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(El Toro, California)

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT
EL TORO MARINE BASE, CALIFORNIA

AT 8:42 P.M. PST

General Walt, General Kyle, General Quilter,
General Thrash, General Sawyer, Troopers:

Tonight, I have come to bid you God-speed as you leave -- some of you for the second time -- to defend your Nation's cause.

Your destination -- I Corps in Vietnam -- is torn and scarred tonight. More than any other stretch of territory, it is a place where the meaning of this war is clearly revealed.

The enemy, who set out nine years ago to conquer South Vietnam by force, is showing precisely what he intends in I Corps. He makes no pretense of talking about land reform, or of improving the lives of the people. He wants, instead, his neighbor's land. He believes the way to get it is at the point of a gun.

He is undertaking what he calls his "Route 9 Offensive." He plans to strike along that route and to plant his flag on the free soil of the Republic of Vietnam. Defeated in every other part of the country, he has concentrated his major effort there, with regular forces of the North Vietnamese Army. At Quang Tri -- at Hue -- at Danang -- at Khesanh -- tonight United States Marines stand squarely in the path of his plan.

Freedom's defense could not be in better hands.

The Marines in Vietnam have not only shown how bravely they can fight. They have also pioneered in an effort that has no precedent whatever in warfare. They have shown the Vietnamese people, whose lives and homes they defend, how to hope. Side by side with their allies, they have planted seeds of freedom in hundreds of villages. They have inspired new courage, new confidence, in all the people. And the people will not forget.

Now the enemy has brought new heartbreak to the land he has invaded. He has marked his path with flame and terror -- and the time of testing is still not over.

This is a decisive time in Vietnam. The eyes of the Nation and the eyes of the entire world -- the eyes of all of history itself -- are on that little, brave band of defenders who hold the pass at Khesanh and the area that is around it.

We do not doubt the outcome.

General Walt, who is here with me tonight, who has flown across the land with me today, tells me that he has walked every mile of I Corps. And General Walt believes it can be defended.

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I read that same message in your eyes.

The enemy's tide will be broken. The villages -- and the treasured city of Hue -- will be rebuilt. Freedom will survive -- because brave men like you are going there to preserve it.

You -- and the men of the Airborne to whom I spoke earlier today at Fort Bragg -- are the sons of America's best years, the best years any nation, any people, have ever known. Whatever the station from which you come, you -- and your families -- are living a life that no others have ever lived.

If there is goodness in our American life, it flows from the reality that we live in peace -- without fear of our neighbors -- without threat from aggressors -- without hating or knowing that we are hated by ancient foes.

Peace has been, and peace is, the great American blessing. It is peace that we seek to help others find so that they may live as we in America are privileged to live.

When men cry "Peace", do they not know that Americans cannot give peace to the world by ever abandoning it to aggressors? When men cry "Peace", do they not understand that we cannot keep peace for ourselves by withdrawing from the challenges that the enemies of peace present?

But nations -- like men -- are never privileged to know and never able to choose the precise moment when their destiny is determined. We can only know -- and we can only strive to answer -- the call of duty when that call comes, and the call has come tonight.

The men at Khesanh, in I Corps, need help. They have asked for it. If you were there and they were here, they would come to help you.

I have asked you to go and help them. I know you will do your duty and that you will get the job done. Our hearts and our hopes fly with you as you leave on this week end.

May God keep you safely and some day bring you -- and all with whom you stand -- to live in a nation and to live in a world that is made peaceful by the duty that you now undertake.

May God bless and keep each of you. We are proud of you. Your Nation is proud of you. And we will be prouder when you come marching home after you have done the job.

Thank each of you, and good night.

END

(AT 8:50 P.M. PST)