

Sent: Friday, November 10, 2006 12:26 PM
Subject: Hi

My Friends,

Greetings once again from Afghanistan. Today is overcast, chilly, and rainy. Tomorrow is 11 November, Veterans Day. That's an important day to me. I have a lot to celebrate, a lot of friends to honor tomorrow. At Dickinson College, where I taught ROTC, Veterans Day was the first big, dress-up ceremony of the year for the cadets. During my time at Dickinson, I watched the community's respect for the cadets rise steadily. The cadets went from literal nobodies in the community to being a most sought-after part of many activities and ceremonies, not just in Carlisle, PA, but also in neighboring townships. Seems every year we received invites from further and further out, opportunities for the cadets to be on display. After three years in the program, it was not unusual to have a dozen events on and around Veterans Day.

Unfortunately, we had to decline a few because the cadets' schedule would not allow participation. The cadets worked the Vietnam Veterans annual spaghetti dinner. The cadet color guard raised flags as a part of ceremonies all over central Pennsylvania. I was honored to be a part of all of it. I left Dickinson College three years ago. Every cadet that we commissioned is now among the ranks of those we celebrate and honor on this day. Most of them deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan, or both since commissioning. Some are here in Afghanistan with me now. Some just returned home last month from Iraq. I am honored to serve with them.

Veterans Day is also about that old guy in front of you in traffic who drives so slow he makes you angry. That old guy was 19 when he landed at Normandy 60 years ago. That was the same day a lot of his friends died for an ideal we call Freedom. Freedom prevailed and that old guy earned the right to drive slowly. Since 11 September 2001, nearly 3,000 US service members paid the ultimate price. They all fought for Freedom, maybe not ours specifically, but they fought for the Freedom of others. They fought and died so that women could shed their burkas, show their faces to the world, and learn to read. They fought and died for oil. I've heard that both times we fought in Iraq. I believe it is true in both cases. But fighting and dying for oil is directly related to Freedom. Remember that old guy who hit the beach at Normandy and drives slow? He probably lives on a meager pension and Social Security. He and many of his friends live that way, barely able to afford the utility bills to heat the house in the dead of winter. He can barely afford to pay utility bills now imagine if oil cost \$200 a barrel. Does that bring it home enough? Well how about if he's your father, or your grandfather?

Freedom is being able to live with the basic needs of food, water, and shelter. We've been fighting for Freedom for five years so far this time and 3,000 is a lot of people. It's about 1,000 more than the total number still missing in action from Vietnam. It's also about 1,000 more than we lost in a few hours at Normandy. 3,000 is about one-fifteenth of the total Americans lost in three days at Gettysburg. Among the 3,000 is former Cardinals defensive back, Pat Tillman. The only difference between Ranger Tillman and the rest is name recognition. Tillman certainly made a sacrifice for Freedom. So did Sergeant First Class Paul R. Smith, but most will not recognize his name. Smith is the only Medal of Honor recipient from the Global War on Terrorism. No loss is any less significant than the rest. When you see that old guy driving slowly, don't beep your horn in anger at him. Wave and smile at him, and if you have the opportunity, thank him. It doesn't have to be at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month. You can thank him any time. But thank him soon. He may not be around much longer.

All my best,
Rob