



[CLICK HERE TO PRINT](#)

For Immediate Release
Office of the Vice President
August 18, 2005

Vice President's Remarks at the 73rd National Convention of the Military Order of the Purple Heart

University Plaza Hotel
Springfield, Missouri

12:46 P.M. CDT

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you. (Applause.) Thank you very much. At ease, please. (Laughter.)



Well, thank you very much. It's great to be back in Ozark Mountain country, and to join the 73rd National Convention of a great American organization, the Military Order of the Purple Heart.

Let me thank your national commander, Bob Lichtenberger of Texas, for the introduction, and for his leadership of the M.O.P.H. I also want to thank Bill Bacon, Carol Lance, the President of the Ladies auxiliary, and chapter leaders from around the country for being here today. I'm pleased that we are joined by members of our military stationed at Fort Leonard Wood and by Medal of Honor recipient Nick Bacon, as well.

It's good to see all of you, and I'm honored to bring warm greetings to you from our Commander-in-Chief, the President of the United States, George W. Bush. (Applause.)

Members of this order come from all regions of the country, and from every walk of life, but you share a distinction that all citizens recognize and respect: The medal you wear is the oldest decoration in the American armed forces, created by General George Washington and originally named the Badge of Military Merit. The Purple Heart is the only award that comes not through any recommendation or approval, but as a matter of right to those wounded in combat. It is also known as "the medal that no one ever tries to earn."

But all of you did earn it. And in so doing you took your place among the men and women who suffered most to protect this nation. You put your life on the line for the United States of America. You bled in freedom's cause, and you have the nation's gratitude.

As combat veterans you know the toughest realities of the battlefield, and you have seen fellow Americans give the last full measure of devotion in defense of our country. My old friend Joe Foss, who earned both the Purple Heart and the Medal of Honor in World War II, used to say, "Those of us who lived have to represent those who didn't make it."

I know that all of you feel the same way. And I know your fallen comrades would be proud of you -- not just for your service in uniform, but for your enduring service as patriotic citizens. You look out for each other, and move swiftly to the side of veterans in need. You build and care for war memorials across our country. You stand behind our men and women in uniform, and welcome home returning soldiers. For those who have been wounded, you give the moral support and encouragement that only you can give. And like every generation of veterans, you are a daily example of the values of personal responsibility, physical and moral strength, and unselfish courage.



The United States of America and its military are today as we began: a democracy, defended by volunteers. And we owe so much to every generation of American soldiers. More than two centuries ago, citizens stepped forward to wage a war of independence, fighting the army of an empire and facing the longest of odds. The struggle was to last eight years; and of those, the pivotal one was 1776, as David McCullough writes in his new book. "This," McCullough recently said, was "the most important year of the most important conflict in our history. And we damned near lost it."

The victories in 1776 were few, and the condition of the Army was dreadful. By Christmastime our men were cold, hungry, and exhausted, and many of them didn't even have boots to wear. The volunteers were near the end of their rope, and thousands of enlistments were set to expire on New Year's Day. These men were bound and determined to leave, so the Continental Army was about to evaporate. General Washington himself said, "I think the game is pretty near up."

General Washington decided to make one final appeal to his discouraged soldiers. "My brave fellows," he said, "you have done all I asked you to

do and more than could be reasonably expected; you have worn yourself out with fatigues and hardships; but we know not how to spare you. The present is emphatically the crisis, which is to decide our destiny." One by one the men stepped forward. They could not let their country or their fellow soldiers down. Inspired by leadership and renewed in their strength, they stayed in the fight -- and America won the war.

From that day to this, our country has always counted on the bravest among us to answer the call of duty -- fighting our wars, defending our interests, standing by our friends, and keeping patient vigil against the enemies of freedom.

All who wear the uniform today, and every person who has served honorably in the military, can be proud of the cause that America represents in the world. As a nation born in revolution we believe, and we know, that tyranny must be opposed and ended, that cruelty and violence must be answered, not with indifference but with justice, that innocent captives deserve to be liberated, and that every person on this earth has a yearning to be free.



At this moment, all branches of the armed services are fighting the new war against one of our most ruthless enemies. Those who attacked America have proven their eagerness to kill innocent men, women, and children by the thousands. They are looking to obtain weapons of mass destruction by any means they can find. They would not hesitate to use such weapons at the first opportunity. And their prime target is our country.

Four years ago, on a Tuesday morning in September, a threat that had been gathering for years, in secret and far away, arrived in America and brought grief to the entire nation. And after 9/11, the United States made a decision: Having been attacked by stealth inside our own country, we will not sit back and wait to be hit again. We will do everything we can to prevent attacks by taking the fight to the enemy. (Applause.)

In these 47 months, we have been unrelenting in the effort to defend the freedom and security of the American people. In a multinational campaign, we continue to make progress on many fronts -- financial, legal, military, as well as others.

