

Lieutenant General H Steven Blum

Chief, National Guard Bureau Speech from 126th NGAUS General Conference

Wednesday, September 15, 2004

Thank you. Good morning. What a great conference. First, I think we need to give our Nevada host, Major General Giles Vanderhoof and Linda and their joint team a big round of applause for the great job they're doing.

Ladies and gentlemen, fellow soldiers, Airmen, general officers, families, and friends of the National Guard, I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you. Today, we are a National Guard that is serving a nation that is at war. I ask you to join me in a moment of silence and reflection as we honor the memories of the 126 as of today Army and Air Guard citizen soldiers and Airmen who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our great nation, and we remember those Guard members who have been wounded, some in severe life altering ways. Please join me in a moment of silence.

To their friends and their families, we offer our thoughts and prayers, our admiration and support, our undying gratitude. They will always be missed. They will never be forgotten. Thank you.

As we gather here today in Las Vegas, more than a hundred and twenty thousand Guardsmen and women are answering the call to colors. As painful and terrible as war can be, our nation should never go to war any time, any place for any reason without calling out the Guard.

When you call out the Guard, you call out all of America. The Guard brings the American people to the fight, and when that happens no one can defeat America.

The range of operations being simultaneously conducted around the world today is truly awesome, from tough and deadly joint multinational Ph.D level warfare, close quarters combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, peacekeeping in Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Sinai, to performing state partnerships with 45 sovereign nations as part of four combatant commands inter-security cooperation efforts, and terrorism support to local, state, and Federal officials --

And the combatant commanders outside the United States, all the while supporting the lead Federal agencies and the United States Northern Command for national special security events, and assignment to operations over the United States seven days a week, 365 days a year, since the 11th of September 2001. And the last line of defense from an airborne threat to our nation's capital and the White House itself is a lone citizen soldier

air defender standing ready. It is your National Guard that is manning the crews that will provide our nation with its first capability to be able to defend against inter-continental missile attacks and providing homeland defense and support for homeland security operations in every state, the territories, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia, and still the Guard provided disaster response in support of every single governor's call for assistance in the wake of floods, hurricanes, forest fires, blizzards, and tornadoes.

Your National Guard did not walk away from a single domestic program either. Starbase, About Face, Drug Demand Reduction, and Challenge continue to operate. That is a full-spectrum force by any measure. You should be rightfully proud.

That's a full-spectrum force. That is a ready force. That is a flexible, engaged, reliable. It is the essential force that is you, each and every one of you that knows you represent the modern National Guard.

Three years ago this week, the world as we knew it changed forever. Buildings were destroyed. Lives were shattered. The quiet American peace was broken. America called on its Guard when it needed help, to defend her, to protect her in the early hours following days of incredible need. Perhaps this country needed the Guard more than than at any other time in the nation's history. And just as we continue to do today, the Guard answered every call, met every challenge, accomplished every single mission it was given.

Our elected and appointed leaders in and out of uniform presented us, the modern Minutemen and women with new challenges to ensure that this nation was prepared for the new century. We needed to embrace homeland defense as mission one. We needed to be prepared to respond in the Minuteman tradition in a joint environment, ready for both the scheduled homeland defense in depth away game and the unscheduled home game, to be prepared to simultaneously and effectively operate in either the home game or the away game across the full spectrum of operations. That means from operations other than war all the way to the high-end, full-scale combat overseas, to transform, to be more capable, to be better trained, to be ready, more agile, more accessible to both the Department of Defense, and the governors and states, to meet the needs of our states and our nation in the Federal war fight in homeland defense for homeland security and our vital state missions.

We needed to rebalance our forces to ensure we had the right capabilities in the right numbers in the right places for both the home and the away game. And we had to be capable of employing operational force. We had to be a joint and expeditionary operational force rather than being relegated and under resourced as we were in the former Cold War status, a strategic reserve.

When we met last year in Biloxi, I presented you with our shared vision to attain what I felt to be the proper future for the National Guard. One year ago, they were words; they were concepts, ideas, a road map to our way ahead.

One short year later, I am proud to report to you that once what was merely a briefing a short year ago today is a reality and represents a national capability on a grand scale.

