

'No power on earth can withstand a US onslaught now'

Indian hotelier is amazed by US military preparedness

GEORGE JOSEPH
in New York

Raxit Shah, a hotelier in Ohio, is convinced the United States military is invincible. The conviction comes from the fact that he was a first hand witness to US military strength a few months ago.

Shah participated in the Joint Civilian Orientation Course in April. As part of the course, he interacted with top military brass, saw vital military equipment and installations in various parts of the country and had a feel of the discipline and dedication of the men in uniform.

JCOC is a US defense department program to show civilians US military preparedness. Military officials informed Shah he was the first Indian to be selected for the program.

During the eight-day program, Shah had some unforgettable experiences. Like this one that took place mid-air. "We were in a plane 27,000 feet above the earth and flying at 400 miles per hour. We fueled a B-52 bomber, 20 feet away, in midair. It was an experience of a lifetime."

The team visited the Norfolk naval base, where most US submarines and aircraft carrier ships are anchored. They also visited the USS Theodore Roosevelt, the aircraft carrier, at mid-sea. The warship, currently at the war



zone, carries more than 140 fighter planes and 6,000 sailors aboard.

"We landed at mid-sea, 100 miles from the shore, in a plane while the nuclear weapons-carrying ship was on a routine exercise. We also visited a nuclear submarine in Norfolk. The precision of the instruments, like the sonar system that can detect most

enemy ships and weapons from far, was astonishing," he says.

Military officials showed the team how the submarine worked and explained how it can stay underwater for long with nuclear fuel.

"We saw the nuclear weaponry stored, the safety required to fire the bombs," he says.

The facilities at the Cheyenne

Mountains, Colorado, showed the US's preparedness in case of a nuclear attack. Designed to house the US president, it can survive a nuclear blast. The president can run the country from the place for over six months.

A visit to the Pentagon and intelligence offices was also part of the program that allowed him to see "the patriotism of the men



■ Raxit Shah in a military helicopter (left) and speaking at a meeting at the Pentagon (above)

and women in uniform."

"The young people in uniform are so dedicated, disciplined and knowledgeable about technology, and ready to sacrifice their lives for the country," he says. "No power on earth can withstand the onslaught of the US military now," he adds confidently.

Shah, 51, has lived in the US for 22 years, and in Canada for 10 years before that. He owns and operates five Holiday Inn franchises and is involved in commercial real estate, developing housing, office buildings and other activities.

As a Rotarian, he helped build an eye hospital in Godhra, Gujarat. He raised more than \$100,000 and equipment for the hospital. He also sent 200 large boxes of clothing, collected at a clothes drive in Youngstown, to Gujarat for earthquake relief.

Shah hopes the September 11 attacks will not result in stopping the JCOC program. But, the authorities may become more selective, he feels.