

Unconquered and Unconquerable: A Life and Legacy

Story and Photo by SPC Chad Seibold / 108th ADA PAO / November 2009



POPE AIR FORCE BASE, NC – LT. GOV. Keel spoke for the 108th Air Defense Artillery Brigade's Native American Awareness Month at Pope Theater on Pope Air Force Base to several hundred Soldiers. Keel was Given A certificate of Appreciation and a brigade coin fashioned after their unit patch Shown from left to right SSG. Henry Marris, CSM Harold Lincoln, LT. GOV Keel, COL Christopher Spillman. Photo by SPC. Chad Seibold.

The Lieutenant Governor of the Chickasaw Nation, Jefferson Keel, was the guest of the 108th Air Defense Artillery Brigade for Native American Awareness Month on the 9th and 10th at Pope Air Force Base theater where he spoke to several hundred Soldiers about the past, present and future of his tribe.

Keel knows very well the history that the Chickasaw Nation has with the US Government and the Army that enforced its policies, but that is clearly in the past for his “Unconquered and Unconquerable” people; the slogan of the proud, progressive, and undefeated Chickasaw Nation. They are focused on the future.

Becoming self sufficient one day and not having to rely on any assistance from the US Government, even though “[it] is guaranteed by treaties and affirmed by the US Constitution,” is a long term goal of the Chickasaw people; a point Keel stated many times in his presentation.

Keel enlisted into the National Guard as a tank operator, but decided to change his military occupational specialty before going over to Active Duty. When Keel decided to change from being a tank operator to an infantryman, many thought he had lost his mind and asked why. “As an infantryman, I will only have to worry about my rifle and myself.” he said simply. A statement in line with the direction of his tribe and an overriding theme in his life.

Keel is now very involved in politics, which has taken him to Washington D.C. to discuss healthcare policy with leaders of congress. Healthcare is a major focus of the current Chickasaw administration and has been for several years. The Tribe is currently building a state of the art hospital that will be ready next summer. In addition, they have placed clinics all over their tribal lands so that no one has to drive more than 30 miles for health care.

Keel also conducted a meeting with the members of SSG Henry Marris’ section, a member of the Chickasaw Nation and Keel’s escort. In a stuffy conference room, 15 Soldiers from 108th ADA Bde sat and listened intently as Keel talked about his life before, during, and after the Army.

Marris made an observation about this group of Soldiers after the meeting was over. “Every Soldier was completely focused on [Keel] and what he had to say for the entire 90 minutes. Normally [Soldiers] get bored and start to nod off. They really wanted to glean as much knowledge as possible from him.”

“[Keel] was very adamant about how important education is and that even with our lower rank, we are all still leaders,” said SPC Thomas Sullivan, noting that Keel focused on those two points in regard to the lower enlisted Soldiers.

SSG Joshua Miles commented on the opportunity saying, “We were all very fortunate to sit down in such a personal venue to hear [Keel] talk about his military and political careers and how leadership development and style transcend duty and carry over to whatever position one is in.”

Keel is a leader within a tribe of leaders, and it is a matter of great pride to him that the Chickasaw Nation is in a position to set an example and lead the way for other Native American Nations to follow.