

## Secretary of the Army Pete Geren - Address to the 2008 AUSA Annual Meeting and Exposition - October 6, 2008

---

Oct 09, 2008

BY Secretary of the Army Pete Geren



**Secretary of the Army, Pete Geren, speaks to the audience at the Association of the United States Army (AUSA) annual meeting in Washington D.C., on Oct 6, 2008. Geren discussed a wide spectrum of issues addressing the Army and announced 2009 will be celebrated as the year of the Noncommissioned Officer. Photo by D. Myles Cullen**

General Sullivan, thank you for that introduction, and thank you for your kind words and for the invitation to speak to AUSA this morning. It's an honor to represent our Army. And thank you for 35 years of active duty service, and your unsurpassed leadership at AUSA, a lifetime of service to our Army, and to our Nation.

And to all AUSA members here this morning, and all around the country, and all around the world - thank you for all you do for soldiers and families. General Casey, Sergeant-Major of the Army Preston, Secretary Ford, distinguished guests, soldiers, and civilians, it truly is an honor to be with you today.

I want to recognize the outstanding Soldiers who performed here this morning. General Sullivan, the awards were a wonderful tribute to those soldiers. Also gave us an opportunity to recover from that great performance by the Military District of Washington; "The Old Guard;" and the Army Band - "Pershing's Own." What an extraordinary job they did telling us this history of our Army, and giving us such a powerful insight into the heart and soul of soldiers and why they serve.

I also want to add my congratulations to the AUSA award winners - thank you for your service. And LTC Rallis - and your children - God bless you. You are a great example of Soldiers taking care of

Soldiers. Our Army remains strong over the years of this conflict, because Soldiers and Families look after Soldiers and Families. Thank you so much for what you do.

As I reflected on what I wanted to talk about this morning, I recalled something that Deputy Secretary England said to me at the first of the year. He said, we now move into the year of last times as Secretaries. A little puzzled by that, but then he went on to explain it. Last time to testify before Congress representing the Army. Last time to prepare a budget. Last time to represent the Army at an Army-Navy game. Last time to visit the troops as their Secretary. A year filled with last times. And this is the last time I will have the privilege to represent the United States Army at AUSA.

AUSA is the closest thing we have to an Army-wide family gathering. It's really a family reunion of sorts. And this year, with our Army long at war, it's a family with a lot on its mind, and a lot on its heart. We're an Army proud of what we're doing today, proud of our past, and confident about our future. An Army with 140,000 family members in harm's way, thousands preparing to go, and thousands that just got back. Over the past year our Army family has lost 344 soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, and nearly 3000 have been wounded and injured. We are an Army family where the grief remains raw. There's no time to heal in an Army family. Brace for more.

And we've lost many old soldiers over the course of this past year, including our beloved General Dutch Kerwin, whom we said goodbye to this year in his 90th year. This is the first AUSA convention in decades without Dutch Kerwin, and I know all of us miss him terribly.

We're an Army with strong Army Families pulling together, and helping Army Families through tough times. We're an Army working to ensure that the best army in the world remains the best army in the world, 10, 20, and 30 years from now. An Army that knows that it has shaped the history of our nation, and of the world, and knows that the future would be dark indeed were it not for the United States Army.

And this Army is one big family, a multi-generational family, but a very small world.

So what should I say in speaking this last time to AUSA? We're a busy Army, Soldiers and civilians working very hard every day on so many different tasks, supporting the global war on terror, growing the Army, key modernization programs, FCS, modularity, BRACC, our new energy initiative that we announced last week, billions in construction, new field manuals, the 010 budget, all critically important to the present and the future of our Army.

But General Abrams told us that people are the Army, and today, in this my last time, I'm going to talk about people - Soldiers, Army Families, and Civilians.

I came to the Pentagon late summer of 2001, and I was in the Pentagon the morning of 9/11. And for seven years, I've watched Soldiers go off to war, and watched their families stand with them. I've been inspired by the service of our Soldiers, and humbled by the sacrifice of their families - spouses and kids, moms and dads. And it's the privilege of a lifetime to work with and for soldiers and Army Families. And for this last time, let me say first, and above all else, thank you, Soldiers, Army Civilians, and Army Families, for what you do every day, what you've done for generations, and what you'll do for generations to come. As an American, as a dad older than average with young children, I say thank you.

And I also want to pick out a few of the many family successes of our Army of late, of our Army long at war, and celebrate them with you. At family reunions we brag on our kids. And I'm going to reflect on a couple of chapters in our Army family history that have helped make our Army what it is today. And in the course of that, identify some challenges that remain in making the family that is our Army stronger over the years ahead. And I will focus on an aspect of the life of our Army family where we will do better to align our conduct with our values and our warrior ethos.

