

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks at a Memorial Service at Fort Hood, Texas

November 10, 2009

To the Fort Hood community; to Admiral Mullen, General Casey, General Cone, Secretary McHugh, Secretary Gates; most importantly, to family, friends, and members of our Armed Forces: We come together filled with sorrow for the 13 Americans that we have lost, with gratitude for the lives that they led, and with a determination to honor them through the work we carry on.

This is a time of war, yet these Americans did not die on a foreign field of battle. They were killed here, on American soil, in the heart of this great State and the heart of this great American community. This is the fact that makes the tragedy even more painful, even more incomprehensible.

For those families who have lost a loved one, no words can fill the void that's been left. We knew these men and women as soldiers and caregivers. You knew them as mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, sisters and brothers.

But here is what you must also know: Your loved ones endure through the life of our Nation. Their memory will be honored in the places they lived and by the people they touched. Their life's work is our security and the freedom that we all too often take for granted. Every evening that the sun sets on a tranquil town; every dawn that a flag is unfurled; every moment that an American enjoys life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—that is their legacy. Neither this country, nor the values upon which we were founded, could exist without men and women like these 13 Americans. And that is why we must pay tribute to their stories.

Chief Warrant Officer Michael Cahill had served in the National Guard and worked as a physician's assistant for decades. A husband and father of three, he was so committed to his patients that on the day he died, he was back at work just weeks after having had a heart attack.

Major Libardo Eduardo Caraveo spoke little English when he came to America as a teenager. But he put himself through college, earned a Ph.D., and was helping combat units cope with the stress of deployment. He's survived by his wife, sons, and step-daughters.

Staff Sergeant Justin DeCrow joined the Army right after high school, married his high school sweetheart, and had served as a light wheeled mechanic and satellite communications operator. He was known as an optimist, a mentor, and a loving husband and father.

After retiring from the Army as a major, John Gaffaney cared for society's most vulnerable during two decades as a psychiatric nurse. He spent 3 years trying to return to active duty in this time of war, and he was preparing to deploy to Iraq as a captain. He leaves behind a wife and son.

Specialist Frederick Greene was a Tennessean who wanted to join the Army for a long time, and did so in 2008, with the support of his family. As a combat engineer, he was a natural leader, and he is survived by his wife and two daughters.

Specialist Jason Hunt was also recently married, with three children to care for. He joined the Army after high school and did a tour in Iraq. And it was there that he reenlisted for six more years on his 21st birthday so that he could continue to serve.

Staff Sergeant Amy Krueger was an athlete in high school and joined the Army shortly after 9/11 and had since returned home to speak to students about her experience. When her mother told her she couldn't take on Usama bin Laden by herself, Amy replied: "Watch me."

Private First Class Aaron Nemelka was an Eagle Scout who just recently signed up to do one of the most dangerous jobs in the service, diffuse bombs, so that he could help save lives. He was proudly carrying on a tradition of military service that runs deep within his family.

Private First Class Michael Pearson loved his family and loved his music, and his goal was to be a music teacher. He excelled at playing the guitar and could create songs on the spot and show others how to play. He joined the military a year ago and was preparing for his first deployment.

Captain Russell Seager worked as a nurse for the VA, helping veterans with posttraumatic stress. He had extraordinary respect for the military and signed up to serve so that he could help soldiers cope with the stress of combat and return to civilian life. He leaves behind a wife and son.

Private Francheska Velez, daughter of a father from Colombia and a Puerto Rican mother, had recently served in Korea and in Iraq and was pursuing a career in the Army. When she was killed, she was pregnant with her first child and was excited about becoming a mother.

Lieutenant Colonel Juanita Warman was the daughter and granddaughter of Army veterans. She was a single mom who put herself through college and graduate school and served as a nurse practitioner while raising her two daughters. She also left behind a loving husband.

Private First Class Kham Xiong came to America from Thailand as a small child. He was a husband and father who followed his brother into the military because his family had a strong history of service. He was preparing for his first deployment to Afghanistan.

These men and women came from all parts of the country. Some had long careers in the military. Some had signed up to serve in the shadow of 9/11. Some had known intense combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, and some cared for those who did. Their lives speak to the strength, the dignity, the decency of those who serve, and that's how they will be remembered.

For that same spirit is embodied in the community here at Fort Hood and in the many wounded who are still recovering. As was already mentioned, in those terrible minutes during the attack, soldiers made makeshift tourniquets out of their clothes. They braved gunfire to reach the wounded and ferried them back to safety in the backs of cars and a pickup truck.

One young soldier, Amber Bahr, was so intent on helping others, she did not realize for some time that she herself had been shot in the back. Two police officers, Mark Todd and Kim Munley, saved countless lives by risking their own. One medic, Francisco de la Serna, treated both Officer Munley and the gunman who shot her.

It may be hard to comprehend the twisted logic that led to this tragedy. But this much we do know: No faith justifies these murderous and craven acts; no just and loving God looks upon them with favor. For what he has done, we know that the killer will be met with justice in this world and the next.

