

Gen. Dempsey Assumption of Responsibility Ceremony remarks

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April 11, 2011 -- I noticed the groom's side is a lot quieter than the bride's side over here. Let's see if we can pick it up a notch. Thank you all for being here today to welcome the Dempsey family back to Washington DC.

I do want to start by saying how much Deanie and I regret that George and Sheila Casey are not here today with us. The 36th Chief of Staff and Sheila have been mentors, role models, and friends to us. As you all know, the Casey's are fighting through a very deep tragic personal loss. But it won't surprise you to know that the way in which they are fighting through it is as inspirational as the way in which they have led our Army with great strength, with great dignity and with great resolve. As my first official act as the Chief of Staff of the United States Army, I applaud and celebrate the service of George and Sheila Casey. Through their 41 years of service, they have ensured that our Army remained the most capable fighting force on the planet. God Bless them.

Thanks to all of you who planned, rehearsed, reorganized, planned again, scaled up, scaled back, re-planned, rehearsed, reorganized and finally executed this ceremony today. If that's not an example of an adaptive Army, what is? Let's give the people who put this thing together a round of applause.

I am always inspired by the sight on the field of the famous 3rd Infantry Regiment the Old Guard. And I'd like to dispel any rumors right from the beginning of my tenure that I intend to rename it Dempsey's own. At least not for now.

I want to note that this is the fourth ceremony at which our esteemed Secretary of Defense, Dr. Robert Gates, has been present as I have either taken or relinquished command. Now I'm not sure what it means that I've changed jobs four times, and that in that time, you've remained in one job. It seems that one of us can't hold a job and the other can't seem to shake his! What I do know is that the Nation is blessed by your service, and I am excited to be back among your circle of advisors. I feel the same kinship and loyalty to our Secretary of the Army, John McHugh. Challenging times require tireless, dedicated and visionary leaders, and Secretary McHugh is every bit of that and more. Mr. Secretary, I'm proud to be on your team.

I want to give a shout out to that rough looking bunch over there are my classmates of the Class of 1974 from West Point.

That explains why they were noisy here. Almost 40 years ago, we chose as our class motto “Pride of the Corps,” and in doing so, we set a very high standard for ourselves in the service of our country. I just couldn’t be more proud of what our class has accomplished. We are business, medical, academic, governmental and military leaders. We care about America. Your presence here today is a testament to your love and support of our Army and its Soldiers. Well done Class of 74. But I do want to encourage my security detail to keep an eye on them since they are children of the 60’s and have a reputation as a rather mischievous bunch.

I note with great joy the presence here today of many of our international friends and partners. I’ll mention two in particular: General Sir Peter Wall, my counterpart from Great Britain, and General Babakir al Zabari, my counterpart from Iraq. Thank all of our international partners for what you do to help us promote our common interests.

As I stood at the shelter behind us preparing for the ceremony, I saw a parade of former and current mentors. I saw friends and colleagues. I can’t possibly mention them all, but I will tell you this: I am very well aware that it is on your shoulders that I stand here today. So thank you all for what you’ve done.

To the members of my family, especially the kids: Chris, Julie, Megan, Kory, Caity and Shane, who is currently deployed in Africa, and to the grandkids: Kayla, MacKenna, Luke and several players to be named later, thank you for your love and support through the years and for celebrating this day with us. I think the Army is especially blessed by its new First Lady, Deanie, and I’ll have more to say about that in just a moment.

You know, events such as these seem to me to be best captured in images, not necessarily words. I imagine my Grandmother Bridget, a 16 year old Irish immigrant, widowed mother of three in her early 40’s, janitress of a small public school in Bayonne, New Jersey. I imagine her bragging to Saint Peter that her oldest grandchild is the Chief of Staff of the United States Army. I have no doubt she’s up there doing that. I imagine my mother Sarah, who’s seated down here, the unassuming and saintly matriarch of the Dempsey family, quietly remembering that were it not for her insistence, I would never have gone to West Point in that tumultuous summer of 1970. I imagine what it must have been like for my father-in-law and mother-in-law, Tom and Marge Sullivan, who are also here with us, to give their daughter to a young, idealistic Calvary Officer headed off to Cold War Europe. By the way, they joined us here today despite the fact that my father-in-law is in the middle of cancer treatments. Now that’s Army Strong!

I now have new images in my life. Each morning in our quarters I walk past the images of my predecessors as Chief of Staff: Pershing, MacArthur, Marshall, Eisenhower, Abrams, Sullivan, Shinseki. I step out on my porch and I see the symbols of our nation: the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument and the Capitol. And then on the way to the Pentagon I drive past row after row after row of those who have fallen in the service of our nation, including hundreds who have fallen while under my command in Iraq and Afghanistan.

