

# REMARKS BY VICE PRESIDENT BIDEN AT THE PENTAGON 9/11 10TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION

September 11, 2011

Good morning. Mr. Secretary, it's I'm the one who is honored to be given the privilege to speak at such an important memorial ceremony.

Admiral Mullen, Speaker Boehner, members of our armed forces and above all, the family members gathered in front of me who suffered such a grievous loss here 10 years ago today. My wife, Jill, and I want you to know our heart goes out to you.

And those of you who survived that cowardly act, I say it again, I'm the one that's honored to be here with you. To the family members, I know what it's like to receive that call out of the blue, that the dearest thing in your life is gone. I know these memorials—and you've been through many—are bittersweet moments for you because as you sit here right now, unlike a month ago, everything has come back in stark relief. It's not a thought. It's precise. You remember that God-awful empty feeling you remember being sucked into your own chest, that feeling of hollowness. So I want you to know that I personally believe that the courage you're showing today is remarkable. It's hard to come back. You have that sense of overwhelming pride and love and devotion, but also that feeling of "oh, my God."

But I want you to know something else, your physical presence here today gives hope to thousands of Americans who under different circumstances are trying to come to grips with the losses that you had that they're going through. Because when they see—they see you here, you let them know that hope can grow from tragedy, and that there can be a second life.

My mom used to say, Joe, at everything terrible something good will come if you look hard enough for it. In the beginning there's no way to believe that. You're living proof to those people who are still scrambling and looking for that hope that it's possible.

So let me say that our thoughts—Jill's thoughts, mine, the whole nation's thoughts and prayers are with those who also were wounded in this attack last night—wounded in an attack last night in Wardak Province, a stark and

vivid reminder this war continues. The courage, determination and the sacrifices of our forces in Afghanistan and around the world is literally astounding. I'll have a little more to say about that in just a moment.

Ladies and gentlemen, milestones are especially—and especially those that are tragic — compel us to reflect and to remember, to honor and, with God's help, to heal because that's what this is ultimately about.

And so today, above all else, we recall 148 [sic] lives cut short on this site 10 years ago this morning — lives that touched every aspect of our national endeavor: a Marine who lost his leg, and nearly his life, in Vietnam but who used what he called a “second chance” to become a father of five; a three-year-old passenger aboard that fateful flight, who held her stuffed “lambie” each night, as her parents read her bedtime stories; the secretary who worked for American Airlines for 45 years, whose colleagues considered her a second mother, and who dressed as Mrs. Claus each Christmas; the Navy physicist, whose wife said after his death: “He was a wonderful dancer. I'll never be able to dance with anybody else. He was a perfect partner. And above all, he was a good, caring and loving man.”

And so, so many others are remembered this morning with the moments of silence in small towns and bustling cities all across this country. But nowhere are the memories more immediate, more vivid, more compelling, more real than in New York City; Shanksville, Pennsylvania and right here in Northern Virginia at the Pentagon.

Although words cannot ease the pain of these losses — paying tribute by recalling not just the horror of that day but the heroism as well can hopefully give you some comfort and stiffen the resolve of this nation.

At 9:36 a.m., thousands of patriotic Americans were going about their daily business in the building behind me, in this great citadel of our national defense. And one minute later, 9:37 a.m., an unconscionable tragedy struck.

But what happened—what happened after that was far more remarkable than the damage inflicted in the building behind me. Those who worked in this building, many of you in front of me, and thousands more first responders across the region—firefighters from Arlington County, Fairfax County, Montgomery County, the District of Columbia and many others, they sprang to action, risking their lives so their friends, their colleagues and total strangers, people they had never met, might live.

From corporals to cafeteria workers, right up the chain of the command to the top brass, to Secretary Rumsfeld, who I pay special tribute today; I understand he is here. Secretary Rumsfeld himself did what he did as a young soldier, a young man, and did all his life—you and he and others streamed into that breach between the 4th and 5th corridors, where the devastation was the greatest, where death came in an instant, but also where there were survivors to be found.

Specialist Beau Doboszenski was a tour guide that morning, on the far side of the building — so far away, in fact, he never heard the plane hit. But he shortly felt the commotion. He could have gone home — no one would have blamed him. But he was also a trained EMT and came from a family of firefighters. So when people started streaming out of the building and screaming, he sprinted toward the crash site. For hours, he altered between treating his co-workers and dashing into the inferno with a team of six men.

Micky Fyock, a volunteer fire chief in Woodsboro, Maryland, 60 miles away, after working all day, when he heard that evening that the rescue workers at the Pentagon needed a fire truck—a small fire truck, small enough to fit through tight places, he knew he had a '54 Mack, which was the smallest one around. So fresh off an all-day shift, he barreled down the highway and battled the blaze all night with thousands of others.

And at dawn, exhausted and covered with soot—with soot, 14 hours on the job, he sat on a bench and confronted [sic] a man—a man who he said was wondering aloud, why am I still alive for had I not been at the dentist, I would have been in the office, my office, totally destroyed, with my colleagues gone. Why me?