And I'll close with a tribute to the foundation of our extraordinary Army, the volunteer. Again, brag on our kids - the type of men and women who say, here am I, send me, when most don't, the All-Volunteer Force, a national treasure, the strength of our nation.

But first let me affirm our top priority, our top priority that never changes. The top priority for any family are loved ones in harm's way. They are front of mind 24 hours a day, and we're committed to meeting with urgency the ever-changing life and death needs and demands of our soldiers in Afghanistan and in Iraq. And not just meet their needs and meet the evolving threats, but anticipate, and do everything we can to get ahead of the threat. And care for those who have borne the battle, and their loved ones. These are moral duties of the highest order for our nation and our Army.

This room is filled with partners in that effort, in and out of uniform, all working together - whatever it takes. Thank you for all you do.

Now, there's an old expression that amateurs talk tactics and professionals talk logistics. Well, this amateur is going to talk logistics this morning.

In 1944, LTG Somervell wrote a timeless piece about logistics. He said, "No one has ever painted an inspiring picture of a general brandishing a requisition ... and ... the prancing charger is longer remembered than the pack mule." Well, this morning I'm going to talk about the requisition and the pack mule, and the men and women who fill those requisitions and pack those mules. And in parts of Afghanistan today, they do in fact still pack mules, and pack everything else that rolls, flies, or walks, but hardly anyone ever talks about it.

We have 250,000 Soldiers in 80 countries, and we've been at war for seven years, with 140,000 Soldiers in theater today. And nobody ever asks, who feeds those guys? Our logisticians are victims of their own success. Their work is so good it is invisible - it's a given. Wherever our Army goes, whatever our Soldiers need, whenever they need it, they get it. The miracle of Army logistics.

The papers are filled with accounts of the movement of soldiers, but no one ever mentions how they move. That Army logisticians repair over 14,000 vehicles every year - a number equal to the number of Yellow Cabs in New York City.

Every year, Army logisticians move more than 700,000 personnel in and out of theater, equal to the entire population of Charlotte, N.C.

Every day, Army logisticians provide 750,000 meals in Kuwait, Afghanistan, and Iraq. And every day, 3000 Army trucks travel 600,000 miles in Kuwait, Afghanistan, and Iraq, equal to crossing the United States from Washington to California 200 times every day. Every day, Army logisticians dispense enough fuel in theatre to fill up 750,000 cars, nearly four times the number of vehicles registered in Washington, D.C.

We talked much about the surge - 15,000 more Soldiers in Iraq - but nobody ever mentioned that Army logisticians would serve 45,000 more meals each day, and ship 120,000 more gallons of water each day.

And every day, Army logisticians strap on their body armor, they grab their weapons, and supply our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines - and they take the fight to the enemy.

And tragically, on too many days, our logisticians have made the ultimate sacrifice - over 619 sustainment and support Soldiers have given their lives in OIF and OEF.

Army logisticians - invisible, because they're so good at what they do, and absolutely indispensable.

Retired Lieutenant General Gus Pagonis told us that "every war that was ever lost, every war that was ever won, was because of logistics."

I'd like to ask the invisible men and women of our logistics community - all of our supporters and sustainers - who are with us today, Soldiers and their family members, and the contractors that work with them, please stand up and let us recognize you as the unsung heroes, and let us say thank you. Thank you for your great work.

And no family reunion would be complete without talking about the heart and soul of the Army family, the heart and soul that we call the backbone, the non-commissioned officer corps.

At the front of every Army mission in the United States or overseas, you'll find a non-commissioned officer. They know their mission, they know their equipment, but most importantly, they know their Soldiers.

If you want to see what right looks like, ask an NCO. Or better, watch an NCO. They are the keepers of our standards, a lofty phrase that has substantive meaning on the grounds in every place around the world where you find an American Soldier. From the recruiting station to basic training, over a career of service from Benning to Baghdad, combat, civil affairs, medics, logisticians, natural disasters at home, graveside at Arlington, Active Guard and Reserve, our NCOs lead.

And our NCOs lead the way in education, in training, and discipline. And they share their strength of character with every Soldier they lead, every officer they support, and every civilian with whom they serve.

Today's NCO operates autonomously, and always with confidence and competence. Our NCOs are empowered and trusted like no other NCO in the world, and most advanced armies in the world today are going to school on our model.