These images are almost overwhelming. I say almost because I know that inside this great Army are hundreds of thousands of Soldiers, Leaders and Families - Active, Guard and Reserve - on whom I can always rely to do what's right. I say almost overwhelming because I am joining a team of Joint Chiefs who are equally dedicated to protecting America and promoting our values. I say almost overwhelming because we are teamed with scores of dedicated civilians who share a passion for the nation and for its Army.

You know, sometimes life is just about starting a journey based on faith. I have faith that we have a team that will figure "it" out, whatever "it" becomes. To paraphrase one of our great poets, Maya Angelou, "I have many rainbows in my clouds of doubt."

To my high school sweetheart Deanie, the most beautiful and beaming rainbow in my life, thank you for accepting yet another adventure. I know I asked you to stick with me just through Battalion Command, but I think we both knew that walking away from the Army that we both love was never really in the cards as long as the Army still wanted us around. I look forward to sharing this experience with you over the next four years. To the care of your three kids, your three grandkids, and one really maintenance-heavy husband, I now add about three million Soldiers and Family members for you to be concerned about. And I have absolutely no doubt you'll live up to that task.

Now as an Irishman, I tend to be a little superstitious. I know that surprises some of you. So I often research the history of the date on which I am about to give some remarks.

On this day in 1814, Napoleon Bonaparte abdicated his throne and was subsequently banished to the Isle of Elba. On this date in 1951, President Truman relieved General Douglas MacArthur of his command of U.S. Forces in Korea. On April 11 1962, the New York Mets lost their inaugural baseball game and went on to lose 120 games out of 160. Sorry, Pop. I am hoping that I can turn the tide on this April 11th thing.

You should know that I've always considered service in the Army a privilege. And that privilege is even more pronounced and more evident when our very way of life has been challenged as it has been

these past ten years. I stand before you today with confidence that whatever challenges confront us in the future, your Army will respond with the same courage and resolve with which it has responded over the past 235 years.

Today, our Army is in transition. This is certainly not a new phenomenon for us. We are always in transition. However, this particular transition is somewhat unique in that we have persevered through a decade of war with an all-volunteer Force. That's an incredible testament to America's Soldiers and their Families. Their resilience, their courage, and their dedication to the mission are inspirational. I, for one, several years ago, had some doubts about whether we could persevere this long with an all-volunteer Force. And there's a lesson in this for me and for you. Never underestimate the patriotism and willingness to sacrifice of this new greatest generation. They will carry us forward into the future as their predecessors have so honorably in the past. I'm humbled by their sacrifices; I'm inspired by their willingness to serve in time of war; and I'm encouraged that we have a solid foundation on which to build as we prepare our Army for future challenges.

You know, their expectations of us senior leaders are as simple as they are profound: they trust that we will provide them the resources they need to succeed in the fights in which they find themselves currently engaged. And they trust that we will have the wisdom and resolve to prepare them for the future challenges that they know surely await them.

Now, to chart a path for America's Army that preserves and builds upon our legacy, we must center our sights on who we are as an Army. Therefore, I'd like to share just a few themes that the Secretary of the Army and I have discussed on this first day of my tenure as the Chief of Staff.

We will provide whatever it takes to achieve our objectives in the current fight. We will win in an increasingly competitive learning environment. That's the domain in which we must prevail. We will develop a shared vision of our Army of 2020. We will design units and prepare Soldiers and Leaders to overmatch their adversaries. We will master our fundamentals and develop deep global expertise. We'll change. Change is inevitable, but when we change, we'll change to contribute to the versatility and relevance of the nation's military instrument of power. We'll maintain a reputation as good stewards of America's resources. We'll remain connected to America. And we'll succeed in all of that because we'll reconnect, engage, empower and hold our leaders accountable.

Now between now and the Army birthday, I will engage our Army's senior military and civilian leaders, my fellow Service Chiefs and the Combatant Commanders and then publish a document that charts our way ahead, including a portfolio of initiatives intended to deliver on the themes I've just mentioned. I look forward to the collaboration and the dialogue.

Now many of you know we're involved in a campaign this year to examine ourselves as a profession. Related to that and one of the early insights of this campaign of study, is that I want to highlight an important quality, not necessarily a quality that is unique to the military, but a quality that must define us as a profession. That quality is trust. Trust between leader and led. Trust among Soldiers, leaders, Families, our wounded and our Veterans. Trust between those of us in uniform and the elected leaders whom we serve. Trust among us and our partners. Trust among the Active, and Reserve components of our Army. Trust between this institution and the American people.

My commitment and expectation of this great Army is that we will work on strengthening the bond of trust among those with whom we work, among whom we support, and among those who march with us into battle. On that foundation of trust, we will overcome any challenge that we confront in the future.

Thanks again for being here today. I'll end by quoting Benjamin Franklin. Ben Franklin said, "Well done is better than well said." So beginning right now, I'll get to work to deliver on some of these promises. God Bless America, and it's Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and their Families. Thank you very much. Army Strong!