Defeating the terrorists and their ambitions requires that we deny them sanctuary and support, and the United States is leading a global coalition in that effort. We are dealing with a network that has had cells in countries all over the world. Yet bit by bit, through diplomacy and by force, with our allies and partners, we are acting to shrink the area in which the terrorists can safely operate.

Many countries have joined us in tracking the enemy, disrupting plots against America and our friends, destroying the training camps of terror, and closing off their access to funding. We have also enforced a doctrine that is understood by all: Governments that support or harbor terrorists are complicit in the murder of the innocent, and equally guilty of terrorist crimes.

We gave ultimatums to the brutal regimes led by the Taliban and Saddam Hussein. And when those regimes defied the demands of the civilized world, we removed them from power and liberated 50 million people.

Our actions have also persuaded the regime in Libya to voluntarily abandon its weapons of mass destruction programs. In addition, we uncovered a sophisticated, large-scale network selling nuclear technologies on the black market, and we've shut that network down. The United States has acted decisively, and we have sent a clear message: We will not stand by and allow terrorists to find safe haven, or to gain access to weapons of mass destruction.



The war on terror has a home front, and we have taken extraordinary measures to protect the American people and our homeland. Yet for all the improvement in homeland security, we are mindful of a continuing danger to this country. Every morning President Bush and I receive an intelligence briefing that includes a review of the threats we face. The enemy that appeared on 9/11 is wounded, off-balance, and on the run, yet still very active, still seeking recruits, still trying to hit us.

Since 9/11 terrorists have continued to wage deadly attacks -- never as a conventional military force, but as a hidden element determined to slip in unnoticed, to shed innocent blood, and to shake the will of the civilized world.

In Bali, bombs in a commercial district killed more than 200. In Riyadh, simultaneous suicide car bombings of civilian targets left 34 dead and many more injured. Since the mid-1990s in Jerusalem and in other cities in Israel, multiple suicide bombings have killed and maimed hundreds. In Casablanca, five separate attacks took the lives of over 40 civilians and hurt more than 100. In Jakarta, a blast in front of a hotel killed 13 and injured at least 150. In Istanbul, terrorists set off four trucks filled with explosives, killing approximately 60 people and injuring some 700 more. In Madrid, 10 bombs on commuter trains killed nearly 200 and wounded more than 1,800. Six weeks ago today in England, terrorists set off four explosions at rush hour, all of them targeted at commuters taking the train or the bus. The body count in central London was 56, including the bombers, together with another 700 injured. A few weeks later in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, suicide bombers in a commercial district killed as many as 90 people, and injured more than 100 others.

In Iraq, terrorists have slaughtered innocent people in marketplaces, in restaurants, in private homes, at police recruiting stations, in a hospital, and outside a mosque. They have beheaded bound men in front of cameras, and killed UN employees and international aid workers. Earlier this summer, as American soldiers were giving candy to children, a suicide bomber drove into the crowd, killing 18 boys and girls and an American soldier.

That's the nature of the enemy we face in the war on terror, and will face for the duration of this struggle. And our duty is clear. Killers who target innocent, unsuspecting men, women, and children on a peaceful street, or set off explosions during a morning rush hour, or fly passenger jets into buildings are not the kind of people you can bring to the bargaining table and sit down for a reasonable exchange of ideas. This is not a war we can win strictly on the defensive. Our only option against these enemies is to find them, to fight them, and to destroy them. (Applause.)

Iraq is a critical front in the war on terror, and victory there is critical to the future security of the U.S. and other free nations. We know this, and the terrorists know it as well. Osama bin Laden has said the "Third World War is raging" in Iraq. "The whole world," he said, "is watching this war." He says it will end in "victory and glory -- or misery and humiliation."

Our mission in Iraq is clear. On the military side, we are hunting down the terrorists, and training Iraqi security forces so they can take over responsibility for defending their own country. And over time, as Iraqi forces stand up, American forces will stand down. On the political side, we're helping Iraqis build a vital, peaceful, self-governing nation that can be an ally in the war on terror.

There, as in Afghanistan and across the broader Middle East, we are encouraging free markets, democracy, and tolerance -- because these are the ideas and the aspirations that overcome violence, and turn the creative gifts of men and women to the pursuits of peace. And this is the very kind of progress that will promote the long-term security of our country, and make the world safer for future generations.

After decades of tyranny and neglect in the broader Middle East, progress toward freedom will not come easily. It will be resisted by men whose only hope for gaining power is through the spread of terror and violence. Yet the direction of events is clear. Afghanistan has held the first free elections in the nation's 5,000-year history. In Iraq, voters turned out in incredible numbers and elected leaders now preparing the way for a new constitution and a new government. The Palestinian people have chosen a new President and have new hopes for democracy and peace. The citizens of Ukraine have stood strongly for their democratic rights, and chosen a new leader for their country. In Lebanon, citizens have poured into the streets to demand freedom to determine a peaceful future for their own country as a fully independent member of the world community.

