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W06 TOA Speech

Good morning everyone.

COL Sevier, CSM Brandt, fellow Commanders, Command Sergeant's Major and friends of Task Force Wings and Task Force Palehorse. Thank you for taking a break from your incredible work pace to attend this ceremony... a ceremony that marks the end of our year in Iraq and the beginning for 1-131 Aviation.

As I reflect back on an incredibly fast paced year, I am struck by the fact that as we assumed mission, my concerns focused on the fact that we were a very young organization... young staff, young aviators and young Soldiers. Now as I look around my formation... all walk with confidence and pride. Confident in their skills as Soldiers and pride in what our organization has accomplished. And accomplish the Soldiers and aviators did... over 27,000 hours flown, 2.5 million gallons of JP8 pumped, over 150,000 passengers flown and 30 air assaults flown in support of 3/4 BCT, 4 ID. All of this while our maintainers worked overtime allowing the flight companies the ability to launch, recover and launch again all the while maintaining an 87% FMC operational readiness rate for our aircraft and a 99% FMC operational readiness rate while accumulating over 25,000 road miles on our wheeled vehicles.

I am very proud of the Soldiers in this task force, we assumed the CORPs GS mission role and while it's not our usual air assault mission profile, it's a very noble mission—keeping Soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, civilians and our coalition partners off the dangerous roads of Iraq and undoubtedly saving lives in the process. Our mission set allowed us to participate at the strategic level of this War on Terror by transporting the Vice President of the United States, the Honorable Dick Cheney; The Secretary of State, the Honorable Condoleza Rice; The Secretary of Defense, the Honorable Donald Rumsfeld as well as numerous US Senators, Congressmen, foreign dignitaries and senior military leaders. The Wings Soldiers accomplished this, while always maintaining safe, flexible mission focus and the ability to move rapidly over Iraqi battle space. In addition to our general support mission, Task Force Wings also provided a surgical tactical air assault capability to 3/4 BCT, 4 ID. Working in close coordination with 1-8 Infantry, 1-32 Cav and 3-29 Field Artillery, Wings aviators provided this air assault capability to the ground commander and gave him the flexibility to go where the enemy least expected—again keeping Soldiers off the roads while exploiting the enemy's vulnerabilities.

As our mission winds down I would like to thank the entire Wings team; from the pilots and crewchiefs in the flight companies who endured extended flight hours, exposure to enemy fire and recently, blistering heat. To our maintainers and POL folks that literally kept our vehicles and aircraft up and running. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to extend my appreciation to all of the staff sections who worked tirelessly behind the scenes, doing the day-to-day tasks that kept this task force on track. You all performed magnificently and made the biggest challenges appear routine.

I can not say thank you enough to a very special group of people that have and continue to provide love and support to the Wings Battalion... our Rear Detachment and our Family Readiness Group. This very special team has worked tirelessly at home and has allowed us

to focus our attention forward and on the mission at hand. The Rear Detachment continued to improve the infrastructure and our battalion area while we've been deployed. They also provided critical training for new Wings Soldiers and their families prior to their deployment. Our FRG leaders and the many FRG volunteers have continued to support and take care of our families over the many months of this deployment. I can never say thank you enough... you truly are the wind beneath our wings. I am blessed to be a member of such a great organization... thanks for counting me among your ranks.

Is a year spent in Iraq worth it? I have asked myself that and suspect that others have as well. Over this past year we have witnessed and played a key role in remarkable changes in this country. The people of Iraq ratified a constitution and freely elected an interim government as well as a president. The countries "most wanted" terrorist was killed by US and Iraqi forces this last summer and countless Al-Qaieda leaders and foreign fighters have met similar fates. The sustained support of the United States Military as well as our coalition partners has been and will continue to play a crucial role as Iraq continues to establish a free and stable environment for its people. I'd say that's not bad for a year's work!

Zach, I join Command Sergeant Major Sowers and all of the Soldiers of Task Force Wings in wishing you and Command Sergeant Major Russell a safe and productive deployment. The right and left seat rides are complete, the battalion colors have changed position and Task Force Palehorse is more than ready to assume this mission. Hang on and enjoy the ride.

Wings of the Eagle

Air Assault

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