

**OSS Donovan Award Dinner
Remarks by GEN David Petraeus
Washington, DC
2 May 2009**

Good evening and thank you all for that warm welcome. It is a true thrill to be here with you this evening. Indeed, I've felt a chill go down my back as we've recalled those whom this Society honors, the extraordinary work they did for our country, and those who continue that work today.

General Singlaub, thank you for your very kind words this evening. They are far too generous. But, in truth, I do wish my parents could have been with us to hear them. My father would have enjoyed your generous introduction, and my dear mother would have believed every last word of it. PAUSE

And thanks for the vote of confidence back in 2007. As you noted, that was a tough period on the battlefield in Iraq and back here in the United States. And while over 150,000 great coalition troopers helped carry the rucksack of responsibility in Iraq, I must confess that I did experience a few of those "Army of One" moments here in Washington. Indeed, I came to understand what then Joint Chiefs Chairman Bill Crowe was talking about when he used to observe that Washington was a dog-eat-dog world and he felt like he was wearing milk bone underwear. At a time like that, it's great to have General Singlaub watching your back.

But more importantly, General Singlaub, thank you for your decades of selfless, forthright, and courageous service. You are a true national asset, and I know that I speak for all here this evening in noting how grateful we are for what you have done to help preserve and protect the freedoms our Nation holds so dear. APPLAUD

If I could, please allow me to say thank you this evening to my wife, Holly who was not only there during the tough days of 2007, but has been there every step of the way since young 2LT Petraeus married the Supe's daughter at West Point in July 1974. Holly has been the consummate Army daughter, Army wife, and Army mother. She's been father as well as mother for 5 of the last 8 years, she's been the first lady of two Army installations, and she's established a Better Business Bureau program to help our troopers and their families with financial planning and to alert them to rip-offs. I can never thank her enough, but I can say thanks tonight. APPLAUD

I'd also like to add congratulations to the two great Americans who were recognized earlier. To Dr Christian Lambertsen, the "Scuba Godfather" and a legendary figure in the annals of our underwater services -- it is wonderful to see you honored here this evening. And how fitting it is to have ADM Eric Olson, our country's senior SEAL, the commander of America's special operations forces, and my shipmate and neighbor, here to help honor the man who swam point for the community in which Admiral Olson has served with such distinction. And congratulations again, Eric, on the extraordinary performance of those three SEAL snipers off the coast of Somalia on Easter Sunday. They sure made all Americans proud! APPLAUD

Congratulations, also, to Ross Perot, another extraordinary American whose generosity has enabled this Society and so many other organizations that support our troopers. As I listened to the remarks about him this evening, I recalled being present at SOF Mess Night some years ago in Tampa when Mr. Perot was presented the Bull Simons Award. You could feel in that room that night universal agreement that recognizing Mr. Perot was something about which all present felt exceedingly good. And that's the way I know that all here feel about his recognition this evening. Congratulations again, sir! APPLAUD.

Secretary Penn, thank you for joining us to help honor one of your Navy's underwater pioneers.

General Schwartz, Norty, long-time Air Force special operator and the man at the controls of America's Air Force, thanks for being here.

And it's pleasure to see with us, as well, GEN Doug Brown, who did so much to guide development of our Army's Special Operations Aviation, who eventually commanded the 160th Spec Ops Avn Regt and JSOC, and who was Eric Olsen's predecessor as SOCOM Cdr. Nightstalkers Don't Quit!

I'd also like to recognize and thank Generals Sullivan, Saint, Merritt, Rhame, and Thompson for being here tonight – and for not being too rowdy over there at the AUSA table! Thanks for what each of you did and continues to do for our Army, and thanks for never failing to remind me that, in your eyes, I'm frozen in time as a major who hustles bags for our great Chief of Staff, Gen Carl Vuono.

To Senator Stevens, who was so supportive of our Armed Services during his decades on Capitol Hill, to former Secretary of Defense Carlucci, to former DCIs Woolsey and Webster, and to the many other flag officers, ambassadors, command sergeants major, and other guests, thank you all so much for being here this evening and for helping to honor individuals and institutions of such great importance to our country.

How fitting it is to have this organization and its superb leaders provide such well deserved recognition of those who, in choosing the path they did, explicitly sought no recognition. Charles, thank you, in particular, for your dynamic, inspirational, and visionary leadership of this wonderful Society. I know that you would respond that it's all about the team – and that's true, as always. But I'd remind you that every team has a coach. And this society has a great one. Well done!

