

COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR CHANGE OF RESPONSIBILITY & RETIREMENT CEREMONY

**Presenter: CSM Barry Wheeler
CSM UNC/CFC/USFK and 8th United States Army**

Knight Field, 11 February 2008

Gen & Mrs. Bell, Gen Kim, Byoung Kwan & Mrs. Bae, Gen Paek, Sun Yup, LTG & Mrs. Valcourt, LTG & Mrs. Wood, CSM & Mrs. Cheon, thank you for being here today. We would especially like to acknowledge our son Brett and daughter Deanne, her husband Don, and our grandchildren, Dominique, Katie, and Jaden. Thank you for traveling all this way to share in this occasion. Our granddaughter Jenah was not able to be with us today, but we know she is here with us in spirit. Deanne, you began this journey with us 35 years ago and Brett two years later. It is befitting that you are here with us today as this chapter in our life comes to a close. All of you being here means a lot to your mother and me.

To all the other distinguished guests, friends, officers, noncommissioned officers, soldiers and civilians, thank you for coming and sharing this special day with Pat and me. You honor us both with your presence.

As always, the United Nations Command Honor Guard Company and the Eighth Army Band stand tall and sound superb. Thank you both for the pageantry, expertise and dignity you lend to every event we host here in Combined Forces Command.

Today is not about any honor owed the Wheeler's. Pat and I are the ones who owe a debt of gratitude and any honor that may be due. Forgive me for my service specific parochialism, but as for the Wheeler's; **it has always been about the American soldier, service member, and their families!**

This is a day here at Yongsan...in the Republic of Korea...which ends much like a movie, happily ever-after, the way it is supposed to end. You know the story—the young kid from a very

small town signs up, guts it through basic, goes overseas, takes charge, makes sergeant, continues to stay in because he discovers he “likes this stuff of being a soldier,” teaches a new generation, and then passes on the torch in a blaze of glory. Hollywood makes it over and over—*The Story of G.I. Joe*, *The Steel Helmet*, *Heartbreak Ridge*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *We Were Soldiers*—and is a box office hit every time. You can’t miss with that story. It’s an American story. It is the Wheeler story.

Now in the movie version, they always run the final credits with the trumpets blaring, the drums pounding, flags waving and a crowd cheering. Well, this afternoon, we have the trumpets, the drums, the flags, and we have the crowd. However, this is no movie. This has been real every step of the way! A journey that has consisted of three and one-half decades, 12,775 days, 306,600 hours, and 18,396,000 minutes of total duty to country and commitment to the American Soldier!

Our duty and commitment has always been about the American Soldier, their families, and those things we might be able to do to improve their quality of life. The Soldier and their families are what kept us motivated to continue serving. To this day, 35 years removed from my enlistment, I can remember what it was like to be that Soldier – that private E-1 standing in the formation where everyone outranked you and knew more than you did. That private who was totally dependant on the sergeant for everything – guidance, encouragement, instructions, and the plethora of various other important things – things that only the sergeant can answer and provide! To this day, I remember what it was like to be that private who did not get a vote – on anything!

This journey started 35, arguably very short, years ago. A journey where a raw, untested private was put through his paces in far away places like Fort Ord, CA and Fort Polk, LA. A raw private who, when he reported to his first duty station at Fort Hood, TX, was one of only a few who had not just returned from a little known place called Vietnam. A duty station where it was not uncommon to attend a memorial service once or twice a month due to a fellow soldier succumbing to drug abuse. A place where the sergeants were mediocre and did not know how to spell, much less enforce, standards. That experience molded me more than any other – one that shaped my

leadership style throughout my career in the Army. An experience that taught me to treat others as I would want to be treated. An experience that instilled in me to always remember what it was like to be that private and that it is not about us as leaders – it's about the Soldier!

You see, even though 35 years have transpired, there is one thing that has really not changed – the basic needs of the American Soldier. All they ask for is quality leadership. Leadership that genuinely cares about them, treats them with dignity and respect, enforces high standards, and leadership they can trust enough to go to when they have problems. The old saying “they will care when first they know you care!” Was true back in my day and continues to be true today. To the thousands of soldiers, service members, and their families with whom we have served, we say “thank you” for allowing the Wheeler's to be a part of your lives. Our only hope is that in some small way we made a difference in your's.

So, today is about the opportunity for Pat and I to express our gratitude to all of you for giving us the honor to share in your lives for the past almost three years as well as those we have served with along the way; for being allowed to serve in the United States Army for the past 35 years. Trust me, the honor has been all ours!