A few years ago, a major writing in the NCO Journal recounted a story from an exercise in the Ukraine with a number of foreign military officers. And a quote from his article:

"A colonel approached and asked to meet with his American counterpart for the weapons familiarization lane. Our instructor was a sergeant first class. After a short silence, we explained that the U.S. contingent had no officers as lane instructors. The colonel's look of disbelief will linger with me for many years. Where we primarily had sergeants and staff sergeants, our training allies were using captains, majors and lieutenant colonels."

When Dr. Gates visited Iraq in February, he met the III Corps command sergeant major, Nell Citola. Dr. Gates said of Citola, "For 14 months he was the Corps' steel spine, the eyes and ears of its command. Without his leadership, and the leadership provided by all the other NCOs on the ground, none of the recent progress in Iraq would have been possible. Whenever I travel ... I make a point of meeting with NCOs of all ranks, for there is little doubt that they are the backbone of our military."

And the year 2009 will be the Year of the NCO in the United States Army. During that year, we will accelerate NCO development of strategic initiatives, develop new initiatives that enhance the training, education, capability, and utilization of our NCO Corps, showcase the NCO story to our Army and the American people, and honor the sacrifices and celebrate contributions of the NCO Corps, past and present.

Let's kick off the Year of the NCO a little early. All NCOs and family members, please stand. The backbone of our Army. Thank you.

And this year, 2008, we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Army Family Action Plan, 25 years old this year. It was initiated by former Chief of Staff General John Wickham. We had hoped General Wickham would be here so that we could honor him for his transformational initiative, but a family illness kept him away.

In 1983, GEN Wickham created the AFAP, and published a White Paper on the future of Army families, and it reads as contemporary as if he had written it today.

He chronicled the history of Army families - including the days of, "If the Army had wanted you to have a wife it would have issued you one." - the years up to 1942, when, if you were married you could not enlist, and if you got married you could not re-enlist. We've come a long way.

This year, President Bush underscored the central role of military families in his State of the Union address. He told us: "Our military families also sacrifice for America. They endure sleepless nights and the daily struggle of providing for children while a loved one is serving far from home. We have a responsibility to provide for them. ... Our military families serve our nation, they inspire our nation and tonight our nation honors them."

An Army wife said the same thing, but differently: "We have combat patches, too - but we wear them on our hearts."

Over this past year, we increased our investment in Army Families with more personnel, resources, and facilities. To reinforce our commitment to Army Families, we signed Family Covenants and Community Covenants at posts all around the globe.

I want to thank Retired Major General Craig Whelden who came out of retirement and led that effort, and the CASAs all over the country who organized our Community Covenants, and helped expand community and state support for Soldiers and Families - there's no substitute for neighbors helping neighbors.

We owe our Families a quality of life equal to their extraordinary service, and that target will forever move. Over the years ahead, our leaders - officers, NCOs, and civilians - must ensure that these covenants remain living documents, responding to the demands of an unpredictable future, the needs of an expeditionary Army, and the ever dynamic needs of Army Families.

On this silver anniversary of the AFAP, we must look into the future as did GEN Wickham, anticipate the challenges, and recommit ourselves to building an Army that works for Army Families - it's our duty, and the success of the All-Volunteer Force depends on it.

Last summer we celebrated another significant anniversary for our Army. At a ceremony in the Capitol Rotunda hosted by the Speaker of the House, and at another in the Pentagon hosted by the Secretary of Defense, we celebrated the 60th anniversary of the integration of the United States Military, a watershed event in the life of our nation and in the life of our Army.

Sixty years ago, our Army did not stand as one. It was not a single band of brothers, rather, a collection of bands of brothers divided by race.

Sixty years ago, our Army's policy was separate and hardly equal. When it came to race relations, our Army mirrored part of our society - the worst part, with segregation the standard and soldiers of color disadvantaged in assignment and promotion.

What a shock it had to be to a Soldier like retired LTG Julius Becton, an African-American who left the integrated community of Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania as a young man in 1944 to join the Army. He passed through the door of the US Army, and entered the world of Jim Crow. Where he went, where he ate and slept, what he did and whom he did it with was determined by the color of his skin.

The cruel irony of our nation sending soldiers to fight for freedom against the Germans - yet affording privileges to white German P.O.W.s held in the United States that were denied to the African-Americans Soldiers who guarded them.

There were indignities throughout our nation and our Army, some petty, but all significant. And the Army organized along standards that contradicted the freedom and values for which our Soldiers fought and died, contrary to core Army values that guide our Soldiers' lives and their service.

And then with the stroke of a pen, President Truman, launched the Army on the path to the color-blind institution we know today. The Army moved slowly and stubbornly at first, but now stands as the model for equal opportunity in our nation.

