

CSA's National Guard Association of the United States speech

By Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Mark A. Milley September 11, 2015

General Milley: You know, the Sergeant of Arms and everything, I thought I was in Congress. So, check it out. Look at that.

(Laughter)

All right. Attention to orders. Hey, first I want to thank Deb. Thanks for that introductory remark, and thank all of you for being here. And I did note that Frank Grass was here, and Glenn Curtis and Tim Kadavy. And so I asked Tim outside, I said what are we doing? And he said I don't know. I'm not in charge.

(Laughter)

And then I asked Frank Grass. I said what are we doing? He said I don't know, I'm not in charge. I looked at Curtis, and I said look at, you're the NGAUS guy. I said, what are we doing? He said I don't know, I'm not in charge. So I got three guys here all from my guard who said not in charge. Well, let me tell you, I think they're all in charge. And I think the world of the National Guard.

As I looked out there, I shook Corey Carr's hand not just a few minutes ago as I walked in. And Corey and I served together a long time ago in Bosnia when he was Lt. Col. Carr and I was Col. Milley. And since that time, I have served repeatedly, over and over again, not only in the Balkans, but in Afghanistan, Iraq, and many other places, actually, with our great National Guard.

And, and I have to tell you that in my mind, what Deb said is absolutely, 100 percent true. There is only one Army.

(Applause)

And this Association, since 1878 is what Glenn Curtis told me, has been the Association that has not only fought for the needs of America's National Guard, but it's also fought for the needs of America's Army. And I want to thank Gus Hargett, who's here tonight, and the entire organization of NGAUS for all the efforts you've done for well over a century on behalf of our entire Army.

And I also want to thank Joni Ernst. And Joni Ernst who just spoke to you, I had the pleasure of talking to her several times during my preparation for testimony to become the Chief. And then since then, she's not only a wonderful Senator and a great national leader, but she is also, as you well know, a tremendous leader in the National Guard, has served also in combat. So how about another round of applause for Senator Ernst?

(Applause)

And I believe that we have in the audience Representatives Mark Takai from Hawaii and Jim Bridenstine, and Trent Kelly

are also here. So thank you. Not only for being great representatives, but being here and supporting our nation's National Guard and for all that you do for our Army back in D.C. So thank you.

And thanks also to the veterans, the wounded warriors, and the families that are attending today and this entire conference. And it's especially important I think today because today is our nation's Patriot's Day, and it marks the 14th anniversary of 9/11, which I had the privilege of attending the ceremony at the Pentagon this morning.

All of us should reflect on that and the meaning, and I know you have. Almost all of you have served in combat since that time. You all remember the reasons why we fight, and we should never forget the lives we lost on that horrible day, and the freedom that we preserve by taking the fight to the enemy.

The history of our Guard has been around since 1636. I don't have to tell you that. You know it. And you are chartered to protect and defend our great nation, even before we were a nation. And it does my heart good to sit here in the great State of Tennessee to know that the United States National Guard was regimented as infantry and artillery with the purpose of defending the great Colony of Massachusetts.

(Applause)

That's right. And it was, and I was given just a few minutes ago the shoulder patch of the Third Battalion 126th Aviation out of the Red Sox Nation.

(Applause)

That's kind of weak for Massachusetts. You know, look at, dude, I'm from Boston. Come on. Pick the pace up. Let's hear a little bit more.

(Applause)

Can we get a little bit more out of Massachusetts? All right. Everybody go silent. Here we go. Watch this. Okay, Red Sox Nation, on three, let's hear it. One, two, three.

(Applause)

There. Thank you. Thank you. And without the National Guard, by the way, there probably wouldn't be a Red Sox. Maybe we would have had a better season this year, but there wouldn't be a Red Sox.

(Laughter)

There wouldn't be a Patriots either. And for all those Pittsburg fans, by the way, we did, in fact, win last night fair and square.

(Applause)

And I personally checked the balls, and they were inflated.

(Laughter)

And the COMMO problems that the Steeler's allegedly had were, in fact, an act of nature, so I don't want to hear it.

