

Remarks at a Retirement Ceremony for General Maxwell R. Thurman in Arlington, Virginia
February 26, 1991

Thank you very, very much. And let me salute our Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of our Joint Chiefs, the Chief of Staff of the Army, Secretary of the Army behind me, Members of Congress that are here today, and so many friends of our honoree, our most distinguished General Thurman.

I'm sorry to kind of hit and run, but I wanted to come over here and pay my respects to Max. To all of you here today, his friends, his admirers, thank you very much. To all those in uniform and in the service, through your devotion to our common defense, you show the same spirit and commitment that we're now seeing shine so brilliantly in the actions of every single man and woman now serving in the Persian Gulf.

Secretary Cheney and General Powell just came over to the White House for a briefing, and I got a good update from them. And as I noted earlier today, we are not only on schedule, we are ahead of schedule. No Commander in Chief has ever been so proud of America's men and women in uniform.

This is Max Thurman's day. And they say you can't keep a good man down, and the man we honor this afternoon certainly proves it. A distinguished officer of the field artillery; two tours in Vietnam; four stars; commander in chief of the Southern Command; a general who is as human as he is professional, as generous as he is just.

General Thurman has devoted his career, his entire career, to helping all around him reach their fullest potential. His life and work are a testament to the power of an individual. And his brilliant role in the liberation of Panama was a fitting grace note

to a great career. By assuring the freedom of the Panamanian people, General Thurman has played a crucial role in the revival of democracy in this, our own precious hemisphere.

At home and abroad, America has been fortunate to have Maxwell Thurman in uniform. He's been the man who never shirked responsibility. I've been told, for instance, that General Thurman was standing outside the Papal Nunciature when somebody asked who was responsible for the loud music. He immediately said, "I am the music man—CINC music." Nobody argued from there on.

If you can't keep a good man down, it's also true that it's hard to see a good man go, especially in time of war. General Thurman, your retirement from service, as well-earned as it is, leaves a great void. Simply stated, there is no more dedicated officer in the United States Army. A generation of service men and women, some of whom will rise to match your rank, now go forward with your leadership in their minds and your example in their hearts. Your devotion to service has brought honor to your nation, and your commitment to America has inspired admiration in all of us. Thank you, sir.

Note: The President spoke at 4:03 p.m. in the Ceremonial Hall at Fort Myer Army Base. In his opening remarks, he referred to Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney; Colin L. Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Gen. Carl E. Vuono, Army Chief of Staff; and Secretary of the Army Michael P. W. Stone.