It's a basic American instinct to respond to crises when help is needed, to confront [sic] the afflicted. An American instinct summoned by the collective strength of the American people that we see come to the fore in our darkest hours, an instinct that echoes through the ages — from Pearl Harbor, to Beirut; from Mogadishu to Ground Zero; Flight 93 to right here in the Pentagon.

Those in this building that day knew what they were witnesses. It was a declaration of war by stateless actors—bent on changing our way of life—who believed that these horrible acts of terror—these horrible acts of terror directed against innocents could buckle our knees, could bend our will, could being to break us and break our resolve.

But they did not know us. Instead, that same American instinct that sent all of you into the breach between the 4th and 5th corridors, galvanized an entire new generation of patriots -- the 9/11 Generation.

Many of them were just kids on that bright September morning. But like their grandparents on December 7, 1941, they courageously bore the burden that history had placed on their shoulders.

And as they came of age, they showed up—they showed up to fight for their country, and they're still showing up. Two million, eight hundred thousand of that 9/11 Generation moved to join our military since the attacks on 9/11, to finish the war begun here that day.

And they joined—they joined knowing that they were in all likelihood going to be deployed in harm's way -- and in many cases deployed multiple, multiple times in Afghanistan and Iraq and other dangerous parts of the world.

Those of you, Admiral, who command this building turned this generation, this 9/11 Generation into the finest group of warriors the world has ever known.

Over a decade at war, they pioneered new tactics, mastered new languages, developed and employed advanced new technologies. They took on responsibilities once reserved only for those with considerably more seniority -- responsibilities that extended beyond the base or the battlefield to the politics of Afghanistan, to the politics of Iraq, to the economies of those countries, and to the development tasks that ultimately will lay the groundwork for us to leave behind stable countries that will not threaten us.

And along with the intelligence community and the law enforcement community, they relentlessly took the fight to al-Qaeda and its affiliates. They were prepared to follow bin Laden to the hell's gate if necessary. And they got him.

My God do we owe those special ops folks and intelligence guys who got him, many of whom have subsequently lost their lives. But we will not stop -- you will not stop -- until al-Qaeda is not only disrupted, but completely dismantled and ultimately destroyed.

And one more thing about this 9/11 generation of warriors—never before in our history has America asked so much, over such a sustained period, of an all-volunteer force. So I can say without fear of contradiction, or being accused of exaggeration, the 9/11 Generation ranks among the greatest our

nation has ever produced. And it was born—it was born—it was born right here on 9/11. (Applause.)

And as the Admiral said, that generation has paid an incredible price -- 4,478 fallen angels in Iraq and 1,648 in Afghanistan, and more than 40,000 wounded in both countries, some who will require care and support the rest of their lives.

Having visited them multiple times like many of you, I am awed not only by their capability, but their sacrifice today and every day.

The terrorists who attacked the Pentagon, as Leon said, sought to weaken America by shattering this defining symbol of our military might and prowess. But they failed. And they also failed for another reason, not just physically failed. They failed because they continue to fundamentally misunderstand us, as they misunderstood us on that day. For the true source of American power does not lie within that building because as Americans, we draw our strength from the rich tapestry of our people—just looking at the people before me, looking at the families before me.

The true legacy of 9/11 is that our spirit is mightier, the bonds that unite us are thicker, and the resolve is firmer than the million tons of limestone and concrete that make up that great edifice behind me.

Al Qaeda and bin Laden never imagined that the 3,000 people who lost their lives that day would inspire 3 million to put on the uniform and harden the resolve of 300 million Americans. They never imagined the sleeping giant they were about to awaken.

They never imagined these things because they did not understand what enables us, what has always enabled us to withstand any test that comes our way. But you understood. You knew better than anyone because you knew every time this nation has been attacked—you particularly who wear the uniform—every time this nation is attacked, you knew it only emboldens us to stand up and to strike back.

But you family members, you also knew something else that a lot of us didn't know that day, that your loved ones, those who you lost, who we now call heroes, were already heroes. They were already heroes to you.

They were the father that tucked you in at night. They were the wife who knew your fears before even before you expressed them. They were the

brother who lifted you up. They were the daughter who made you laugh, and the son who made you proud. I know. I know in my heart, so do all of the people on this stage know, that they are absolutely irreplaceable—absolutely irreplaceable.

As the Speaker heard me say yesterday in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, no memorial, no ceremony, no words will ever fill the void left in your hearts by their loss. My prayer for you is that, 10 years later, when you think of them—10 years later when you think of them that it brings a smile to your lips before it brings a tear to your eye.

My mom used to say that courage lies in every man's heart, and her expectation was that one day—one day it would be summoned. Well, here, on September 11, 2001, at exactly 9:37 a.m., it was summoned. It was summoned from the hearts of the thousands of people who worked here to save hundreds. It was summoned in the hearts of all those first responders who answered the call. For courage lies deepest in and beats the loudest in the heart of Americans. Don't forget it. We will not forget them.

May God bless you all. May God bless America. And most of all, may God protect our Troops. (Applause.)

Source: White House Press Office

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/09/11/remarks-vice-president-biden-pentagon-911-10th-anniversary-commemoration>