It is with bittersweet emotions that Pat and I leave the US Army, US Forces Korea, and the Republic of Korea. We are saddened to be leaving Korea and what has been for us a very special tour; a tour of service that has been our honor to have been blessed to serve in this incredibly great nation and to experience. A country that is unique in its culture and whose people are loving and extremely generous. One that has truly become the Wheeler's second home! We will miss tremendously the Land of the Morning Calm and the many friends we have made and those that have touched our lives along the way. To all of them, we say “thank you!”

General Bell, it has been a pleasure to serve with both you and Mrs. Bell (Katie). It seems as if we have known you and Katie for years. The Bell's are about family and you and Katie have made Pat and me feel as though we are a part of your family. Sir, you are a great commander, a true

officer, and a gentleman. You bring nothing but dignity to the position. Miss Katie, you are a true southern bell with a huge heart and beautiful smile. "SB" says he holds no grudges and loves you very much! Seriously, thank you both for allowing us to continue to serve.

LTG Valcourt and Diane – what can we say? To serve again with the two of you has been a true pleasure! As we have often discussed, there must have been divine intervention to put us together during this time and at this place. If the Army had given us a list of all eligible general officers for the position of Eighth Army Commanding General and told us we had only one choice – it would have been you! Thank you for the kindness and friendship you have shown to both Pat and me over the years. We are forever grateful.

Special thanks also go to General(r) Leon and Judy Laporte for bringing Pat and I back to the Land of the Morning Calm and for their friendship over the last decade. Thanks also to General Hondo and Diane Campbell for their caring leadership and friendship.

We have truly enjoyed serving with the great officers, noncommissioned officers, and the many service members we have met here in Combined Forces Command, US Forces Korea, and 8th Army. Great officers and their ladies like LTG Wood and Denise, MG Morgan and Debbie, MG Panter and Mary Ann, MG Sterling and Kathy, MG Weida and Bonnie, BG Aycock, and Sue, BG Trombitas and Kelly, BG Stein and Debbie, BG Lobeto and Mary, Rear Adm Rowden and Susie, BG Rodriguez, BG Perrin, and COL (p) Teeples and Sue, as well as many others too numerous to mention. Our great senior enlisted leaders and their ladies here in US Forces Korea. Leaders like CMSgt Allen and Yong, CMC Sarver and Linda, CSM Witt and Andrea, CSM Stall and Cheryl, CSM Duncan and Jackie, CMC Ellis and Elena, MSG Bauser and Jill, and the list goes on and on. What a true group of professionals and their spouses who do the hard work everyday in their efforts to improve our service member's and their families' quality of life....and without complaint. To them we say "well done!"

It has been wonderful to serve with the thousands of service members serving here in the Republic of Korea for the last three years. Each of you made us proud to serve. Everywhere you go,

you meet great service members and family members serving their country proudly and without complaint. They are the true reason we have continued to serve. Far from their loved ones, they serve everyday. They came to Korea without fleeing from their obligations. My chest fills with pride everyday here on Freedom's Frontier. To all of them we say "thank you."

It has been an honor to meet and work with all the great professional officers and noncommissioned officers in the ROK Army. Professionals such as Minister of National Defense, Kim, Jang Soo; Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, GEN Kim, Kwan Jin; ROK Army Chief of Staff, Gen Park, Hueng Yeol; Combined Forces Command Deputy Commander, Gen Kim, Byung Kwan; CFC Deputy Chief of Staff, MG Kim, Yong Ki; ROK CJCS CSM, CSM Ryu, Seong Ho; ROK Sergeant Major of the Army, Yoon, Joong Ki; CSM Cheon, Ki Chil of Combined Forces Command; CSM Kim of Third ROK Army and the many, many others and their spouses. Thank you for your friendship, warm hearts, hospitality, and for sharing your majestic country with us. You will always have a warm place in our hearts, our homes, and you will always forever be our friends.

We especially want to say thank you for the pleasure of being able to serve side-by-side and to get to know many of the over 2800 Korean soldiers that serve as KATUSA soldiers here in 8th Army. What great ambassadors they are for their country! Thank you for your service to your nation.

It has been our honor to serve with the great military and civilian workforce of US Forces Korea, both Korean and American. While too numerous to mention, they serve diligently each day in an effort to improve the living conditions of every service member here in Korea. All too often, it is without so much as a thank you. Let us be the ones today to say "thank you" on behalf of every service member assigned to US Forces Korea. To every one of you that has touched our lives, we are better people for having known you.

