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Obama meets with participants in raid that killed bin Laden

Video: President Obama traveled Friday to Fort Campbell in Kentucky to thank troops stationed there. He said that because of incredible their skill and courage, Osama bin Laden "will never threaten America again." (May 6)

By Perry Bacon Jr.,

FORT CAMPBELL, Ky. — President Obama met Friday with some of the Navy SEALs who raided Osama bin Laden's compound and killed him, part of a day of events marking bin Laden's death that was far more celebratory than was Obama's solemn appearance a day earlier at Ground Zero in New York.

In private meetings at this Army installation, Obama and Vice President Biden congratulated members of the elite Navy SEAL Team 6 and units that supported their mission, presenting them with the Presidential Unit Citation, the highest award for a military unit, a senior White House official said.

Obama was given a briefing on the bin Laden operation that included photos and a scale model of the compound, the official said.

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Seal Team 6, the team of Navy SEALs who killed Osama bin Laden, are known at the Pentagon as a tier one force — reserved for high priority targets. (May 6)

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Afterward, Obama publicly praised both the troops who killed bin Laden and those who serve throughout Afghanistan, including brigades from the Army's 101st Airborne Division, which is based at Fort Campbell. The more than 2,000 soldiers who heard the president in a hangar shouted and cheered throughout his speech, a marked break from the more formal appearances the president has made since bin Laden's death.

"I came here for a simple reason: to say thank you on behalf of all America. This has been a historic week in the life of our nation. Thanks to the incredible skill and courage of countless individuals, intelligence, military, over many years, the terrorist leader who struck our nation on 9/11 will never threaten America again," Obama said to loud applause.

The president said his meeting with Special Operations forces "was a chance for me to say on behalf of all Americans and people around the globe, job well done, job well done."

"These Americans deserve credit for one of the greatest intelligence and military operations in our nation's history," he said.

The identities of the men who killed bin Laden are likely to remain secret. White House officials released few details of Friday's meetings and would not formally confirm whether Obama met members of SEAL Team 6, whose existence is classified.

But the always-candid Biden gave a strong hint. Beaming as he introduced Obama at the hangar, the vice president told the troops that he had tried to explain to one of his granddaughters what he was going to do in Kentucky, and she had replied, "My pop's going out to see the whales."

Joining Biden and Obama in the private meetings were Adm. Eric T. Olson, the commander of U.S. Special Operations, and Vice Adm. William H. McRaven, the head of Joint Special Operations Command and the man who directed the SEALs' mission. Nearly 80 U.S. commandos were involved in the top-secret mission, including about two dozen who entered bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan.

The president also met with members of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, which provided the helicopters that took the members of Team 6 to bin Laden's compound.

A dog that took part in the raid also was present, aides said.

Obama used his appearance to speak broadly about the war in Afghanistan, where he has pledged to start reducing troops by July. About 1,000 soldiers from Fort Campbell returned this week from deployments, but more than 7,000 remain in Afghanistan, a base spokesman said.

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"Our strategy is working, and there is no greater evidence of that than justice finally being delivered to Osama bin Laden," Obama said.

Some lawmakers in both parties disagree with that assessment and have called for withdrawing forces more quickly than Obama supports.

Sgt. Marcus Miller, who recently returned from Afghanistan and heard Obama's speech, said, "Everybody had a sense of accomplishment" following news of bin Laden's death.

But Spec. Miranda Dillon said, "I'm glad bin Laden is gone, but there are still how many people standing behind him."

Staff writers William Branigin and Anne E. Kornblut in Washington contributed to this report.