These are trying times for our country. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, the same extremists who killed nearly 3,000 Americans continue to endanger America, our allies, and innocent Afghans and Pakistanis. In Iraq, we're working to bring a war to a successful end, as there are

still those who would deny the Iraqi people the future that Americans and Iraqis have sacrificed so much for.

As we face these challenges, the stories of those at Fort Hood reaffirm the core values that we are fighting for and the strength that we must draw upon. Theirs are the tales of American men and women answering an extraordinary call, the call to serve their comrades, their communities, and their country. In an age of selfishness, they embody responsibility. In an era of division, they call upon us to come together. In a time of cynicism, they remind us of who we are as Americans.

We are a nation that endures because of the courage of those who defend it. We saw that valor in those who braved bullets here at Fort Hood, just as surely as we see it in those who signed up knowing they would serve in harm's way.

We are a nation of laws whose commitment to justice is so enduring that we would treat a gunman and give him due process, just as surely as we will see that he pays for his crimes.

We're a nation that guarantees the freedom to worship as one chooses. And instead of claiming God for our side, we remember Lincoln's words, and always pray to be on the side of God.

We're a nation that is dedicated to the proposition that all men and women are created equal. We live that truth within our military and see it in the varied backgrounds of those we lay to rest today. We defend that truth at home and abroad, and we know that Americans will always be found on the side of liberty and equality. That's who we are as a people.

Tomorrow is Veterans Day. It's a chance to pause and to pay tribute: for students to learn the struggles that preceded them; for families to honor the service of parents and grandparents; for citizens to reflect upon the sacrifices that have been made in pursuit of a more perfect union.

For history is filled with heroes. You may remember the stories of a grandfather who marched across Europe, an uncle who fought in Vietnam, a sister who served in the gulf. But as we honor the many generations who have served, all of us—every single American—must acknowledge that this generation has more than proved itself the equal of those who've come before.

We need not look to the past for greatness, because it is before our very eyes. This generation of soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and coast guardsmen have volunteered in the time of certain danger. They are part of the finest fighting force that the world has ever known. They have served tour after tour of duty in distant, different, and difficult places. They have stood watch in blinding deserts and on snowy mountains. They have extended the opportunity of self-government to peoples that have suffered tyranny and war. They are men and women, white, black, and brown, of all faiths and all stations—all Americans, serving together to protect our people, while giving others half a world away the chance to lead a better life.

In today's wars, there's not always a simple ceremony that signals our troops' success, no surrender papers to be signed or capital to be claimed. But the measure of the impact of these young men and women is no less great. In a world of threats that know no borders, their legacy will be marked in the safety of our cities and towns and the security and opportunity that's extended abroad. It will serve as testimony to the character of those who served and the example that all of you in uniform set for America and for the world.

Here at Fort Hood, we pay tribute to 13 men and women who were not able to escape the horror of war, even in the comfort of home. And later today, at Fort Lewis, one community will gather to remember so many in one Stryker Brigade who have fallen in Afghanistan.

Long after they are laid to rest—when the fighting has finished, and our Nation has endured; when today's service men and women are veterans, and their children have grown—it will be said that this generation believed under the most trying of tests; believed in perseverance, not just when it was easy, but when it was hard; that they paid the price and bore the burden to secure this Nation, and stood up for the values that live in the hearts of all free peoples.

So we say goodbye to those who now belong to eternity. We press ahead in pursuit of the peace that guided their service. May God bless the memory of those that we have lost. And may God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:55 p.m. at III Corps headquarters. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gen. Robert W. Cone, USA, commanding general, III Corps and Fort Hood; Secretary of the Army John M. McHugh; Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization; and Army psychiatrist Maj. Nidal M. Hasan, suspected gunman in the November 5 shootings at Fort Hood, TX.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Fort Hood, TX, memorial service.

Locations: Fort Hood, TX.

Names: Bahr, Amber; bin Laden, Usama; Cahill, James; Cahill, Kerry; Caraveo, Angela; Caraveo, Eduardo; Caraveo, John; Caraveo, Jose; Casey, George W., Jr.; Cone, Robert W.; de la Serna, Francisco; DeCrow, Marikay; Gaffaney, Christine; Gaffaney, Matthew; Gates, Robert M.; Hasan, Nidal M.; Krueger, Jerilyn; McHugh, John M.; Mullen, Michael G.; Munley, Kim; Papst-Czemerda, Melissa; Patillo, Tawnya; Rivera, Megan; Rivera, Tiffany; Seager, Cynthia; Todd, Mark; Vanacker, Keely; Velez, Juan Guillermo; Warman, Philip.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : Service members :: Casualties; Armed Forces, U.S. : Service members :: Casualties; Army, Department of the : Fort Hood, shooting; Army, Department of the : Secretary; Defense, Department of : Secretary; Texas : Fort Hood, shooting; Texas : President's visits; Veterans Day.

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