

9/11 Memorial
COB Speicher
LTG Robert L. Caslen

"Speech as delivered at COB Speicher, Iraq in September 2009 by then Maj. Gen. Robert L. Caslen while commanding the 25th Infantry Division (Light) and the Multi-National Division - North, during Operation Iraqi

Throughout our history, certain images become engrained in our minds- the flag raising at Iwo Jima; the day President Kennedy was killed; Neil Armstrong stepping on the moon; President Reagan telling the Soviets to "tear down this wall."

But for all of us, the events of September 11, 2001 will forever live in our memories.

We shall never forget the images of planes flying into the World Trade Center or the smoke rising from the Pentagon. We shall never forget the courage and compassion of the New York

City firemen and other men and women racing into burning buildings to save the innocent or those heroes who died in a Pennsylvania field.

The days following the attack brought even more memories.

We shall never forget the image of a boy leaving flowers outside the American embassy in Moscow. We shall never forget the candlelight vigils held in India and Bangladesh.

Thousands of Germans marched at Brandenburg Gate. One hundred thousand Canadians gathered in Ottawa. Jordanian women gathered to pray – all sharing in our sorrow.

There is no doubt that the horrific acts of a few were surpassed by the heroic acts of many. All Sailors, Marines, Soldiers, Airmen and Coastguardsmen continue to perform daily acts of heroism in response to the attacks. But the legacy of that September day lies in the worldwide embrace of freedom that followed.

Today we recall, and we celebrate, what we learned about ourselves on September 11, 2001. We recall and celebrate, how

we acted that day. We remember once again how ordinary human beings, living their ordinary lives, reacted with extraordinary heroism when – without warning and in an instant – they were thrown face-to-face with the most fundamental questions of human existence.

On September 11, 8 years ago, we saw ordinary people choose duty in the face of death, as the security guards in the Trade Center continued to help people out even as the buildings were collapsing around them. On September 11, we saw loyalty to friends overwhelm all sense of danger, as the New York City firefighters searched tirelessly for their own. Eight years ago today, we saw ordinary people choose self-sacrifice for the good of strangers, as the passengers on the plane over Pennsylvania refused to allow the hijackers to succeed. On September 11, 2001, we saw ordinary people choosing to spend their final moments expressing their love to their families.

Today, millions of people from nations around the world stand united behind one ideal – that the destructive agendas of radical extremists shall never eclipse the light of liberty.

We gathered here to remember, to console and pray. To remember comrades and colleagues, friends and family members – those lost to us on September 11th.

We remember them as heroes. And we are right to do so. They died because – in words of justification offered by their attackers – they were Americans. They died, then, because of how they lived – as free men and women, proud of their freedom, proud of their country and proud of their country's cause – the cause of human freedom.

Those who worked in the Pentagon on 9/11 – whether civilians or in uniform, - side by side they sought not to rule, but to serve. They sought not to oppress, but to liberate. They sought not to take lives, but to protect them. And they sought not to preempt God, but see to it His creatures lived as he intended – in the light and dignity of human freedom.

Our task then is to remember the fallen as they were – as they would have wanted to be remembered – living in freedom, blessed by it, proud of it and willing – like so many others before them, and like so many today, to die for it.

And to remember them as believers in the heroic ideal for which this nation stands and for which this building exists – the ideal of service to country and to others.

Beyond all this, their deaths remind us of a new kind of evil, the evil of a threat and menace to which this nation and the world has now fully awakened.

As General Casey said when he took the reigns as our new Chief of Staff of the Army ... “We are locked in a war against a global extremist network that is fixed on defeating the United States and destroying our way of life. This foe will not go away nor will they give up easily, and the next decade will likely be one of persistent conflict. At stake are the power of our values and our civilization, exemplified by the promise of America, to confront and defeat the menace of extremist terrorists. At stake is whether

the authority of those who treasure the rights of free individuals will stand firm against the ruthless and pitiless men who wantonly slay the defenseless. At stake is whether the future will be framed by the individual freedoms we hold so dear or dominated by a demented form of extremism. At stake is whether we will continue to expand freedom, opportunity, and decency for the those who thirst for it, or let fall the darkness of extremism and terror.”

