

JOHN C. STILL, III
Minority Leader
STATE SENATOR
Seventeenth District



SENATE
STATE OF DELAWARE
LEGISLATIVE HALL
DOVER, DELAWARE 19901

COMMITTEES
Banking
Ethics
Executive
Insurance & Elections
Legislative Council
Small Business

Guest Opinion
November 18, 2005

Contact: John Still 302-734-4448 (o)
302-736-6028 (h)
Scj564@aol.com (e)

A Senator's Journal: Giving Thanks At Home

Recently I joined 45 other participants from diverse backgrounds throughout the U.S. who were selected by the Secretary of Defense to attend the week-long Joint Civilian Orientation Conference (JCOC). This civilian program was established in 1948 to educate and expose selected groups of leaders by providing a unique opportunity to tour U.S. and overseas military bases and operations. As a member of the 70th tour (JCOC 70), I was extremely impressed with the professionalism, dedication, and talents displayed by our military personnel at each facility we visited.

Our familiarization briefing began on a Sunday night (October 16) in Washington, D.C. where we learned about the week's agenda, travel plans, and logistical and operational details. Early on Monday morning we began our tour at the Pentagon and received a very informative presentation by Mr. Gordon England, the Deputy Director of the Department of Defense and Marine Corps General Peter Pace, new Chairman of our Joint Chiefs of Staff, along with several other representatives. While there we had a chance to talk with a variety of Pentagon officials and saw the plane crash site of the 9-11 terrorists attack. While reconstruction is nearly complete and while business will never be "as usual" because of this terrorism threat, it was evident that our military will always persevere.

After visiting the Marine Base at Quantico, VA we traveled on a C-17 plane to McGuire AFB in New Jersey and departed to different locations around the world. We traveled to military facilities in several European countries such as Germany, the United Kingdom and Italy. Along the way, we had one-on-one conversations over meals or at meetings with enlisted personnel, officers, Special Forces Reps—Army Rangers, Navy Seals and Green Berets. Each military visit offered a different demonstration of other educational presentation on their equipment or training. For example, we experienced a tactical landing aboard a C-130 military plane at one facility. Later, we observed a demonstration by the 1st Armored Division that included live fire from Abrams tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles and an AH-64 Apache Helicopter. In addition, we fired live ammo from a variety of weapons (under the careful scrutiny of a trained instructor) and learned

about the advanced weaponry used by our military. Again, I witnessed the professionalism, skill, determination and positive attitude of our military—from all ranks.

One particularly memorable visit occurred at the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Ramstein, Germany where the severely wounded from Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere are taken for initial treatment to be stabilized and transported back to the U.S. Of note are the privately, charitably funded Fisher homes. They provide very affordable individual and family housing, similar to our Ronald McDonald houses; now deceased, the Fisher duo left invested trust fund monies to assist in the future capital building costs of the residential facilities to address needs of our soldiers and their visiting families.

After a 40-minute orientation, the Chief of Surgery took us on a brief walking tour of the hospital and a nearby Fisher home so we could visit with injured soldiers and chat with family members. For me, this experience was both humbling and profound! Our group observed soldiers with missing limbs, on crutches, and many in severe pain, yet each one showing professionalism, determination and that positive attitude. The images of those brave men and women with their loving families who share in their sacrifice will stay etched in my memory forever. For me to say that I am proud to be an American would be an understatement. We have paid and are paying a dear price for freedom. Thank God for our military.

On our fourth day in Europe, we observed an aerial simulation of an F-15E air attack and a KC-135 in-air refueling mission. The USAF performance was impressive. In fact, it was comparable to the C-5 cargo air refueling at Dover Air Force Base where I am privileged to participate as a 3-time “Honorary Commander”. Then, it was on to a tour of the Joint Analysis Center (JAC) at Mildenhall, UK Royal Air Force Base in another part of England. The JAC location is the original airfield that hosted the 303 Bombardment Group (H) “Hell’s Angels” during WWII.

The USS Mt. Whitney, our Joint Command Ship, pulled anchor on our last day from Naples, Italy and we spent most of the day at sea so we had an opportunity to: see static weapons displays, observe a nearby destroyer in action, and eat with enlisted Navy men and women. Our DOD and military personnel gave us every chance to have private conversations with them about their military experiences. We were free to ask questions and we did. Again, the professionalism, dedication, determination and positive attitude prevailed.

On the way home, we stopped briefly in Shannon, Ireland where we met about 300 Army personnel en route to Iraq. We shook hands with as many as possible and took the opportunity to say “Thank you for your contribution to freedom.” As they march by, their expressions were uplifting as they saluted, smiled, recognized us and said “Thank God for America”.

From this once-in-a-lifetime experience, I am compelled to share some conclusions shared by many of our attendees.

1. Each civilian attendee paid our own way and gained a tremendous and immeasurable amount of respect and admiration for our military and their families. The brave men and women who are fighting in Iraq and elsewhere around the globe keep our enemies at bay. We and our leaders must continue to show our military that we too are devoted to them, support them, and are thankful every day we are free because of them. They are our true heroes.

2. While we are not proponents of war but are proponents of peace, we fully recognize that we are at war, against a new brand of enemy, insurgents and terrorists worldwide. We can no longer do “business as usual”, and we must fight for freedom and democracy. Our military and we, as Americans, must continue to fight to preserve our democratic heritage and freedoms. It’s the American way!

3. The officers and enlisted military display excellent morale. They are proud to serve their country, and they sincerely appreciate what we do for them. We observed first-hand the increasing joint collaboration between all branches of the military—it was impressive. Discussions with officers and enlisted personnel lead many of us to believe that there is a growing groundswell of support from the Iraqi people, and it becoming more positive every day towards the American people and our military.

4. We are thankful every day for our freedom, for being American, for having skilled, determined, and brave military personnel serving us so faithfully around the world. Democracy will prevail.

May God Bless America and our military everywhere, and when you break bread over this year’s holidays, please say prayers for our soldiers.

For more information on how to support our troops, please visit:
www.AmericaSupportsYou.mil