



LEFT: Country artist Dierks Bentley greets the crowd while performing at Lackland AFB, TX on Sept. 29.

have a conversation. This kind of open-door interaction is one of the things that makes the Spirit of America Tour so remarkable. And the artists on the Tour are not the stand-offish, bodyguard types either. They know why they are there and who they are there for. They want to shake a Soldier's hand just as much as the Soldier wants to shake their's. This night in Lackland was no different. The Airmen setting up had just finished boot camp and they radiated an excitement that would fuel the entire night.

Robert Rosenthal and Cathy Gurley (Spirit of America Tour's founder and national liaison, respectively) were on-site, overseeing the product of their patriotic ambition. You could see their own excitement grow with that of the troops.

Rosenthal, a first lieutenant (retired) with the New York National Guard 101st Signal

# SPIRIT OF AMERICA TOUR ROCKS LACKLAND AFB

## DIERKS BENTLEY AND CROSS CANADIAN RAGWEED PLAY FREE SHOW FOR MILITARY AND MILITARY FAMILIES

Story and photos by Keith Kawasaki

Over 6,000 servicemembers and their families put aside the stress of deployments, hurricanes, and everyday aggravation in exchange for a full night of music courtesy of the Spirit of America Tour, a non-profit military entertainment initiative lauded by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

Never failing to deliver the heavyweights, the Tour brought country musician Dierks Bentley and southern rockers Cross Canadian Ragweed to Lackland Air Force Base, outside of San Antonio, TX on September 29th.

Dierks Bentley is the Grand Ole Opry's newest member (inducted in the beginning of October) and has earned his place in the Opry's company with hits like "What Was

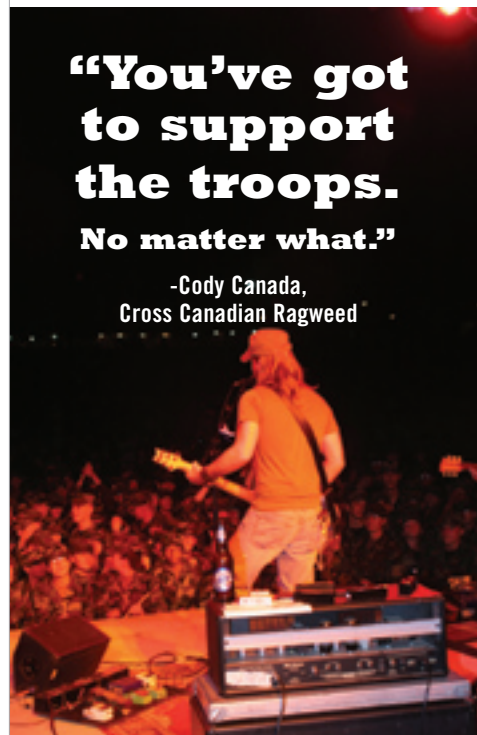
I Thinking?" and the slick, driving rhythm of "Lot Of Leaving Left To Do." An intense mixture of Merle Haggard's "Working Man" ethic and George Strait's gilded country quality, Bentley's music comes across genuine and bold—like a modern-day Waylon Jennings.

Cross Canadian Ragweed, a Texas favorite, just rocks. Their energy is like some desert thunder. Their music is dark, loose, and unpredictable. You want to bang your head one minute and kick back with a cold one the next. Often jumping genres of country and rock, the band describes their sound simply as "American music."

After arriving around midday, the bands mixed with the young Airmen setting up the stage, never hesitating to shake a hand or

**"You've got to support the troops. No matter what."**

-Cody Canada, Cross Canadian Ragweed



ABOVE: Cross Canadian Ragweed perform at Lackland AFB, TX on Sept. 29.



Battalion, formed the Spirit of America Tour after retiring from a successful career in entertainment law in California. He and Gurley, a prominent public relations persona in the country music industry, have put on over 60 of these free, volunteer-driven shows since the initiative began in 2002. One of the unique aspects of the Spirit of America Tour is that not only are servicemembers from every branch of the military invited, their families are invited, too. In fact, anyone with a military I.D. is welcome and all shows are free of charge.

After soundcheck, the bands were treated to dinner at the mess hall where they ate with the troops, signed autographs, and said "thank you" face-to-face for the sacrifice of military service.

"The reason I think the military is I really do think about those guys a lot and appreciate what the military does; not just people that are serving overseas in combat situations right now, but just in general, people back here who sacrifice their time," stated Dierks Bentley in a recent GX interview. "The risk that you're putting yourself into joining the military, it's something that all of us ... should be very thankful for."

Seven o'clock was showtime and you could feel an enormous energy erupt from the crowd. These were no longer military servicemembers, organized and reserved. They were kids, enjoying one heck of a concert. The light in their eyes could've knocked you out. And deeper in the crowd, up on the field, babies danced in circles and moms and dads leaned back in lawn chairs, without a worry in their heads, under a warm Texas night.

"I am still amazed at how much the troops enjoy our shows," says Rosenthal. "It makes it all worthwhile."

"It makes an impact on those guys and it makes an impact on us," added Bentley. "You know... you go away from the gate thinking how you have a lot of respect for those guys, a lot of love for them. And also really thankful that they're doing that stuff. So kind of, in a way, you feel guilty that you're not."

Cross Canadian Ragweed closed the show, putting their all into an electrifying set. This band never misses an opportunity to play for servicemembers. Every year in January, they play the Air Force Academy in Colorado and pepper in as many shows around the country for military as they can. In fact, they don't even refer to it as "playing." For Cross Canadian Ragweed, performing for the military is "service."

"It's mandatory," frontman Cody Canada told GX in an October interview.

"That's what our service is; you know what I mean?" said Canada. "I know that it's not anywhere near what they do. But if we can provide our service to somebody, especially people who are keeping us free, why not do it?" **GX**



ABOVE: (l-r) Commander of the 37th Training Wing Lackland Air Force Base, TX, COL Mary Kay Hertog with country artist Dierks Bentley as he is presented with the Spirit of America Tour commemorative coin - a recognition given by the Tour's founder Robert Rosenthal, in appreciation of artist participation.

**"It makes an impact on those guys and it makes an impact on us."**

- Dierks Bentley, referring to performing for military audiences

YOU CAN READ THE FULL DIERKS BENTLEY AND CROSS CANADIAN RAGWEED INTERVIEWS AND CHECK OUT MORE PHOTOS FROM THE LACKLAND SHOW ONLINE AT:

[www.gxonline.com](http://www.gxonline.com)



Check out where the Spirit of America Tour is headed next at: [www.spiritofamericatour.org](http://www.spiritofamericatour.org)

Check out Dierks Bentley online at: [www.dierks.com](http://www.dierks.com)

Check out Cross Canadian Ragweed online at: [www.crosscanadianragweed.com](http://www.crosscanadianragweed.com)