Because of you, the dedication, commitment, and sheer determination of the National Guard leadership, from the very top to the very bottom, have produced an incredible national success and have made a huge contribution to the national security capabilities of our nation for both the home or the away game.

The support of the governors, your governors, the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the combatant commanders, the service secretaries, and their chiefs of state was critical, significantly contributing to the success that your National Guard has been able to achieve. In a little more than one year, we've been able to transform the way we think, the way we approach problem solving and innovation and the way we operate. We have transformed the National Guard Bureau to be a truly joint organization. We are operating on a daily basis with Northern Command, Specific Command, Strategic Command on homeland defense and homeland security issues. We are actively engaged with every other combatant commander, the joint staff, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

Every single state here today has a standing joint force headquarters. Every state and territory operates in joint configuration. All states are integrated on both the interagency and the intergovernmental level.

As we meet here today, all headquarters are operational, 24/7 around the clock. In the last few weeks, the incredible value of your efforts has born huge dividends, supporting the recent special security events, the G-8 Summit, in Georgia, the Democratic --

Georgia you have a right to applause. No question about it. The Democratic National Convention in Massachusetts and the Republican National Convention in New York.

For these events, the Secretary of Defense approved a first ever command construct. For the first time in history, a National Guard officer was placed in charge of all of the forces. State active duty forces, Title 32 Army and Air Guard forces, and Army, Marine, Navy, Air Force Title 10 active duty forces, as well as the Coast Guard, were under a single National Guard Joint Forces Command.

Your performance at each of these Special Security Events has proven just how right and how appropriate the Secretary of Defense's decision actually was. The effectiveness of the Joint Force Headquarters has been proven in the face of incredible challenges. During major storms, currently afflicting the southern part of our country, and many other operational state missions elsewhere.

None of this would have been possible had you not enthusiastically embraced transformation and moved out fielding your state joint force headquarters. You didn't even wait for instructions. You didn't even wait for the details. I'm immensely proud of

the innovation and the vision shown by the Guard leadership around the country. You have successfully fielded 32 civil support teams and are in the process of fielding an additional 12. It is clear that within a year, every state and territory will have a civil support team.

The Civil Support Teams, at the request of civil authorities, will deploy, detect, advise local authorities on managing the effects of a weapon of mass destruction attack in order to minimize the impact on the civilian populace. You do this every single day, the 32 of you that have them and you know their value.

Your Civil Support Teams have been crucial and decisive contributors to public order, stability of government, and maintaining public confidence in this nation's preparedness to handle that awesome responsibility. The timely and effective response of these teams to the needs of the emergency response community has resulted in your acceptance as being the first military responders of this nation.

You might like to know that the Arizona civil support team is operating here today. They're right behind us, about a hundred feet behind this curtain. It makes me feel a lot safer. I don't know about you.

You make a difference in America every single day. At the request of the United States Northern Command, we have developed and fielded 12 chemical, biological, radiological, and high-yield conventional explosive enhanced force packages. We call them CBRFs. It's a lot easier to say. These CBRFs response to weapons of mass destruction requirements. They provide regional response capabilities, comprised of existing traditional Army and Air National Guard units jointly organized to rapidly respond to weapons of mass destruction incidents by performing mass casualty treatment, patient decontamination, assisting with medical response, and providing a security element. The Marines and the Army have certified 11 of our 12 CBRPs to be fully operational, and Hawaii will be certified next month.

In less than a year, we went from zero capability beyond CBRF to having essentially 13 CBRFs to protect this nation. Thank you, National Guard. You did that.

And you took that on, in addition to everything else I listed we were doing, and a few other things we were doing at the same time. We are a flexible force. In the months ahead, additional Guard engineer personnel will also receive equipment and training to be able to locate and extract victims from the contaminated environment. The power of the SRPs is that we did not create any new units. Rather, we leveraged existing war fighting capabilities end use, modified existing mission essential task lists, and provided modest additional equipment and training. These regional assets significantly add to our national weapons of mass destruction incident preparedness. They are fully deployed throughout the United States and available to the nation 24 hours a day. Additionally, and most importantly, these are deployable capabilities fully available to any of the combatant commanders, using the same approach. Every state has developed rapid and quick reaction forces. They provide every state with a ready combat, ready arms force, capable

of delivering at the request of the governor or the Adjutant General or the President, if necessary, a company sized unit in less than four hours and the remainder of the battalion in less than 24 hours. These reaction forces can help local and state law enforcement agencies by protecting these sites, such as power plants, transportation hubs, and establishing road blocks or securing weapons of mass destruction incident sites. The reaction forces are a very critical element of the first line of counter-terrorism defense and deterrence for this nation.

