

## **SecDef Leon Panetta's message**

### **Army Birthday Celebration June 14, 2012**

As we mark the birthday of the United States Army, I want to congratulate this great American institution for 237 years of distinguished service in defense of this country. The proud story of the American Soldier is one of honor, valor, patriotism, and sacrifice in the service of their countrymen. From those earliest volunteers who stepped forward to join the ranks of the Continental Army to those who fought at Gettysburg, in the Argonne Forest, at Normandy, Bastogne, in Korea and Vietnam, in Iraq and Afghanistan, the American Soldier has shaped the course of world history.

I am proud of the opportunity I had to serve in the ranks of the United States Army. I'll always cherish those memories of Army life, and the honor I felt in being part of an extraordinary team.

For 10 long years the Army has shouldered a heavy burden, fighting in Iraq's city streets and in the mountains of Afghanistan. And through it all, American Soldiers stepped bravely forward, marched off towards the sound of the guns, and gave everything to provide for our security, to give all Americans a better, safer future. They have done everything this country has asked of them and more.

I have been deeply fortunate in my position as Secretary of Defense over this past year to have visited many Army installations and thousands of Soldiers serving around the world, including those on the front lines. These Soldiers, and their families, carry forward the proud and distinguished legacy we celebrate today, and because of their dedication, the United States Army will remain the strongest in the world.