

United States Department of Defense



# Speech

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## Veterans' Day

*Remarks as Delivered by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, The U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC, Sunday, November 11, 2001 .*

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Thank you, Tony [Principi, Secretary of Veterans Affairs]. With no reference to myself, I think we really are blessed with great leadership at this critical hour. We heard from our Commander in Chief who is a man who I think has demonstrated a combination of genuine humility and fierce determination that are the marks of a true leader and I think are earning the respect and attention of the entire world. [Applause.]

We have a great leader here at the Department of Veterans—not here, but you know what I mean by here [laughter]—in the Department of Veterans Affairs.

We have outstanding military leaders. I know General Myers, our wonderful new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, is here today. [Applause.]

All you Marines here are terrifically proud of the first Marine to be the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Pete Pace. [Applause.]

[Commander in Chief of U.S. Central Command] General Tom Franks, down in Tampa, who has the responsibility of running the war, and many many others, more than I can mention here now. It's a great privilege to serve with them and it is a particular privilege and honor to be able to serve with our Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld who sends you his greetings. He is engaged with the media this morning, which seems to be a big part of his job. It is a privilege to work for him.

When he swore me in for my third tour at the Pentagon, he said, "Paul, we're going to keep bringing you back until you get it right." [Laughter.] I can't imagine a better person to be our Secretary of Defense now, and we are getting it right, I guarantee you.

It's an honor to be able to share this day with all of you, our nation's honored veterans and those who do so much to support them. As [Transportation] Secretary Mineta said, we date our observance on this day to end of what was called at the time the "Great War," but on this day we remember everyone who answered our country's call, during past centuries and now at the beginning this one.

Today, exactly two months since a brutal attack visited war on a peaceful people, we remember with full hearts the service and sacrifice of America's veterans. In the days since that attack, we have moved beyond what President Bush then called the "middle hour of our grief" to the dawning hour of our resolve. It is a national resolve of fierce determination long embodied by those men and women, including so many of you here today, who have worn the uniform of our nation.

In this, as in my two previous tours at the Pentagon, I have seen the strong and steady devotion of the young Americans serving across our nation and throughout the world. Believe me veterans, they are carrying on your great tradition. They are men and women full of pride and enthusiasm for our country. The work they do the Secretary has called "noble work." It is also dangerous work, even in peacetime.

I've had the sad responsibility several times in the past year to witness the grief of families and friends at services for brave souls whose peacetime missions demanded of them their last full measure of devotion. In their lives they answered the call of Scripture "to do what is good, to do what the Lord requires, to do right, to love goodness, and to walk humbly with God."

So it is with all our young people who serve what is right, to lead the fight for what is good. They have as their beacon all of you veterans who served before them, the ideals of a nation dedicated to liberty, democracy and the rule of law. Morality defined by a higher purpose will in the end prove more powerful than any strategy man can devise.

Sixty years ago next month our country was attacked before. Following Pearl Harbor courage and ingenuity rose together from the angry wreckage to build the most powerful force for freedom the world had ever seen. That war, in very great measure, was won on the farms and in the factories and in the hearts of the nation as much as on the battlefield. The Army that marched for freedom then was not only fueled by that support, it was shaped by it, and it's happening again today.

September 11th we saw a reverence for this nation and what we stand for given expression in those who risked their lives to save others in New York, at the Pentagon, in the skies over Pennsylvania where heroic virtue ignited and heroes intervened when the security of our very government was in the balance.

Just last month Secretary Principi visited us at the Pentagon and I told him about something that touched us all very deeply, the thousands of veterans who had been flooding us, not only with words of sympathy, but suggestions and strategies and offers to put the uniform back on again. They tell us: "there's work to be done and we want to do it."

Veterans of the Second World War, Korea and Vietnam are sending us their serial numbers hoping to roll up their sleeves and serve once again. And they insist no job is too small, no challenge too great. That spirit lives on in those who are serving us today.

We had a group of outstanding service members come to the Pentagon last week, winners of maintenance awards, those who keep our planes flying, our trucks rolling, our ships sailing. Many of those planes and ships and trucks are older than the people who keep them going. It's a challenge. They're the finest of young men and women.

I looked in their eyes and I heard about their remarkable deeds, and I thought of something that that great British statesman Winston Churchill wrote in his diary the day after he learned of the attack on Pearl Harbor. And I suppose it's worth saying he didn't waste a lot of sympathy on the United States. His words were words of joy and celebration.

He said, "I knew the United States was in the war up to the neck. So we have won after all," said Churchill, four years before the war ended. He talked about "silly people"—here in England and obviously in Germany, not only in enemy counties—"discounted the force of the United States. Some said they were soft, others that the Americans would never be united. They would fool around at a distance. They would never come to grips. They couldn't stand the bloodletting. Their democracy and system of recurrent elections," these people were saying, "would paralyze the war effort. They would be just a vague blur on the horizon to friend or foe." I remind you it was December 8, 1941 that these words were written. "Now we would see," these people said, "the weakness of this numerous but remote, wealthy, and talkative people." We haven't changed that much [laughter].

"But," Churchill said, "I had studied the American Civil War, fought out to the last desperate inch. American blood flowed in my veins. I thought of a remark which Edward Grey"—the British Foreign Minister—"had made to me more than thirty years before [as the United States entered that First World War]." Grey had said "that the United States is like 'a gigantic boiler. Once the fire is lighted under it, there is no limit to the power it can generate.'"

Osama bin Laden will not be the first tyrant to underestimate the power of this great country. He will not be the first tyrant who will regret having aroused our anger.

We are making progress—it's a good weekend. In Afghanistan today I think we are seeing the results of a strategy that attempts to enlist as many people in our cause, because our cause is the cause of so many people around the world. But make no mistake, we will do what we have to do to get this job done.

As the President said, it begins in Afghanistan but it doesn't end in Afghanistan. It will not end until terrorism with global reach has been eliminated around the world.

Honored veterans and proud Americans, your service and support have made this great country what it is today. And because of the proud tradition you continue, it still guides those who walk in this hour in

your faithful footsteps. America can yet believe that whatever trials may come we may move ahead with confidence of the saved and the thankful.

In the Defense Department today we are marching forward. As President Bush told us last week, "we have our marching orders. My fellow Americans, let's roll." [Applause.]

For those of you who don't know the reference, and I have to admit I hadn't read the newspapers. Those are the last words of that amazing man who helped bring that plane down over Pennsylvania.

Honored veterans we are rolling and we will win. God bless America. [Applause.]

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