(Laughter)

Just look at the scoreboard. I don't want to hear it.

(Laughter)

Also, on a more serious note, though, about the history of the Guard, as the 39th Chief of Staff of the Army, I did a fair amount of research and reading of past chiefs. And I read quite a bit, as you might imagine, of Creighton Abrams. One of our greatest Chiefs of Staff that we've ever had.

And I was reminded, and am still reminded of his charter in that great, difficult war, Vietnam, which we did not prevail. As communist tanks rolled through the gates of the U.S. Embassy in April of 1975 to signify that we had, in fact, lost that war. And Creighton Abrams and other senior officers of our Army at the end of that war did a very detailed and deep reflective after action review.

And there were many reasons why we did not prevail. But one of those reasons, in the words or the thoughts of Creighton Abrams, was we lost the will. We lost the connective tissue with the American people. And you may know that that war was largely fought by a professional force of volunteers and draftees, and very few National Guard served. There were some. Indiana served and some others. But very few. It was largely fought by volunteers and draftees.

And Creighton Abrams said that ultimately war is about politics, and it's about the will of the people. And he said never again will I send or be part of sending America's Army into conflict without Main Street U.S.A. And he said, I'm just the Chief of Staff of the Army. I can't solve everything. But I can do some things. And one thing I'll do is I'll change the construct of how America's Army goes to war.

And that's when we began the concept of a Total Army, of one Army, one Army made up of three components, the active or regular Army, the National Guard, and the United States Army Reserve. And he designed us in such a way that we cannot conduct sustained land operations without the Guard and the Reserve.

It is impossible for the United States of America to go to war today without bringing Main Street, without bringing Tennessee and Massachusetts and Colorado and California. You just can't do it. And he was right when he made that call. And he was right then, and he's right today.

We are, in fact, one Army. We have three components, but it's one Army. We are E Pluribus Unum in reality. Of the many, come one. And we are not 10 divisions. We are 18 divisions.

(Applause)

And we're not 32 brigades. We're 60 brigades. And we're not 490,000 Soldiers. We are 980,000 American Soldiers.

(Applause)

And as we are one nation indivisible, we are, in fact, one Army indivisible. And I want to reinforce that 100 times over and let there be no mistake about it. I mean what I say. And I say it in every meeting. And every time I hear the word 450, I jump through the ceiling. If I heard the word 490, I jump through the ceiling. If I hear the word 10 divisions, I lose my mind.

It is one Army. And we are not small. We're big. And we're very capable. And we're capable because of the Reserves. We are capable because of the National Guard.

(Applause)

Today, as I mentioned, is Patriots Day. And in Massachusetts, where I grew up, we celebrate Patriots Day in April, and we run the Boston Marathon, or some run the Boston Marathon, and begin spring break for children, and we commemorate the great battle, which didn't last long, of Lexington and Concord and the opening events of the Revolutionary War.

And those shots, those were fired not by the regular Army. Those shots were fired by America's militia. Those shots were fired by America's National Guard. And the National Patriots Day, like that in Massachusetts that we celebrate today on 9/11 to honor the fallen, we also honor those who volunteer and defend this great nation and bring communities together. And all of us should be thankful for what we have.

And I could ask anyone in America where you were on 9/11/2001 when our country came under attack, and most could tell us. But I can tell them that America's Army National Guard was everywhere. Not just in one place for one memory, you were everywhere. My home state's National Guard, the Air Guard, had fighters in the air within minutes of the first attack heading rapidly to the World Trade Center Towers.

The 119th Fighter Wing from North Dakota scrambled to intercept the planes heading towards the Capitol. And among the 184 killed at the Pentagon were several active Guard and United States Army Reserve Soldiers.

In the days after the attack, it was the Army National Guard who responded to New York and New Jersey and Connecticut and Virginia, Maryland and Washington, D.C. It was guardsmen who were searching airports, securing our people, the bridges, the seaports, and patrolling our northern and southern borders.