You all are members of this new, proud 9/11 generation – a generation that saw your country attacked and internalized the fact that our very way of life is now threatened because of this. Each of you came from a different background, drawn to serve your country and our way of life for many different reasons, but you are all bound together through this shared bond. You’ve seen it up close and personal. You’ve lost brothers and sisters, friends dearer to you even than family. Brothers and sisters who have paid the ultimate price in sacrifice for our country. You are living history – the history of war, and the ethics of war. This Global War on terrorism is in your face every day. But as I’ve watched you

this past year and before, you have never quenched, nor waived, never faltered – you quietly count yourself among the generations that have gone before you to place yourself in the gap between this evil and our way of life.

The fact that you chose the path that you are on right now truly makes you the best our country has to offer. The best are not necessarily in the corporate boardrooms – don't ever think that the people running our corporations have anything on you. You are privileged to have the one advantage that all of them covet ... that you will know many of life's truths – you'll know about the going on in Iraq and Afghanistan, and many other places.

You've seen the smiles of Iraqi's having the chance to vote, or to make a simple choice, of children receiving 21st Century medical care or going to school for the first time in their lives. You've seen more in the last few years than many will in a lifetime, and because of this you know some of life's hard truths and some of the purest devotions. You will never have to guess.

History will gloriously record your service and your sacrifice to our country. I know you understand the consequences, and you have no idea of the honor it is for an old guy like me to stand among your ranks and consider you brothers and sisters in arms.

To the families and friends of our fallen fellow Americans of 9/11 – as well as our colleagues and comrades here in Iraq and Afghanistan – we extend today our deepest sympathy and condolences.

We pray that God will give some share of the peace that now belongs to those we lost, to those who knew and loved them in this life.

But as we remember together we are also thankful – thankful for their lives, thankful for the time we had with them. And proud too – as proud as they were – that they lived their lives as Americans.

We are mindful too – and resolute that their deaths, like their lives, shall have meaning. And that the noble birthright of human freedom – a birthright that was theirs as Americans and for which

they died – will always be ours and also of our children's. and through our efforts and example, one day, the birthright of every man, woman, and child on earth.

For years to come, Americans will gather on this day to memorialize those lost in the tragic events of 9/11. Americans will gather, on this very day, and recall the horrors inflicted by those who would see us, and our way of life, end. Years from now, when you and I are far past our primes, Americans will come together and remind themselves of the evil that still exists in the world. But above all of this, Americans will remember the true legacy of 9/11: that self-sacrifice exists in this nation despite what our enemies and detractors say. That values such as duty, honor, country still hold strong places in our national conscience. And that love – of family, of country, and of humankind – remain foremost in our minds, but more importantly our hearts. This is the true lesson and legacy of September 11. We are duty bound to remember it.

So let us resolve again, to stand together as we have before, to recommit ourselves to the principles that have made our Nation free and to the values that made our military what it is today.

Hanging in my office is a picture of the Pentagon early in the morning of 9/11 that my close friend and colleague took with his personal camera. It was taken right after the building collapsed. And right where the building collapsed is a Marine general's office. And inside the office, right on the edge of the collapse, is still standing the American flag. You couldn't find it unless you look for it, but when you see it, it is indelibly there.

Unbeknownst to my friend when he took the picture is a ray of sunlight shining on our Nation's flag still standing. It was a cloudy day that day, but when he took the picture, the clouds opened, and the sun shown – just for a second – on our country's symbol of hope, strength, solidarity, and honor.

It is an amazing, and the next time you're in my office, let me show it to you. But wherever I'm stationed, I bring it with me to remember – to remember the tremendous sacrifice that was given

that day, to remember our nation's treasure – our very sons and daughters – that were forever lost that day, to remember the greatness of our Nation and not only how she responded on 9/11, but over the last 8 years, to remember this incredible 9/11 generation that has shouldered the security of our nation again and again and again and gladly continues to do so, and mostly to remember God's grace and His sovereignty ... and my He always shed His grace on thee.