

Vice President Rallies Troops at Peterson AFB

Press Release

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PETERSON AFB, Colo. ? For Marine Sgt. Pedro Rodriguez, Vice President Dick Cheney?s 20-minute speech here Monday struck more than a concordant note. It struck at the young Marine?s heart and soul.

Rodriguez, a missile technician assigned to the Cheyenne Mountain Operational Center, was on duty at the missile-warning center three years ago when the first of two hijacked commercial airliners struck the twin towers in New York City.



Photo
credit:
TSgt.
Lawrence
Holmes

?I knew exactly what the vice president meant when he talked about how NORAD (North American Aerospace Defense Command) responded that day,? said Rodriguez, who also was a member of the honor guard that escorted the vice president and Mrs. Lynne Cheney from Air Force Two to Hanger One.

The 24-year old Marine seemed to choke back emotions as he recalled the events of Sept. 11, 2001. ?Even though I don?t work in the air warning center, we had full situational awareness of what was going on that day,? he said.

?I don?t want to say anything that wouldn?t be politically correct, but people just don?t understand how the warning center works.? Rodriguez said that is one of the reasons he appreciated the vice president?s words of encouragement to the military members representing Peterson AFB, nearby Schriever AFB, and the Air Force Academy.

More than 1,500 Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, Canadian military members, civic leaders, civilian and contract personnel, and family members braved 90-degree temperatures, body scanners, and a two-hour wait to see and hear Cheney speak.

Flanked by Gen. Ed Eberhart, NORAD and U.S. Northern Command commander, Gen. Lance W. Lord, Air Force Space Command commander, Brig. Gen. Richard Webber, 21st Space Wing commander and other key officials, the vice president and his wife made their way from Air Force Two.

Lead by an all-services honor guard, the group made their way across the flightline and through a sea of camouflaged-clad service members, blue-suited Secret Service members, and members of the local and White House press to the podium.

Nearly 100 military members stood directly behind Eberhart and the Cheneys as the vice president addressed the audience.

Though he did not meet the vice president or his wife, no one was more pleased to have heard Cheney?s message than 14-year-old Ken Lewter III. ?I was sort of

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excited about coming here," said Lewter, who will be entering the 10th grade at Sand Creek High School this fall.

Lewter said the speech made him "a little bit proud" of his master sergeant father, who is a security forces member and part of the military force Cheney credited with making America and Canada more secure.

"I liked what he (Cheney) said about all the things we've done to stop the terrorists from conducting future attacks against us, and how we stopped Saddam's regime," said the young Lewter.

Following his introduction by Eberhart, Cheney took the microphone saying that he was proud to stand in the midst of the men and women who represented "America's newest unified command."

"I am honored to bring personal regards to each and everyone of you from our Commander and Chief President George W. Bush," said Cheney, to which he received thunderous applause. "In less than two years time, you turned a brand new command into a disciplined, professional, effective component of the greatest military force in the world," he told the group.

After acknowledging state and local civic leaders and community leaders in the audience, Cheney singled out military family members for their support.

"You're the ones who send letters and packages, care for friends and neighbors in need, and provide prayerful support. " America is enormously proud of our military families," the vice president said.

Cheney went on to address the global war on terrorism. "It's been three years since terrorists brought war to our land," he said. He said the attacks, "in many ways, brought out our best."

The vice president talked about some of the changes in national security since the 2001 attacks, including NORAD's change in focus "from threats coming outside the United States to those coming from within the country " and the stand up of U.S. Northern Command.

Cheney also talked about the nation's efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan to defeat terrorism. He said any group that supports, assists and harbors terrorists are themselves "guilty" of terrorist activity and "will be held accountable."

Since the terrorist attacks, the United States has taken the war on terrorism "to our enemies, wherever they plot and plan," said Cheney. He said that is one reason the creation of USNORTHCOM was "a critical addition to the nation's military strategy."

"In NORTHCOM, we have a fully unified command, fully dedicated to defending against threats to the United States," said Cheney. He cited the more than 36,000 sorties flown as part of Operation Noble Eagle "to deter and disrupt attacks against America from the skies."

Cheney also cited the USNORTHCOM's efforts to develop a national missile defense system, which he said is "one of the great contributions to national security in the past three years."

The vice president also addressed the command's homeland security efforts, including providing security for events such as the recent G-8 Summit meetings near Savannah,

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Ga., the Democratic National Convention in Boston, and efforts to fight drug trafficking.

"In all of these actions, you have demonstrated the high quality of your training and the depth of your dedication," Cheney told the audience. "By carrying out your duties, you make it possible for so many Americans to lead their daily lives with confidence and security, and your fellow citizens are deeply grateful for your service."

Cheney said that because of the nation's vigilance at home and its "strong and effective actions overseas," America has not suffered another terrorist attack in three years. However, he cautioned, "We must have no illusions about the dangers we face."

According to the vice president, terrorists are "doing everything they can to find ways to attack us." He cited some of the actions the nation has taken to protect Americans, track down terrorists, improve border and port security, and improve defenses against possible biological attacks. "All Americans can be certain that we are doing every thing in our power to protect the people in this country," he said.

The vice president also assured military members that the Bush administration is doing everything it can to "back you up," from providing "the best possible equipment to do your jobs," to ensuring "end pay," and protecting military family members.

The vice president concluded his speech by stating some of the reasons terrorists will fail in attempts to destroy this country. Chief among those reasons, he said, is the resolve of the American people and its allies, and because "men and women like you stand in their way."

At the end of his speech, Cheney and his wife spent 10 minutes meeting and greeting members of the audience. The vice president then attended a working lunch with senior military leaders at the NORAD and USNORTHCOM headquarters building before he and his wife departed the base for Texas.

More photos are located here :

<http://www.northcom.mil/index.cfm?fuseaction=photos.main> Select category Vice
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