

Banquet Speech 1st Cav Reunion, Columbus, Ga. 8/11/90

{Acknowledge introduction; Salute WWII and Korean vets; salute all others that served after my time and ask the indulgence of all for speaking primarily to the First Team of my era.}

My friends, it's no idle figure of speech when I say I'm delighted to be here. It's always good to take a break from Washington- awash in drugs, its' Mayor on trial and the antics of a Disneyland Congress. I've shed about 25 of my 75 years in the last few days in again being with people that I trust and admire. Thanks for asking me to talk, but you must understand the risks of giving an old soldier a chance to tell war stories- especially when you turn him loose in an old stomping grounds as full of memories as Ft. Benning and Columbus are for me.

Certainly my memory tonight is full of images going back over the 27 years that have flown by since the 11th AAD was activated here at Ft. Benning on 15 February 1963. 27 years is quite a spell as men measure time, and some memories fade and die. But our days together here were so full of excitement, accomplishment and comradeship that they remain crystal clear to me as I'm sure they do to you. Let's recapture for a few moments some of these memories, and stroll back through memory lane. I remember:

1. Being the first and only name on the Divisions morning report
2. My box of Tentative TO/TEs which I dubbed my "do it yourself Division"
3. The dilapidated, vine infested, barracks at Harmony Church
4. Talking to all the new arrivals to explain our purpose.
5. Flying every morning at 0 Dark Thirty to qualify as a pilot
6. Old choppers like the H-34 and H-37 with lots of headaches
7. New helicopters like the Chinooks with even more headaches
8. Do you remember calling our Hook port Chinook Mobile homes?
9. Days and nights of hard training. Building teamwork from the ground up.
- 10 Rappelling, the Chinook ladder, the Air Assault Badge
- 11 The Idea Center and the endless quest for better equipment and better ways to do things.
- 12 Airmobile metrecal to strip out tons and tons of weight.
- 13 Endless visitors and endless demonstrations for them.
- 14 Key words and phrases come to mind like: An Airmobile state of mind: Imaginuity; if you can't lift it by Chinook, you're better off without it; freed from the tyranny of terrain and many more.
- 15 Testing and retesting everything, at every level, until we finally convinced all the right folks that we really had something new, different and better.
- 16 Word that we would become the 1st Cavalry Division and PS be going to Vietnam and PPS the President isn't going to declare an emergency so guess what?-you'll be losing lots of your key people just as you're preparing for war.
- 17 Dyeing our underwear and field clothes till the Chatahoochee and the Upatoi ran green.

- 18 Our other preparations for Vietnam-- were'nt Conex containers great? Briefings by people billed as experts on Vietnam, for example the lectures on Guerrilla Warfare (JOKE- Identifying VC by the circles under their eyes).
- 19 Our move to Vietnam. The Kula Gulf incident; training at sea
- 20 Building our Base at An Khe--the justly famous Golf Course conceived by General Jack Wright and built with so much sweat.
- 21 The names of countless Fire Bases and LZs all over our enormous area of responsibility. An area whose size was many time larger than that ever assigned a division.
- 22 The realization that the VC and North Vietnamese were tough, crafty opponents, but that we were more than a match for them.
- 23 The sense of loss when our friends were wounded or killed.
- 24 The sense of exhilaration of a splendid unit performing marvelously as a fighting team under extremely tough conditions.

I, and I'm sure you also, could add many,many more flashbacks of memories, and each of these remembered images could be a full subject for a talk longer than this one will be. But such reminiscence is best done one on one or in a bull sessions. Instead, I want to give you a somewhat more structured overview of the why and the how of our efforts. With that in mind I'll touch briefly on these points:

1. What were we asked to do ?
2. How tough or easy was our assignment ?
3. How did we approach our job ?
4. How well did we do ?
5. What came of our efforts ?

And I hope to stop talking before you stop listening.