We are once again seeing the power of freedom to change our world, and all who strive for freedom can know that the United States of America is on their side. (Applause.)

When our war on terror began nearly four years ago, President Bush told Congress and the country that we "should not expect one battle, but rather a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have seen." It may, he said, "include dramatic strikes, visible on TV, and covert operations, secret even in success." All of this has come to pass. And the greatest challenges are borne by the men and women who take the oath to serve.

No matter how many advances are made in military technology, our greatest asset has always been, and will always be, the ones who man the aircraft and the ships, and carry the rifles. The United States Armed Forces reflect extraordinary credit on this nation. As a former Secretary of Defense, I am proud to say the cause of freedom is in very good hands. (Applause.)

Right now in Iraq and Afghanistan, there is still tough fighting, in conditions ranging from urban to desert to the high mountains. At every stage of this conflict, members of our military have had to carry out some of the most perilous, technical, time-sensitive missions ever attempted. When you have enemies that are hidden, diffuse, secret in their movements, and asymmetrical in their tactics, you have to go into the shadows and get them -- one at a time, if necessary.

In the Cold War, national security required massing large forces at borders, year in and year out for a stand-off. The present security environment often requires small teams to go searching in caves and hiking over mountain peaks, or to conduct hazardous patrols in urban settings. They are hanging tough, going directly into the face of danger, rooting out deadly enemies, and dealing with them. By their training, their tactical skill, and above all their character, men and women in our uniform are making us proud each and every day.

In this difficult and necessary cause we have lost some of our finest Americans. That loss is irreplaceable, and no one can take away the sorrow that has come to the families of the fallen. In military hospitals we also have many soldiers recovering from serious injuries in battle. Some are facing a very hard road ahead, and they can be assured of the finest care we can give them. These Americans can wear the Purple Heart with pride, knowing with absolute certainty that they have contributed to the future safety of this nation, and to the peace of our world.

Every man and woman who fights and sacrifices in this war is serving a just and noble cause. This nation will always be grateful to them, and we will honor their sacrifice by completing our mission. (Applause.)

Like the President, over the last several years I have had the honor of presenting the Purple Heart to my fellow Americans. As in all wars, a good number of battle decorations have been awarded posthumously. One of those we've honored is Army Sergeant Paul Ray Smith -- and the story of this young man is one of the most impressive in our history. In April of 2003, during the campaign to liberate Iraq, a task force led by Sergeant Smith came under surprise attack in Baghdad by a company-sized force of Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard. Under constant enemy fire, with his unit pinned down and a number of men wounded, Sergeant Smith climbed onto a damaged armored vehicle and manned a 50-caliber machine gun, all the while in a completely exposed position. He remained in that spot, subjecting himself to greater danger than the military or the country could ever ask, firing incessantly at the enemy until he took a fatal round to the head. After the firefight, the Army concluded that this one soldier had personally killed as many as 50 Republican Guard, and saved the lives of more than 100 Americans. On the second anniversary of that fight, President Bush presented the Medal of Honor to the wife and children of Sergeant Smith. One of Paul Ray Smith's men said that he "was hard in training because he knew we had to be hard in battle." For as long as citizens step forward to wear the uniform of the United States, our nation will remember this man of courage. (Applause.)

I don't need to explain to the Military Order of the Purple Heart that wartime conditions are a severe test of national resolve and military skill. We have no illusions about the difficulty of engaging enemies that recognize neither the laws of warfare nor standards of morality. These enemies hate us, they hate our country, and they hate the liberties for which we stand. They have contempt for our values. They doubt our strength. And they believe that America will lose our nerve and let down our guard. They are sorely mistaken. (Applause.)

We will not relent in this effort, because we have the clearest possible understanding of what is at stake. None of us wants to turn over the future of mankind to tiny groups of fanatics committing indiscriminate murder, enslaving whole populations, oppressing women, imposing an ideology of

hatred on an entire region, and arming to create death and destruction on an unbelievable scale. And so we must direct every resource that is necessary to defending the peace and freedom of our world, and the safety of the people we serve. That is the commitment the United States -- that we've made to ourselves and to other nations. And with good allies at our side, we will see this cause through to victory.

It was George Washington who said, "Perseverance and spirit have done wonders in all ages." And ever since those first desperate days for the republic, the perseverance and spirit of our military have always come through for the people of the United States. I am in the presence today of fellow citizens who have shown those qualities under enemy fire. In the words of one of your department commanders, "It can be a very high price to join our organization."

On behalf of the President and the American people, I want to thank each and every one of you for paying that price, for placing duty and honor above self-interest, and for valuing service to this nation above your own life. You did your part to keep our country free, and you inspired a new generation of freedom's defenders.

Thank you very much.

END 1:07 P.M. CDT

Return to this article at:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/08/20050818-4.html>

 [CLICK HERE TO PRINT](#)