We have an Army today, as General Colin Powell told us at the Capitol last summer, that " ... no longer cared whether I was black or white, ... The only thing my commander ever asked me, from 1958 through the rest of my career [was] can you perform?"

Today, we have an Army where the only colors that matter are red, white, and blue.

This year also is the 30th anniversary of the disestablishment of the Women's Army Corps (WACs) - October 20, 1978.

One of the many steps forward in opportunities for women in the Army over the decade of the '70s. The WAC began in 1942, and under the leadership of legendary Texan Oveta Culp Hobby. She told her WACs that year that they had a "debt and a date" - a debt to democracy and a date with destiny. Mrs. Hobby would not recognize the Army of 2008.

Today, there are more than 120,000 women in the Army, Active Guard and Reserve. More than 56,000 NCOs, nearly 25,000 officers, and 32 general officers.

This year, Lt. Gen. Ann Dunwoody will become the first woman 4-star general in our Nation's military history.

Since 9/11, nearly 90,000 women have served in Kuwait, Afghanistan, and Iraq. One hundred and thirty women have received awards for valor, including two Silver Stars - SSG Leigh Ann Hester and SPC Monica Brown. One hundred and sixty-five have received Purple Hearts. Forty-nine women have been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. And 535 have been wounded.

But in spite of their service, we are short of becoming the band of brothers and sisters that our values demand.

In jarring contrast to the Army values and the warrior ethos that bind our Soldiers together, since 9/11 1800 American Soldiers have been punished for sexually assaulting a fellow Soldier. And experts estimate that only one in five sexual assaults ever gets reported. The rate of reported sexual assaults in our Army is twice the rate of other services - an Army at war, at war within itself, blue on blue.

Sixty years ago, we began down the long road to end racial discrimination, and root out the remnants of racism from our Army, bring our attitudes, words, and deeds in line with Army values. And we succeeded, thanks to leaders who gathered here today.

This year we recommitted to do the same in regards to gender. We committed to eradicate sexual harassment and sexual assault from the life of our Army.

And, as with equal opportunity, we will become the model for sexual assault prevention in our Nation. And we will succeed the cause of Army values.

Sexual assault is a crime everywhere, but blue on blue, it is that and much more. It's an assault on the core values of every American Soldier.

American Soldiers are bound together by Army values of duty and loyalty that set them apart from the rest of society, by a selfless commitment to each other that outsiders find incomprehensible, a willingness to sacrifice or even die for each other, even die for a stranger if he or she shares their uniform.

In Iraq - that bond led 19-year-old Ross McGinnis to cover a grenade with this body to save the lives of his fellow Soldiers. He was a regular kid - until he put on the Army uniform.

In Afghanistan, that bond led 19-year-old medic PFC Monica Brown to throw her body on top of wounded Soldiers to protect them from mortar and small arms fire - and provide them life-saving medical care as shrapnel and bullets rained down around her and the Soldiers she was protecting in the middle of an enemy ambush. She was awarded a Silver Star for her heroism.

Her citation repeats three times: " ... disregarding her own safety, PFC Brown shielded the casualties with her own body ... disregarding her own safety, PFC Brown shielded the casualties with her own

body ..."

PFC McGinnis gave his life and PFC Brown offered hers for their band of brothers and sisters.

It is in this context that we will attack the enemy within our ranks, and crime of sexual assault, and the enabling offense of sexual harassment - and affirm the duty of every Soldier - demand that every Soldier - intervene to protect their comrades from harassment and the risk of assault. In the Army, there are no by-standers - every Soldier is his brother or sister's keeper. That's the army of Ross McGinnis and Monica Brown.

The brothers and sisters of our Army must be able to count on each other, wherever they are, in the battlefield or in the barracks, and whenever, on duty or off, no matter the cost.

We will create a climate of zero tolerance for gender-based misconduct - in attitude, word, and deed, and become fully, as our values demand, a band of brothers and sisters.

We will succeed in this effort. Army values will lead us to our goal. Strip away everything else about our Army, at its core, Soldiers take care of Soldiers. That's what Soldiers do.

In closing, I will celebrate with you the 35th anniversary of the All-Volunteer Force and the 1.2 million Soldiers, who are on point for freedom at home and abroad - all volunteers - engaged in the third longest war in our nation's history and the longest war we have ever fought with an all-volunteer force.

We are succeeding in the Global War on Terror today - and this success has a thousand fathers - and mothers.

But I want to focus on the foundation that has made this success possible, the national treasure that is, The All-Volunteer Force.

