

**REMARKS BY
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COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS
SEMPER FIDELIS AWARD DINNER
MARINE CORPS UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION
SATURDAY, MARCH 1, 2008
SHERATON PREMIERE, TYSONS CORNER, VA**

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Let me say first of all that it's great for Annette and I to be able to be with you tonight to honor a great American (*Mr. Robert S. Mueller, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation*). The organizers have asked me to give just a little bit of an update on the Marine Corps and maybe say something about this wonderful foundation. I'd be happy to do both, and I'll try to keep my comments brief because I count the number of speakers yet between us and dinner.

Giving you an update of the Corps is pretty timely. A week ago tonight, the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps and I just got back from a trip to Iraq and Afghanistan. I'm happy to tell you there are amazing things taking place in the al Anbar Province where most of our Marines are assigned. To the credit of every rotation — the Marines, Sailors that support us, and the Soldiers that work with us — there has been an amazing turnaround for the past eighteen months or so. Al Anbar is now the model for everything else that takes place there, and we're just delighted with what is taking place.

We have some new equipment in theater. The MRAPs, the mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles, have now arrived in large numbers. Our Marines, your sons and daughters, are being well protected in that very large vehicle. The Osprey is at work. It is now about five months into a seven-month deployment. We are purposefully taking a minimalist's approach to media coverage of the Osprey until such time as it finishes its deployment. But I'll tell you people, it is doing wonderfully. It is doing every bit as good as we might have hoped at this point in time in the deployment, and we pray that this continues.

There are a couple of issues that we face based upon what is happening in the al Anbar Province. We are very much in nation-building and arguably that is not a core competency of the Marine Corps. The Marines are doing a wonderful job, but that may not be the best job for us in terms of what we traditionally offer to the Nation. Quite frankly, we've gotten a little heavy. We have been performing the role of a second land army now for just about four years in the al Anbar Province, and that has meant additional equipment, rolling stock, weapons, communication gear, all of those types of things.

The problem is we are an expeditionary force. We need to stay light, fast moving, and hard hitting. At some point, our commanders and I are going to have a discussion

about what that balance needs to be so that we can be that expeditionary force of the future for this great Nation.

We also went to Afghanistan, and in Afghanistan, there is a commander there named General Dan McNeil. He is a student of history. He asked the Secretary of Defense about 30 days ago for a Marine Air-Ground Task Force to serve the same purpose in Afghanistan that the fire brigade built around 5th Marines served in Korea. He will keep tight control, personal command on that unit. He expects to use it as an air-ground team. I will tell you it wasn't long before some command-and-control folks made a run on command of our fix-wing aviation associated with the MEU. General McNeil said, "No, I understand how Marines are employed best, and I want them kept together." They will strike at Taliban offenses in the spring, or if the Taliban does not commence an offensive, he will use that MEU to do his own.

The 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines is also going in. They're going in with a role of training Afghan police and working with the Afghan National Army. They are going right smack in the middle of bad-guy country, and today, as we sit here, we're looking at how we best task organize those great young Marines, from the West Coast, for success.

Now that deployment to Afghanistan means that we're going to be at surge levels through October in our Corps, and that concerns us greatly; we've got to do something about that. But ladies and gentlemen, I'm here to report to you tonight that your Marines are holding up magnificently under the stress of these two fights. As we look at those areas of measure, those metrics, and there are ten or twelve of them, you can imagine what they are – UA (*unauthorized absence*), desertion rates, retention, divorce, suicide, alcohol abuse, spousal or child abuse – all of those figures are as good today or better than they were at the turn of the century, or in 2001.

Your Marines are showing an amazing resiliency to the task. We could not be prouder with the young men and women as they go about their duties. (*Applause*)

I cannot say the same to you about our families, and that is our most brittle part. We are concerned about the families. They are very proud of their contributions to these fights, but they are also getting tired. I had a spouse down in the Carolina MAGTF tell me that, "They interviewed Sergeant Sasquatch over there about four times on every deployment for PTSD, but no one has counseled my two sons yet, and sooner or later somebody is going to have to talk to me." I think that's one characterization or account of where we are. But we are paying attention to it. Historically, we have put about \$5 million of our Marine Corps budget against family programs. Ladies and gentlemen, this year, based on some windfall and based on some redirection of our budget, that figure is \$130 million. (*Applause*)

We are growing the force. We have been authorized to grow as many as 27,000 new Marines over about a five-year period. In this first year of growth, we needed to grow 5,000 Marines in order to be able to show that we could do so when all three ethnic groups of our country are not prone to join military Services these days. Our men and

women out on recruiting have done an absolutely fantastic job. They needed to bring in 5,000; they actually brought 7,000 new Marines, and they did so at a clip of 96.2 percent high school graduates. (*Applause*)

We do need to tighten some things up. We are in the process of clearing up some uniform issues that have been around for a while. We are in the process of tightening up on our weight control. Those forward operating bases in Iraq and Afghanistan are actually bad for us. We've gotten a little puffy – (*laughter*) – so we're in the process of working that to fruition. And we've got to get a handle on our safety programs. We lose a battalion of Marines per year, primarily to automobile and motorcycle accidents. That is something that we're going to work hard to get control of because a lot of it is truly senseless.

Let me talk to you just a moment, if I can, about this wonderful foundation. One of the red lines that we have put down is that, in spite of the all of the requirements that are out there, for mobile training teams and individual augments, we have not gone to recruiting, recruit training, or to our schools to fill those requirements, and we don't intend to do so. We realize that those great young Marines in class are our seed corn, that they are the future of our Corps, that they will be prominent in those days when we get back to the idea of more amphibious training, better full-spectrum capability, and the things that the country expects our Corps to do.

So we are going to preserve that capacity through the absolute best of our abilities. Our schools need to stay strong, and the (*Marine Corps*) University Foundation needs to stay strong. So it's delightful to see you folks here tonight in these numbers, and thank you for your support in terms of what the Foundation does. I think it's absolutely essential that we do just what we're doing today at the Marine Corps University.

Bottom line folks, your Corps is in good shape. We have tremendous Marines. I have tremendous advisors, both senior staff NCOs and at the general officer level. A number of them are here tonight. We have a First Lady of the Marine Corps who is dedicated to the health and welfare of our families, dedicated to being a wonderful mother and grandmother, and is not the least bit hesitant to tell me if she thinks I'm screwing something up. (*Laughter*) I think we're all in good shape, thank you for being here tonight. (*Applause*)