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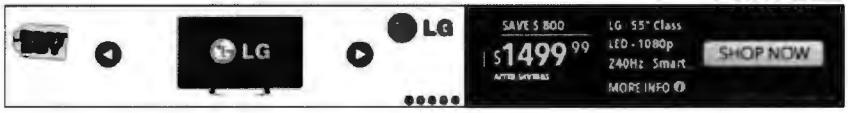

Robert Gates: SEAL Team Members Are Worried About The Safety Of Their Families

DOUG MATACONIS - SATURDAY, MAY 14, 2011 - 12 COMMENTS

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The outgoing Secretary of Defense made a somewhat startling admission the other day regarding **the leaks that have come out regarding the raid that killed Osama bin Laden:**

> The Department of Defense is looking into ways to "pump up the security" for the team of Navy SEALs who helped kill Osama bin Laden after the commandos expressed concern for their safety and the safety of their families, Defense Secretary Robert Gates said Thursday.
>
> Gates made the comment in response to a question at a town hall meeting at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. A Marine asked what measures were being taken to protect "the identities and the lives" of the SEALs involved in the takedown of bin Laden in Pakistan a week ago, as well as other troops deployed in the region, from the threat of retaliation.
>
> "We are very concerned about the security of our families - of your families and our troops, and also these elite units that are engaged in things like that. And without getting into any details ... ***I would tell you that when I met with the team last Thursday, they expressed a concern about that, and particularly with respect to their families," Gates told the audience.***
>
> "Frankly, a week ago Sunday, in the Situation Room, we all agreed that we would not release any operational details from the effort to take out bin Laden. That all fell apart on Monday, the next day."

In all honestly, there's no way that pledge could've been kept I think. This wasn't just another operation in Kandahar, it was an operation to take out the leader of the group that murdered 3,000 Americans on September 11th. Once the White House announced that it had happened, I'm not sure that a "no operational details" stance would have gone over well with the press, or politically. At the same time, it seems apparent that sufficient details about the operation have come out now and that we don't need to know details at the level that would endanger the lives of the SEALs themselves or their families.

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SEAL Team Six: Is their safety being compromised?

Members of SEAL Team Six, the Navy squad that killed Osama bin Laden, are concerned that leaks about the raid will compromise their anonymity and threaten the safety of their families, Defense Secretary Gates said Thursday.

By Aaron Couch, *Contributor* / May 13, 2011

Navy SEALs train this week near San Clemente Island, Calif.

n39/ZUMA Press/Newscom

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Members of the Navy SEAL team whose daring mission ended the life of Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden are concerned for the safety of their families. As details of the raid continue to leak out, the US military is exploring ways to "pump up the security" for SEAL Team Six, Defense Secretary Robert Gates said Thursday.

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"There is an awareness that the threat of retaliation is increased because of the action against bin Laden," Mr. Gates said during a town hall meeting at Camp Lejeune, a Marine Corps base in North Carolina.

When Gates met with SEAL Team Six last week, he said, team members expressed concern for their continued anonymity and their safety, "particularly with respect to their families."

Before the May 1 strike, only a few key players knew of it. President Obama said on "60 Minutes" that most White House staffers, and even his wife, were kept in the dark. Gates said he and the other officials who gathered in the White House situation room to watch the raid agreed they would "not release any operational details" about the hunt for bin Laden.

"That all fell apart on Monday, the next day," said Gates on Thursday.

Indeed, more information about the raid continues to come out. CBS reported Thursday that helmet cameras on all 25 of the SEALs recorded the entire raid, and that those images are being analyzed to give officials a clearer picture of what happened during the 40 minutes the strike force was in the bin Laden compound.

Additional details confirmed Thursday include that SEALs were fired upon by just one person, a courier who fired shots from the compound's guesthouse, and that the SEALs' first sighting of bin Laden was on the third-floor landing on the main house. A SEAL fired at and missed bin Laden as the Al Qaeda leader retreated from the landing to his bedroom. It also has been confirmed that no one in the main house was armed, though weapons were close by.

The video also showed that the first SEAL to enter bin Laden's bedroom grabbed two of bin Laden's daughters and pulled them aside. A second SEAL entered and pushed one of bin Laden's wives aside after she moved toward him, and then shot bin Laden in the chest. A third SEAL entered and shot bin Laden in the head.

Though new details about the operation have been revealed, "there has been a consistent and effective effort" to keep SEAL Team Six identities secret, Gates said. "I think that has to continue," he said.

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