Then we, all of us, the United States Army, one Army, took the fight to the enemy in the mountains of Afghanistan and the deserts of Iraq. And you grew from 351,000 to 362,000 at the peak. And you participated in every, single significant engagement there was. And I personally was witness to your competence and professionalism. In Afghanistan, I had many Guard units under my command, as well as in Iraq.

And today you continue to fight. Today we have thousands of National Guardsmen deployed throughout the world on many critical missions, including still today Afghanistan, and many more deployed in every combatant commander's area of responsibility. In Egypt, Iraq, Kosovo, Kuwait, across Africa, and in Europe, as well as many places in the United States.

Just the other day, as Deb mentioned, I happened to return from a trip. I was in Iraq and then bounced over to Jordan and Israel, and went over to Afghanistan and up to Europe. And during that trip, I met a few quiet professionals from Alpha Troop first of the 112th Cav out of Texas.

(Applause)

They were serving in the MFO. I heard they were wounded. I was in Iraq or in Israel. I said, we need to get to Israel. And I bounced over there and talked to each of them. And they'd make you proud.

And I had the honor of presenting them with their Purple Hearts. And four of those guardsman, Staff Sgt. Chapa and Sgt. Cantu and Specials Burkett and Private Romo, although they were injured, they were proud. They were proud to be Texans. They were proud to be Guardsmen, and most of all, they were proud to be Americans. Each of them is doing well, and each will recover.

And interestingly, Sgt. Cantu received his second Purple Heart. And then Sgt. Chapa has a daughter, PFC Chapa, who also serves in the Texas Guard. These are America's citizen Soldiers, and their commitment to mission, their commitment to nation, their commitment to the Army is unbelievable, and it's a family affair.

Since 1991, America's National Guard has been deterring aggression and building partner capacity through the State Partnership Program that we do throughout not only the world but particularly important in Europe. This low-cost, high-yield program operates globally in 74 countries, synchronized with all of our goals and our objectives, not only of the Department of Defense, but also the State Department, the Guard Bureau, and it's driven by you, the state adjutant generals.

It directly supports our combatant commands and their security and cooperation planning. And just this year, Kenya and Djibouti, and many others were added to the partnership program as we recognize the great importance of Africa to combat terrorism.

And you're also contributing at home. You're partnering with our Homeland Defense Agencies right now with over 2,000 Soldiers and Airmen from our National Guard that are fighting wild fires in Washington, Oregon, California, Idaho, and Montana. Your ability to respond to these situations, both abroad and at home is key to our overall national defense.

And you have done that, all of you, with great personal courage, and great personal sacrifice. And in every case, you have responded, you have been timely, and you have acted decisively. And sometimes, you didn't even have warning, as was the case in Haiti. And yet, you rode to the sound of the guns, and you did so with great distinction. And in some other cases, you were actually on leave, as is the case of Alex Skarlatos from the Oregon National Guard.

(Applause)

You've all heard the story now of his heroism on the train in Paris, France. And I had an opportunity to call him within hours of the incident. And he was remarkable. He was humble. And he was a true professional. Who hears gunshots and runs towards it? Skarlatos did. Who motivates others to follow him into a small battle where he could die? Skarlatos did. Who willingly puts his life in danger to protect others? Skarlatos did. And he did it because he is a member of the United States Army. He did it because he is a member of the Oregon National Guard. He did it because he is an American.

(Applause)

And like Skarlatos, like the Guard that has showed up and Lexington and Concord, you are ready. And our Army is ready. We are ready to win in ground combat. There is no second place on a battlefield.

We are not the Army of the past. We are better than that. But we must ensure that we remain better. We must ensure that we remain Number One. We cannot do it by just saying it. We must remain Number One and face the challenges of not only today but also tomorrow.

And that is why my Number One priority as Chief of Staff of the Army is readiness. And it's readiness across the Total Force. It's readiness for the entire Army. And there is no other Number One. No American Soldier on our watch, on your watch and my watch, must ever be committed to combat undermanned, untrained, poorly led, or poorly equipped. That is the most grievous sin we can commit.