Thanks also, Charles, for reminding us of the colorful collection of individuals I was privileged to have around me during the surge. There were indeed, a few similarities between some of them and the incredibly talented and diverse group of heroes General Donovan assembled for the OSS. To be sure, I never quite found quite someone to match a figure like the OSS' Julia Child, but having as a special adviser a Palestinian Jordanian NYC taxicab driver educated by Mennonites in Kansas was, indeed, pretty close. And I must say that I'm most appreciative to be described as "a Ph.D. who can win a bar fight." That is a keeper.

In truth, like General Donovan, I have been very fortunate to have been surrounded and supported by some superbly educated and highly experienced soldier scholars. One of them is my so-called "designated thinker." And when we began working on my speech for this evening, I asked him how long I had to speak. "No more than 15 minutes, sir," he said. "Only 15 minutes?" I asked, "How can I possibly tell them all that I know in 15 minutes?" "Well, sir," he said, "I'd advise you to speak very slowly."

Actually, I think he stole that joke from playwright George Bernard Shaw, but thanks for laughing. You know the deal: I'm only as good as the material they give me.

You know being around so many intelligence professionals tonight brings to mind the good old days of the Soviet Union and the extraordinary precautions that we used to take when we traveled to Russia. In truth, many thought that visitors there were often a little too paranoid. And that certainly was the case when the great Canadian hockey player Phil Esposito was in Moscow and he and his roommate decided to find the bug in their hotel room. They literally tore the room apart, searching high and low for over an hour to no avail. Finally, they flipped back the carpet and found the bug, inset in the floor. With considerable effort, they were able to unscrew it – only to hear a thunderous crash. They had just undone the anchor of the chandelier in the room below them. PAUSE Those were the days weren't they?

Well, again, what a privilege it is to be here tonight to help honor the OSS and the legacy of the great General Donovan. Needless to say it is more than humbling to recall the accomplishments of a man who was at various points in his life a football star at Columbia University, a battalion commander in WWI who earned the Medal of Honor, the Dist'd Svc Cross, and three Purple Hearts, an accomplished Wall Street lawyer, a presidential envoy, the founder and leader, of course, of the OSS during WWII, and an ambassador in the post-war period. And it is awe inspiring to recall those GEN Donovan attracted to serve in the OSS -- and to reflect on those who continue the traditions of service in the fields of intelligence and special operations.

So it is an enormous honor to receive the award named after General Donovan. As with any such award, however, I accept it only inasmuch as I do so on behalf of the tens of thousands of troopers with whom I have been privileged to serve in recent years in particular. Day after day, these troopers don body armor and Kevlar helmet, strap into a cockpit, or take to the sea to perform complex missions against tough enemies in the most challenging of conditions. And among the very best of them are those who carry out the vital work in the intelligence and special operations arenas. Indeed, just as in the days of the OSS, today's intelligence and special operations professionals often make the critical contribution to the successful accomplishment of the most challenging of our missions. There should be no question about how magnificently the quiet professionals who serve today are extending the proud traditions established by those of the OSS during the Second World War.

America's intelligence professionals and special operators, like their OSS forbears, provide exceptional strategic and tactical intelligence and conduct demanding special operations, albeit with the advantage of modern technology that I suspect those of the OSS could not have dreamed would ever exist. In the spirit of the OSS, these professionals constantly push the limits of the capabilities in their fields. Their goal is to ensure that our troopers are never engaged in a fair fight. Like those early OSS pioneers, today's intel and special ops professionals are constantly developing new ways of collecting, analyzing, sharing, and, most importantly, fusing intelligence, as well as new ways of conducting the most demanding of special operations missions.

It is still true, by the way, that the most powerful tool any of our troopers carries into battle is not his weapon but his mind – and that is particularly true of those who today carry on the traditions of the OSS in places like Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

The best way to explain the extraordinary importance of America's intelligence professionals and special operators is to describe a battle in Iraq that illustrated how much we rely on the modern day descendants of the OSS. The battle of Sadr City in March and April of 2008, which took place during my time as the Commander in Iraq, highlighted the skill of our intel experts and special operators – and their ability to generate and employ intelligence from all the disciplines. This particular fight began when the militia of Muqtada al Sadr responded to Prime Minister Maliki's offensive in Basra by launching an indirect fire campaign of unprecedented proportions in Baghdad. The militia hammered Baghdad's Green Zone with volley after volley of rocket and mortar fire. In fact, our troopers at the time still refer to the early weeks of it as "March madness"—with as many as 15-20 volleys per day of up to 12 rounds per volley. The attacks were launched from carefully sited positions in the southern quarter of Sadr City, a tightly-packed Baghdad neighborhood with about 2 million residents. From these positions, the militia's rocket teams were able to zero in on and pound the U.S. Embassy and Iraqi government buildings in the Green Zone. The casualties and the damage were extensive.

