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6:00 P.M. (EDT)

MAY 14, 1976

Office of the White House Press Secretary
(Johnson City, Tennessee)

THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
TO BE DELIVERED AT AN ARMED FORCES DAY DINNER
GALT HOUSE HOTEL, LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

I am proud to be here in Louisville this evening to address the Armed Forces Committee and their friends. It is a privilege to address this distinguished group of fine Americans--citizens who are vitally interested, as I am, in the defense of this country. The first person to address this distinguished organization at its first Armed Forces Day banquet in 1919, was one of America's great military leaders, General John J. Pershing.

Pershing spoke after the end of World War I--a war that had found America unprepared. Pershing knew what it meant to go to war unprepared. He had seen for himself the terrible price it had cost in American blood, spilled in the trenches and hedgerows of France.

Like any military commander, Pershing wanted his forces fighting together, as a single American unit--but at first he was forced to split off some of his divisions to fight alongside the British and French forces. And why was that? One very important reason was that the American expeditionary force had no tanks, and in 1917 tanks were rapidly changing the nature of the battlefield. Tanks were the decisive punch in any attack.

Our fighting forces have come a long way since then. Speaking here tonight, not thirty miles from the armor center of the United States Army at Fort Knox, let me say tanks today are a critical element of American ground combat power. As we saw in the 1973 Middle East war, the tank plays a central role in ground combat.

And as part of our budget for fiscal year 1977, we are going to make sure that American soldiers have nothing but the best in this crucial area. That budget calls for the purchase of better than thirty percent more tanks than the budget for fiscal 1975. And we are now testing advanced new tanks, to select the very best that can be provided to the American soldier.

We can also look with confidence to our substantial arsenal of the world's most effective anti-tank systems, both air and ground. American technology and skills have made us the foundation of the free world's military might.

As I noted earlier this week at the opening of Armed Forces Week at the Washington Monument: We have laid the keel for the first of a series of new missile launching submarines, the Trident Missile fleet, which will be the foundation for a strong and technologically superior force through the 1980's.

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-- We are developing new fighters, a new Intercontinental Ballistic Missile for the 1980s, and a new cruise missile for our air and naval forces.

I went on to say that we owe our soldiers and sailors and marines and airmen the finest tools this country can provide.

That goes for all the members of our total force, both active and reserve components. The National Guard and reserve forces are a great part of America's fighting team. And I intend to continue improving the combat power and the readiness of that force.

Within the last two hours I signed into law a bill making our National Guard and reserve units an even more significant part of our total force. Until today, it took a national emergency or an act of Congress to put the reserves into action. Under this new law, the President will be able to mobilize up to 50,000 of the selected reserve for up to 90 days.

Of course we all hope that such an order will never have to be given. But if it is, we can now count on the effective deployment of a significant number of reservists to defend our national interest.

This means our reserve and National Guard are being given increased responsibility, and greater importance in our total force. So it is more important than ever that they be equipped and treated as first-class soldiers, and Secretary Rumsfeld and I are going to see they get the advanced equipment they deserve.

I was glad to hear that the Kentucky Air National Guard has just replaced their outdated R-F 101s with one of our most modern reconnaissance fighters, the R-F-4-C. This is just the type of improvement we are aiming to achieve.

Organizations such as those represented in this room tonight -- the 100th Army Reserve Division, the Kentucky Air National Guard, the Retired Officers' Association, and the Reserve Officers Training Corps -- are part of a great fighting team that deserves America's support.

Throughout our history, America has shown its ability to raise great fighting forces on short notice. In World War One, for example, within 18 months, General Pershing was able to produce an army two million strong, that decisively defeated troops hardened by four years of war. In fact, the speed at which America has mobilized has been matched only by the speed with which America dismantled much of its military establishment time and time again -- leaving us ill-prepared for the next threat to our freedom. America today can no longer afford to rely on this roller-coaster approach to our national defense.

The awesome speed and technology of modern warfare mean we would not have 18 months -- or even 18 days -- to prepare our own defense.

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If we are forced to fight again, the next war is likely to be "come-as-you-are." We are strong today. We are well prepared to deter war -- but if deterrence should fail, we are well prepared to control the conflict and avoid nuclear confrontation. Our job now is to make sure that America remains strong. And I promise you, we will.

In my budgets for fiscal years 1976 to 1977, I have already taken steps to arrest the downward trend in American military spending for which the Congress must bear responsibility. That trend in the Congress has reduced the defense share of our Federal budget to its lowest level since fiscal year 1940 -- and the lowest share of our gross national product since before the Korean War.

This has come to pass for one reason -- because the Congress, over the last decade, has reduced the defense budget proposals of three Presidents by some 45 billion dollars. I fought that trend as a Congressman for 25 years. For 14 of those years I had the privilege to serve on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense. For 14 years, for five months a year, I spent many hours each day listening to Secretaries of Defense, Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, all the Secretaries of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force, all the top Generals and Admirals. What I learned then confirmed the lesson of my wartime experience in the Navy -- the lesson that peace demands preparedness, and that weakness invites war.

And in my two years as President, I assure you I have used all that I have learned in putting together programs for national defense which produced two of the largest peacetime defense budgets in the history of the United States. I know America needs a strong national defense. We have to stay prepared. We have to keep our forces strong to keep the peace. That means having the best soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines, and giving them the finest training and the most effective equipment money can buy. That means setting a firm course for the Federal Government -- not just in the defense budget -- but in all the areas where we can help to keep America the greatest nation on earth.

President Eisenhower, when he was General of the Army, once remarked that our fighting forces are just the cutting edge of a great machine. And the inspiration and power for that machine, he said, are found in the hearts of our citizens. And the spiritual powers of a nation -- its religious faith, its self-reliance, its capacity for intelligent sacrifice -- Ike called these the most important stones in any defense structure. Our defenses are strong, not just because their cutting edge is sharp, but because America's spirit is unbeatable. America is prosperous, peaceful and proud on its 200th birthday.

All of us must do our part to see that America remains strong in every respect. And I am confident that we will do our part, and that we stand ready to meet the challenges and responsibilities of our third century.

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