(Applause)

We, the leaders of this Army, do not want a fair fight. We want the odds - all the time - always in our favor. And it's the obligation of our leaders to prepare our Soldiers for combat, to ensure that our nation's sons and daughters have the necessary training and resources to win. And we must be ready today, and we must prepare for tomorrow. And we will do this by redefining and refining our training programs. We will have exceptionally tough, realistic training based on war fighting fundamentals. And we will build that over time. And we will achieve exceptional levels of readiness.

And we have to be very good stewards of our limited resources. We're not going to get tons of them. But those that we do get, we've got to apply them right, and we've got to apply them to the task of readiness.

For our Soldiers to be properly trained, they have to be well-led. So we're going to enhance our leader development education at all levels across the entire Army. And what do we want? We want leaders that are tough, resilient, that can think and out-fight and out-smart the enemy. We want them to be adaptive and agile and flexible. And we want them not only competent, but we want leaders of character.

And we also must have sufficient capacity. Much of America's Army's capacity is resident in the National Guard. I expect demand to increase, not decrease in the future. And we must rely more heavily on our National Guard to meet that demand.

We must also be mindful that readiness takes time. Time to train, multiple iterations of exercises, and constant repetition at individual and collective level.

Our forces are in demand in an ever-increasing complex global environment. And it's not limited to responding merely to conflict or war. But a demand for forces to support allies and partners across a range of missions that will require common and unique capabilities, across a broad spectrum of missions that will require common capabilities across the entire Army.

We will also continue to operate, as you all know and already have, as a joint force. And we will be providing the joint force commanders with Army capabilities to win decisively on land, because that is where wars are ultimately won.

To meet that demand, we in the Army leadership have decided to propose to Congress to request additional funding for 12304.

(Applause)

I've only been on the job for a couple of weeks. But it's readily obvious to me that I need to employ more of the Guard, not less.

(Applause)

And as for the future, the challenge in the next few years is going to be to maintain our tactical and operational overmatch against our adversaries. As you all know, we have that today. We have that advantage.

But access to information, access to technology, access to training techniques, et cetera, are available to a wide array of organizations, both state and non-state actors. And this diffusion is rapidly decreasing our advantages on the battlefield, whether it's in the physical world or the virtual world of cyber. And what that translates in is risk, higher risk to our Soldiers, our formations, and ultimately our missions.

Our adversaries, our enemies know how we operate. They know how we fight. And they have adapted their techniques to something that is now called hybrid warfare. This blend of conventional and irregular warfare does not attack the United States head-on. It threatens neighbors and is intent on creating instability in regions across the globe. And our success in the future will not be measured simply by tactical success. It will be measured by how we have adapted, how we have adapted our knowledge, our tactics, our techniques, our procedures to the enemies that we fight no matter where they are.

Some things I want you to think about, things I want you to challenge. In my mind, nothing is sacred. Nothing about the Army or the way we do business is sacred. We must all of us collectively challenge how we fight. We must all of us collectively challenge how we organize, how we train, how we equip. We must not allow ourselves to accept the status quo. The enemy is not, the enemy is not static, and we must adapt.

And since 1915, America's National Guard has trained annually for 39 days. I want to challenge that. I'm not sure that's right. It might be 60. It might be 90. I don't know. I don't know what the answer is. But I don't know if 39 is right. So I have asked Tim Kadavy, I've asked Glenn Curtis, I've asked Frank Grass to look at it.

Let's now analyze it. Let's take a look. Is 39 the right time? Maybe it's 60 days for some units, 100 days for other units, 39 for others. I don't know. But let's not just say that a rule that's been in place since 1915, 100 years, is good enough for the next 100 years. It may not be.

(Applause)

Somehow, over the last few decades, we've gotten away from roundout units. Roundout units were used quite a bit back when we were lieutenants and captains. I want to look at it. I want to take a hard look at it. And I want to see if we can once again maximize the effectiveness of roundout units so that we can leverage the capabilities and the capacities of both the regular Army and the Guard.

And I want to look at roundout going both ways, not just Guard units rounding out active units.

(Applause)

Not just Guard units rounding out active units, but I want to take a look at active units rounding out Guard units. So what would be so bad about a brigade of the 111st or the 82nd slapping on the bloody bucket patch of the 28th Division.

