away from your homes, your work, and your loved ones. Your families have had to carry on for extended periods of time without you, under circumstances becoming all too familiar to families across the American heartland. All of you have worked hard, all have shed tears, and many have bled for love of our country. Your selfless service has not been in vain, whether it was on foreign soil or on our own Nation's borders.

The grief that was coupled with our charge on September 11<sup>th</sup> has turned to action, but for some outside our work, the action has given way to complacency. You and I know better – the threat is still real, our work remains, and we cannot fail.

You are dedicated to fighting for freedom's cause, and you are just as committed to fighting for the safety and wellbeing of your fellow men and women. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the worst of disasters brought out the very best in you. Katrina was a tragedy that confounded the American imagination, and more than 2,500 of Pennsylvania's finest worked to restore humanity to inhuman ruins. Many were content sending thoughts and prayers to those in despair across the southern United States – and while those were welcome, you gave muscle, determination, and time once again away from your families to rescue and rebuild. Many talk the talk – you walked the walk down the flooded streets and into forgotten homes with families that were desperate for a miracle. And we thank you for that. (Applause)

In the face of loss and devastation, you have signed up to serve in places that others only hear about – in some cases have no idea where it is on the map – they can't even pronounce the names. For that, no words can ever fully express our true gratitude, but I kind of think that's the way it's supposed to be. We move ahead, we get the mission done, without any thought of congratulations or medals or accolades. Quite simply, the brave men and women of the Pennsylvania National Guard have stood shoulder to shoulder with other proud and brave Americans – and your families have helped you to do so, and we thank you for that.

For that, you are among and should be counted among our Nation's heroes, and that's a reality that will endure far longer than forgotten words from this podium, crushed flowers or swept up confetti. It's a reality that your families should and will forever cherish, and one that your nation will never forget. You have continued to serve in the same exemplary manner as your forefathers.

On behalf of a grateful Nation, and a fellow citizen – I thank you. HOO AH! (Applause)

*Operation Salute was held on Sunday, September 10, 2006, at the Bryce Jordan Center at Penn State University – State College, Pennsylvania. The event is a celebration to recognize and thank the men and women of the Pennsylvania National Guard who have served the country and their state selflessly and courageously in the Global War on Terrorism, in response to Hurricane Katrina, and during the June 2006 floods that affected much of Pennsylvania.*

*The program was sponsored by the Pennsylvania National Guard and hosted by Major General Jessica L. Wright, Pennsylvania's adjutant general.*

*In addition to Lieutenant General Burgess, formal remarks were made by Governor Edward Rendell, Major General Wright, and Penn State President Graham Spanier*