So to the first point, What was it the Army wanted us to do? From balloons in the Civil war to the mighty aerial armadas of the Army Air Corp of WWII the Army had always been interested in using machines that can leave the ground to improve ground combat. But in 1947 the Army Air Force became a separate service, the United States Air Force and flew off into the wild blue yonder leaving the army with a few tiny fixed wing observation planes used mostly for spotting artillery fire. But there was considerable conceptual thinking about aviation going on in the Army and also the helicopter was slowly ,but surely coming of age with advent of turbine engines and a myriad of evolutionary improvements. The Korean war had shown some interesting possibilities for helicopters in ground combat and forward looking people in the Army were constantly experimenting with new, different ways to employ helicopters such as attaching weapons to them as aerial fire platforms. But all of the Army thinking and experimentation prior to the 1960s envisioned aircraft simply as add ons to the capabilities of Army units.

All this changed when Secretary of Defense McNamara challenged the Army in 1962 to take a bold new look at the use of aircraft, and the Army responded by convening a board of its' forward thinkers under General Howze.

The findings of the Howze Board were indeed new and bold and included the then revolutionary idea that there should be tested Army organizations which placed primary reliance on aircraft instead of ground based vehicles and weapons systems. Two of the three organizations proposed by the Howze Board were an Air Assault Division and an Air Transport Brigade. The Army's decision to test these two organizations was the genesis of the activation at Ft. Benning in 1963 of the 11th AAD and the 10th Air Transport Brigade. I was an Assistant Division Commander of the 101st Airborne Division at Ft. Campbell at that time and was ordered to Washington to meet with then Army Chief of Staff Wheeler. General Wheeler's words to me, almost verbatim were these: Harry, we're going to test the Howze Board concept. You're going to run the test organization. I want you to find out how far and how fast the Army can go, and should go in the direction of Airmobility. My response was a bit brief and went like this: "Yesss Sir!! "

So, in a nut shell, we were asked to determine whether Army units placing primary reliance on aircraft made sense, how they would operate and their advantages and disadvantages.

And now, going on to my second point, how tough was the task we were given? In a couple of words, "damned tough". The Howze Board had been shoved down the Army's throat by Secretary McNamara and there was plenty of resentment on the Army Staff. There were many Army officers at all levels who thought Army Aviation should remain a minor adjunct to conventional ground vehicles and weapons. The Air Force was by now fully alarmed at the Army mating dance with organic aviation and determined to stop it in its tracks. Furthermore, to resource our Division with over four times the Aviation assets of any previous Division meant that we would be draining aviation assets from throughout the Army and that never sits well with the folks whose things are being borrowed. Finally, the money gremlins figured that our kind of Division would cost at least half again as much as a conventional Division. So all in all we had a very demanding mission to be done in an environment of covert, and in some cases, open, opposition. A large, tough order.

And how did we approach our mission? I felt sure that we had been asked to do much more than simply take the organization proposed by the Howze Board out for a spin and then pronounce it good or bad. I interpreted General Wheeler's directive to me to require us to start with the Howze Board recommendations--find the problems fix those problems (or work around them) then try again -- find new problems, fix them try again and so on for as long a period as was given us. In other words we weren't just testing; we were developing as we went along to wring the very best that was in it from this new use of aircraft. I felt that such an approach could only succeed if everyone on our team thought long and hard about how to improve our operations and make them work better. That is why I spoke to every group of incoming people to explain the importance of what we were up to and the important part they could play by freeing their minds of old ideas and searching for new better ways to do things.

I coined the word imaginuity to highlight the importance of imagination and innovation and ingenuity. We opened the Idea Center with that same thought in mind and finally, I assigned specific projects to each element of our Division for them to develop. For Example 1st Brigade was to develop Rappelling and what came to be the Chinook ladder. Signal Battalion was to develop radio packages best suited to our aircraft and also to work on using jeeps for all their equipment instead of the huge trucks and vans that were in the rest of the Army. The engineers were to work on sectionalizing their equipment so that all the pieces could be transported by a Chinook. The Aviation Group had many projects such as developing better ways for flying in formation at night and so on and so on. You get the idea- everyone was asked to look at his job through new eyes to adapt it to our kind of unit and make each part work better so that the whole would be better. In summary we approached our job by unfettering our minds from the past in the same way that the Helicopter had freed our bodies from the tyranny of terrain. Of course all this unfettered thinking was not an end in itself; we trained hard as individuals, as units and as a team. And I believe our great emphasis on teamwork at every level from one Squad and one helicopter right on up through all the echelons paid tremendous dividends in combat.