(Applause)

Well, maybe not, maybe not Pennsylvania. Maybe Texas.

(Laughter)

But seriously, I want to look at it. I don't know that we'll do it, but I want to look at it. I want to take a hard look at it because if we're going to be one Army, we've got to be one Army.

(Applause)

And I also want to look at it at the individual level. I want to take a page of best practices out of the Marine Corps. So the Marines, my father fought in World War II, and hit the beach in the Central Pacific with the 4th Marine Division. And the 4th Marine Division today is the Marine Corps' reserve division. But they assign a lot of active duty Marines to the 4th Marine Division. Maybe that's something we should look at.

And maybe that's something we should do in reverse as well and assign a lot of guardsmen to our current regular Army active duty divisions. Maybe it's right. Maybe it's wrong. I don't know. But I want to look at it.

I want to challenge everything. I want to overturn every stone to find the right answer to maximize the capability and the capacity of America's Army.

And I also am looking at the training centers. So if I ask myself if training is so important, Milley, if readiness is so important, why is it the Guard only gets two rotations a year, one at, one at JRTC.

(Applause)

If over 50 percent of the United States Army is in the Guard, which it is, if all this combat power is in the Guard, then how can I look myself in the mirror and say that the Guard is ready to go if I've only got two brigades going through a CTC. So that's not right.

So I want to look at it. I make no promises. It's a lot of money. There's a lot of, there's 50 million little staff actions that have to go along with what I just said, but.

(Laughter)

I am the Chief of Staff of the Army, so I ought to be able to make it happen.

(Applause)

So, one of the things I again told Glenn and -- you guys can't call him that, but I can. Glenn and Tim and Frank, let's take a look at it. So maybe it should be four. Maybe at minimum four.

So what would that, what would that do for me as Chief of Staff of the Army? That would give me four brigades that I can answer the call of a combatant commander, answer the call of nation that I am 100 percent confident that they are capable of closing with and destroying the enemy with very little post-mob train-up time. So I think that would be great. So we'll see. More to follow on that.

So I want you to have a spirit of innovation and inquiry. And I don't want you to just accept the status quo ante. I want you to get after it, take a look at it, figure out ways to improve, whether it's technology or equipment, training methods, systems, you name it. It's all comers. New Chief of Staff three weeks on the job, I am willing to listen to anything about a new idea to make us a better Army, and I hope you will do that.

And I want to also challenge all of you to really buckle down. And I'm saying the same thing to the active component about readiness, about look in the mirror and look at ourselves, and ask ourselves how ready are we really?

So the USR might say something, and there might be a chart that says green or amber or red or whatever. But dig a little deeper than that. Ground combat is unforgiving. ISIS does not care what patch is on your shoulder. They are not particularly impressed because we happen to carry the American flag. And we can never rest on our laurels.

We can't look back and say, well, we hit the beach at Normandy, or we won this fight or that fight in World War I or World War II or Korea or Vietnam or wherever and think that's valid for today. It may be. It may not be. So I want each of you, I challenge each of you to look at whatever formation you're in charge of and really dig deep into the readiness of that organization and remember that when a Soldier is killed, it's not a statistic that shows up on a slide. When a Soldier is killed, it's not a storyboard.

When a Soldier is killed, that's one of our family. And to his actual family or her actual family, it's the end of the world. And we as leaders must always recommit ourselves to make sure that we are putting them in harm's way, well-led, well-equipped, and well-trained.

And our Soldiers will do whatever we tell them and lead them to do. They will go. Even if they have wooden rifles and they're throwing stones, they will go. But it is our job, it is our solemn and sacred responsibility to make sure when they

go, they go ready.

So I challenge you all to keep readiness foremost in your mind. Keep it as your number one priority. Understand there is no second place in combat. Understand that ground combat is unforgiving. Understand that the only thing worse and more expensive than fighting and winning a war is fighting and losing one. And readiness is the key to victory. Readiness is the key to winning in ground combat.

Thanks for all you do. Army Strong.

(End of remarks)