Extraordinary Soldiers on the ground who are courageous, adaptable, intelligent, and committed professionals, volunteers, who have learned from their hard-earned experience and personal sacrifice how to succeed in this complex security environment. They're exercising independent judgment and making thousands of well-considered decisions on the spot every day. They're shaping the future of Iraq and Afghanistan, and shaping the future of America.

Ours is an Army filled with combat-tested and seasoned Soldiers: 64% of the Active Component -

31% of the Reserves and 33% of the Guard have served in combat theater. And these extraordinary men and women know why they're fighting, and they have figured out how to win this war.

And these Soldiers are re-enlisting to go back, build on the lessons they've learned, and finish the good work that they've begun.

This year alone, 120,000 men and women re-enlisted, Active Guard and Reserve, and nearly 175,000 enlisted, a number equal to the size of the Marine Corps. Over the past six years, in the middle of this war, a million men and women have enlisted in the Army, and over three-quarters of a million Soldiers have re-enlisted.

How did we build the extraordinary force that is our Army today - the All-Volunteer Force. Soldiers built it from the ground up.

What makes a great Soldier?

As most of you know better than I ever will - a great Soldier has intangible qualities that trump the metrics, that you cannot measure with technical precision - something deep inside that keeps him or her going when most quit - decide to risk everything or give everything when others would not, and step forward when most would step back.

In time of war, with an All-Volunteer Force, we have an advantage in building our Army, in picking the right men and women to be Soldiers. We have a character screen, a "gut check" on everybody on the way in, a character screen on the way in that you never have with a draft and you don't have with a peacetime Army.

You can call it the 1% factor - the 1% of Americans who step up in time of war and say "send me" when 99% don't. It's an intangible, but it's better than any metric. And you can assume a lot about that 1%.

We don't have a yardstick or a dipstick to measure that quality - nothing empirical - but with an All-Volunteer Force - in time of war - with every new recruit, with every re-enlistment, you start with that intangible as a given.

Let me talk about one such Soldier - I mentioned him earlier - PFC Ross McGinnis.

Ross shared his birthday with the United States Army, June 14 - but his year of birth was 1987. But that was all in his boyhood or adolescence that gave any hint whatsoever to the kind of Soldier Ross would become.

His teachers remembered him as a "regular guy" - he worked at McDonald's, he loved cars, he loved music, his dad told me he loved basketball most of all - didn't particularly care for school work.

He was a good kid with a strong family, a mom and dad and two older sisters - Katie and Becky - and they loved him dearly, but there was really nothing that set him apart from his peers until, at age 17, with his nation at war, he joined the Army - most don't, he did - that 1% factor - it tells you a lot.

On December 4, 2006, Ross was manning the .50 caliber machine gun on his humvee on a patrol in northeast Baghdad when an insurgent threw a fragmentation grenade through the gunner's hatch and down into his vehicle.

Reacting quickly, he shouted a warning to his four crew members. He then easily could have jumped to safety. He chose not to.

He dropped down into the humvee and pinned the grenade between his body and the vehicle and absorbed the blast - gave his life to save the lives of his four battle buddies. Ross was 19 years old. Nineteen years old. On this past June 2, President Bush honored Ross in a White House ceremony, and he gave Ross' mother and father his Medal of Honor.

At a Pentagon ceremony the next day in our Hall of Heroes, several speakers and Ross' father spoke to a gathering that included the four men Ross saved - men who are alive today only because Ross chose to die for them.

The speakers who preceded his father had spoken of the debt, the debt we all owe to Ross and those who sacrifice for our lives and our freedoms. His father had prepared remarks, but before reading them, sensing the burden the four men must carry, he spoke directly to those four men.

He said, and I quote from him, "Something that was said just a few minutes ago made me think, when it was said that Ross gave these four men a gift. That's what it was. [You] can't be expected to live the rest of your lives living up to something, or paying back something. It can't be carried as a debt. A debt is something you can repay. A gift is something for you to enjoy. So live your lives, enjoy your lives, because it was a gift."

After the Civil War, General Joshua Chamberlain, who shares a Medal of Honor with Ross, wrote about character. He wrote that "Character is formed in the silent and peaceful years, by the mother's knee and the father's side."

In Ross' father's magnanimous and liberating words, his personal gift to Ross' battle buddies, his family's second gift, you get a glimpse of the spirit of the man who raised Ross, and a glimpse into Ross' heart that his father helped mold - the heart of an American Soldier - a volunteer - who lay down his life for his friends.

At age 17, Ross said, "send me." That 1 percent factor - it tells you a lot.

Thank you.