We would also be remiss not to mention the many, many Korean and American organizations that so strongly support our mission and service members here in the Republic of Korea. I will not mention all of them by name because they are too numerous and their support is so extensive, but

please know that Pat and I are very, very grateful for all that you do to strengthen the US-ROK alliance and for the support you give our service members and their families.

Pat and I need to give a special note of thanks to the Command Sergeant Major's office staff. SFC Winger, you were a superb operations NCO for the last 2 ½ years. You personify the saying "NCOS make it happen!" Your attention to detail was exceptional and allowed me to focus on being the Command Sergeant Major. Thanks for all the hard work; it was deeply appreciated. Continue to seek out the hard jobs and emulate the NCO creed as you progress in your career. To those who have served in my office these last, almost three, years: SFC Green, SSG Taylor, SSG Estremera, SGT Jung, SGT Lee, SGT Castillo, CPL Yi, and PVT Han: thank you for being superb soldiers and for always keeping to the task. SSG Taylor, thank you for your attention to detail. You have a huge heart full of compassion! Sgt Jung, you are an exceptional human being and both Pat and I wish you the best of luck as you transition out of the ROK Army in the next few days. Mr. Chong – the true continuity within the Command Sergeant Major's office! Where would Pat and I have been without you? You were always there for us, even when we did not know of the need. You know everyone and your assistance in getting us through the roadblocks was unmatched. You excel in all that you do. You are the best! Thank you personally for all you have done for Pat and me. We would have not been successful without you and we both consider you a close, personal friend. You will always be a part of the Wheeler family! Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

I need to give a very special note of thanks to both of my parents. My dad was the single biggest influence in my life. A dad, that even though he never served a day in the military, would have been an excellent soldier! He, more than any other drill sergeant or person, taught me what "right looked like" and who engrained in me the understanding of what high standards were all about. He was the perfectionist the young boy dreaded, but who the more mature man respected above all others. Dad, you departed this earth early in my career, but I know you are looking down today and smiling. Smiling because you were successful in raising a son who was a good person, who

genuinely cared about others and one who had high standards. Thank you – and to this day you are the one who I still admire the most! Mom, thank you for always being there and for tolerating a son and his family who has been gone for 35 years and has not paid the loving attention a son should show his mother. I promise to do better in the coming years. I love you!

I spoke to you today as if it were two people speaking. That's because it was.... And we are. It's never been about "me"...it's been about "we." My service to my country over the last 35 years and especially here in US Forces Korea has always been about two people; me and Pat. When you get me, you get Pat. When you think of me as a Command Sergeant Major, you automatically think of Pat. Without her by my side and her love of service members and their families, I would not have been able to succeed by any small measure. Pat has been my bedrock, my teammate, my battle buddy, and my partner. Thank you for being a great Army Wife and my one true friend in life.

Last, but not least, we want to thank our children and our grandchildren. Deanne and Brett, you made many, many sacrifices growing up being the children of an American Soldier. I will never be able to put into words the gratitude and love I have for you both. You have always been your mom's and my pride and joy. Dominique, Katie, Jaden, and Jenah, I know you understand why your grandmother and I were not always there for your sports events, plays, and other occasions. We are now all your's and we have a lot of catching up to do. I have to warn you, Papa will be looking for a new Army to lead; practice your pushups! We love you and are extremely proud of you.

To Bob and Donna Winzenried, congratulations and the best of luck. It has been my experience over the years that good people depart and, strangely enough, good people come in to replace them. In this case, the Army got it right when they chose the two of you to follow the Wheeler's. A quality Army Command Sergeant Major and a quality Army spouse. A better selection the Army could not have made! You both will enjoy this assignment more than any other in your Army careers. Korea and its gracious citizens will attach themselves to your hearts in ways you cannot imagine. Hang on, because it's going to be a great ride!

As Pat and I begin our journey to Central Texas, it is with a very fond farewell we bid to both our Korean and American friends. Our bodies and our minds may well be in Texas, but our hearts will forever remain in the Land of the Morning Calm! To all, if you are ever in Texas, you have a room waiting for you!

Our only wish as we retire is that our nation and our Army can honestly say: “well done, ye good and faithful servants; duty done – mission complete!” We are, and will always continue to be.....an American Soldier and an American Soldier’s wife! So, as the movie ends, the final credits roll across the screen with all of your names, the scene fades to black, and the old soldier and his bride ride off into the sunset to live happily ever after. Instead of “the end”, the screen reads: “old soldiers never die, they simply just fade away!”

As retreat is about to sound here in just a few minutes, I want to end my career the way it began:

Oath of enlistment

I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniformed Code of Military Justice.

So help me God.

God bless our service members, their families, the Republic of Korea, and the United States of America!

Thank you.