For those of you that have not noticed, the Nevada Rapid Reaction Forces are the ones that have made this meeting secure.

The bottom line: America is a safer place because of your dedicated hard work and efforts, and I salute you for it. The poet describing Paul Revere's ride got it right about the fundamental importance of communications to homeland defense. One if by land. Two if by sea. I on the opposite shore will be ready to ride and spread the alarm through every Middlesex village and farm for the country folk to be up and to arm.

While technology has changed, the critical importance of communication remains paramount for effective homeland defense and homeland security operations. In the past months, we have methodically established something called a Joint CONUS Communications Support Environment, JCCSC. This has been throughout the National Guard. It is Paul Revere's 21st century lantern. Every state joint force headquarters has established a secure and a non-secure real-time operational network linking in those critical communications. In addition, we have added secure VTC capabilities in each state and territory. Each of these communications capabilities are critically essential elements of providing a common operating picture to local, state, or Federal agencies.

To put a finer point on it, the National Guard has transformed to meet the needs of the next century. While others were talking about it, we are doing it. We have rebalanced our forces and continue to do so so that we can better care for our people and better manage our deployments, and we have leveraged our forces to insure we have the maximum capabilities to successfully accomplish mission one. That is homeland defense.

We've done all of this. No, you have done all of this, while fully engaged in a world wide fight against a Global War on Terrorism. The transformation I have just described would not have been possible without the support of the Adjutants General and the State Joint Force headquarters. So, I want to take a moment and recognize some absolutely stellar performers. What I'm presenting right now is a first ever award, the National Guard Distinguished Unit Service Award. It will be awarded to Georgia.

Massachusetts. New York. Alaska. Colorado. Florida -- for using their joint force headquarters to make historic and to precedent setting contributions to national security and homeland defense. Let's honor these great award recipients.

While they're walking off to the Joint Force Headquarters of California,

Hawaii, Illinois, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington, West Virginia, Georgia, Massachusetts, New York, and Colorado. You were the first states to field National Guard SRPs. For that I want to present a Minuteman statue, which I think best symbolizes what we're all about and represents the deterrence and response that you represent and the capability you bring to defend this nation.

You've got to love them. All right. Let me get a little serious here for a moment as we close this thing out. As you can see, by my hair supply, I've been around for a little while. I've served in the National Guard about 38 years, most of my adult life. I am and have always been proud of my service in the National Guard, proud of the soldiers, marines, sailors, airmen and coast guardsmen with whom I've had the privilege to serve over 38 years. For 367 years, the Guard has been an all volunteer force. Think about what that means. And service in the National Guard during every one of those 367 years has always been honorable. But I must tell you, I've never been more proud to be a Guardsman at any other time than I am today.

I know you all feel the same way or we wouldn't have had that response. We are all humbled and awestruck by the incredible young men and women we meet. They are the finest group of selfless human beings any of us have ever known. They are always ready, and whenever and wherever they are needed, they are always there. They have proven themselves second to none and equal to any challenge.

Their valor in combat and their indomitable spirits are nothing less than daunting. Their love for and dedication to their fellow soldiers and airmen and their family is like nothing any of us have ever seen. Their love of state and nation is unequalled in our experience. I consider it the highest honor and greatest privilege to serve as the Chief of the National Guard Bureau alongside the next greatest generation.

For those of you that are friends of the Guard and not serving, America sleep well tonight. America's 21st Century Minutemen and women are always ready, always there.

I couldn't say it any better than what I'm about to show you. Two National Guard non-commissioned officers, out of some high-priced production studio, have produced a short video that best shows what our magnificent 21st Century Minutemen and women, America's joint home team, have done in action all around the globe. Every face you'll see, every piece of equipment in this video, is your National Guard. Thank you. God bless the National Guard and God bless America. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you.