Having spoken so far of what we were asked to do, how hard that was and how we approached our task I will now go on to how well we did. Let me tick off a few indicators:

1. In 1964 the 11th AAD was awarded the Grover Bell award for outstanding contributions to Helicopter Development.

2. In 1965 and part of 1966, when I had the honor to command the First Team, we received many, many commendations and awards from all levels from the Army Chief of Staff to the President of the United States. For example, after our Pleiku Campaign the Army Chief of Staff sent us a telegram which said in part, "THE ARMY AND THE NATION TAKE PRIDE IN YOUR DISPLAY OF COURAGE, DETERMINATION AND FIGHTING SKILL. THE BRAVE AND RESOLUTE PERFORMANCE OF THE 1ST CAV DIV (AM) IS IN KEEPING WITH THE FINEST TRADITIONS OF THE AMERICAN SOLDIER.

3. Secretary of Defense McNamara called our Pleiku Campaign "AN UNPARALLELLED ACHIEVEMENT" and added "UNIQUE IN ITS' VALOR AND COURAGE, THE AIR CAVALRY DIVISION HAS ESTABLISHED A RECORD WHICH WILL STAND FOR A LONG TIME FOR OTHERS TO MATCH"

4. In Sept. 1967 in the White House Rose Garden, the First Cavalry Division became the first (and in the Vietnam war the only) Division to be awarded the Presidential Unit Citation, which, by the way, is also only the fifth time in American history that an entire Division has been so recognized. These are only indicators of how well you did. The very best evidence is the way we feel about ourselves. We know beyond any doubt in our hearts that we did all that was asked of us and a great deal more.

One of our own people, General Shy Meyer summed it up beautifully in his preface to J.D. Coleman's fine book PLEIKU. General Meyer who went from Battalion commander in our Division to become a 4 Star General and the Army Chief of Staff wrote this: "THE ARMY WAS CHANGED BY GENERAL KINNARD AND HIS SKY TROOPERS--THANK GOD FOR MEN SUCH AS THESE.

As my last point I want to speak briefly of what came of our efforts. Yes, we did a difficult and important job and did it extremely well but were the things we accomplished important or in vain? I feel you can guess my answer. I feel strongly that there were important payoffs on several levels.

1. First, and maybe most important, is the way we feel about ourselves and each other--that is priceless.

2. But from a different perspective we should be proud that today's Army has embraced Airmobility; For example:

a. Army Aviation is a full fledged Combat Arms Branch

b. The 101st Air Assault Division at Ft. Campbell and the 6th Combat Assault Aviation Brigade at Ft. Hood both reflect our work and are two of the Army's finest units. It came as no surprise to me when the 101st was ordered to Saudi Arabia very early in our deployments there.

c. Every Army Division has a full Aviation Brigade which greatly enhances combat capability.

d. Recent Army operations in Grenada, and Panama, as well as Marine Operations just days ago in Liberia all placed major reliance on helicopters. And should the Iraqis be so unwise as to invade Saudi Arabia, their Armored Formations will learn to their sorrow what it is to confront helicopters such as Apaches armed with Hellfire missiles.

3. On an even higher plane, I believe that what we did in Vietnam was very important. During the many years that our national policy was Containment, it was imperative to face every Communist threat whenever and wherever it appeared. This was the case in Vietnam. I was personally very unhappy at how we fought that war and did all I could to change our approach, but even so, we did challenge Communist aggression as part of our overall policy of Containment. And the important good news is that Containment has finally paid off in a big way as the Soviet Empire dissolves day by day before our eyes. So even from a global point of view our efforts contributed to shaping what should be a safer, better world.

SUMMARY

To wind this down and by way of summary, We were given a very large order of very tough tasks to be done under very difficult circumstances. And the very difficult we did at once; the impossible took us a bit longer.

We approached our jobs with unfettered minds and the determination to do them not only well but with a touch of class.

You did all you were asked to do and much more and are recognized for the pioneers and heroes that you are.

What you did was important to our Army, to our Country and, YES, even important to our world.

I treasure every minute I ever spent with you as I treasure seeing you once again at this splendid reunion. You are ever in my heart as real wonderful people and true friends. I SALUTE YOU !!!!!

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