But given recent advances in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets and the establishment of fusion centers at each of our division headquarters, we were well postured for this fight. And over the course of the first week, we assembled an extensive, multi-layered array of intel platforms, air combat elements, and ground forces, which we pushed to the commander in the Sadr City area, COL John Hort of the 3rd Brigade, 4th Infantry Division. Within days, COL Hort had an extraordinary collection of ground assets at his disposal – from mechanized infantry in Bradleys, Stryker vehicles, and M1 tanks to Navy SEAL snipers and Iraqi infantry conventional and special operations forces (the latter with U.S. Special Forces advisors). And on top of all this, we arrayed 10 unmanned aerial vehicles, two Apache air weapons teams, close air support aircraft, JSTARS, EA-6s, U2s, and several other Air Force, special operations, and CIA intelligence assets. Ultimately, we provided Colonel Hort's unit more intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capability than any brigade has had in our history.

In the ensuing weeks, COL Hort's forces fought building by building and block by block to take away the so-called "sweet spots" from which the militia were able to launch their most accurate rocket volleys. And his brigade and our special operations elements used the aerial armada to target the militia leaders and rocket elements with exceptional precision. In the course of several weeks, the brigade killed 780 militia members, destroyed 77 mortar and rocket teams, and conducted so many precision attacks against the top militia leaders that the survivors decided to flee to Iran.

While the kinetic pieces of the battle of Sadr City may capture your attention, it was the fusion of intelligence and special operations – more than any factor -- that ensured that the battle was not a fair fight and that COL Hort could defeat the militia forces with as little collateral damage and loss to our troops as possible. In fact, it was human intelligence collected on the ground that enabled the target development for our Guided Multiple Launch Rocket Systems and allowed us to hit a Special Groups leaders meeting without even breaking a window in the hospital located across the street! It was intelligence of all disciplines, fused by highly experienced intel analysts that enabled the destruction of the rocket teams. It was Navy SEAL snipers who took out dozens of militia fighters attempting to attack our Soldiers each night as they emplaced cement barriers along a road to wall off a particularly important area of Sadr City. And it was targeted, precise air and ground operations conducted by special operators that located and destroyed enemy leaders and command and control nodes and captured innumerable weapons caches, slowly but steadily convincing a resilient, tough enemy that this was a fight he could not win. PAUSE

As that vignette makes clear, our capabilities have come a long way since the heroes of the OSS – such as General Singlaub -- parachuted into France during WWII. Nonetheless, the concepts pioneered by General Donovan and the OSS continue to guide those in the contemporary intel and special operations fields. And you can certainly be very proud – as I am – of the skill, expertise, initiative, and courage of our special operators and our talented intelligence professionals, and of what they provide to our forces in Iraq, Afghanistan, and a host of other locations around the world. The work of these heroes is truly invaluable. Due to their efforts, we understand our enemies and the networks that facilitate their activities at a level of granularity that was unthinkable in the past, and we are able to undertake complex missions to take the fight to the bad guys.

So, to the pioneers of our nation's intelligence community and special operations forces who are here among us tonight and to those you represent, thank you. You have left huge footsteps in the sands of time and blazed a clearly marked path of extraordinary accomplishment. Your achievements under the incomparable General Donovan are the stuff of history and provide continued inspiration to those who serve today. Wild Bill Donovan established a culture that celebrated excellence, encouraged out-of-the-box thinking, underwrote prudent risk taking, and fostered teamwork. And those qualities live on today in the descendants of those who served in the OSS.

Indeed, to those who currently serve in the intelligence and special operations arenas – thank you for everything you do for our country as we engage in a tough, unrelenting struggle against extremism. There is nothing easy about what you do. And as President Reagan once noted, in your profession, you often hear no bugles and receive no medals. But on this evening, most fittingly and thanks to this great Society, we do recognize your extraordinary service and tremendous sacrifice to help keep freedom's torch burning brightly at home and around the world. PAUSE

Ladies and gentlemen, it has been the greatest of privileges to have been allowed to serve our country in uniform over the past 35 years. It has been a particular honor to have soldiered with our great young men and women in Iraq for four of those years. And, tonight, it has been an extraordinary privilege to join this great Society in helping to honor the legacy of General Donovan, those who served with him in the OSS, and those who are writing impressive new chapters in the history of our intelligence services and special operations. Thank you very much.