

Office of the Commandant of the Marine Corps

**Iwo Jima Association of America Reunion & Symposium
at the National Museum of the Marine Corps**

**General James F. Amos,
Commandant,
United States Marine Corps**

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GENERAL JAMES AMOS: Thanks Jay, very much. Ladies and gentlemen, it's an honor for me to be here. I'll talk in just a minute about what it really means, almost spiritually, to be a part of the annual reunion for our Iwo Jima Veterans. But before I do, I'd be remiss if I didn't, in some cases again and in some cases for the first time today, acknowledge some folks that are in the audience here. General Snowden walked up, he spoke and you gave him a standing ovation. He's a hero of mine and General Snowden it's always good to see you, Sir, and thank you again for being the shepherd and the energy behind the annual reunion, the trips back to Iwo Jima, the Volcano Isle. Thank you, Sir, for your leadership and for always being faithful. Thank you, Sir.

Ladies and gentleman, Lieutenant General Henry "Hank" Stackpole is sitting right here. General, would you stand up and give everybody a wave -- the President of the Iwo Jima Association. He has what I think probably all of us would like to think we would do when we leave the Marine Corps. He lives in Hawaii. He's been very active in the Pacific. He's a good friend of a mentor of mine, Ernie Cheatham from Hue City, so General it's always good to see you. Thank you for your leadership, Sir. Colonel Dick Rothwell -- Colonel Rothwell, are you here? He'll be here later tonight? Tomorrow, okay. Colonel Dick Rothwell, I was going to point him out, because he is one of just a few living battalion commanders on Iwo. So, if you just do the math and you think about age -- we probably made battalion commanders maybe just a bit younger in those days than we do today. You grew up, I think quickly. So, it wasn't any of these 35, 36-year-old battalion commanders. I suspect that Colonel Rothwell was in his 20s. But he's a commanding officer of 2nd Battalion 24th Marines. He landed on D-Day, so you that are here will get an opportunity to meet him.

Bonnie Haynes -- she stood earlier. Everybody cheered Mrs. Haynes, Bonnie... But two years ago, this wonderful museum was decked out in white table cloths and china and it was a wonderful evening. And it was the 65th Anniversary of the landing at Iwo Jima. And there were several folks that are absolute pillars in this organization. We've talked about General Haynes. And we've talked about a few others here this morning like General Snowden. But General Haynes, Bonnie's husband, was the founder of this great organization and attended the reunion two years ago. And I remember, because they sat at the same table that I was fortunate enough to sit at. And they got here just a little bit late. So, everybody was seated and in came General Haynes, with Bonnie on his arm. And it was obvious to everybody that General Haynes' health was failing. He made it through about 20 minutes. All the Marines, the veterans of Iwo Jima -- and this floor was full of them -- stood up when because of his failing health, Bonnie escorted him out of that door. I think all of us knew that would probably be the last time we would ever see General Haynes face to face. He died shortly thereafter. Bonnie is actively involved in this organization. Bonnie, we miss him. He's in a better place right now -- you know that. And Lord willing, we'll all get a chance one day to see him again. But thanks for your leadership here. Thanks for continuing the fidelity that your husband would want you to do. So, thank you Bonnie Haynes for being here today.

General Snowden talked about Ambassador Fujisaki. He is a great friend of the United States and a great friend of the Marines. After that terrible earthquake and tsunami over a year ago now in Japan -- it doesn't seem like it was over a year ago now, but it was -- Marines jumped in first hand from Okinawa, flew up in their 44 year old helicopters and their brand new KC-130J's and worked for the next 35-40 days with their brothers, their Japanese brothers, to help the people up in Sendai. I have one of my favorite gifts that sits in my home right now. It was hand carved and delivered to me just before Christmas this year. It says in kanji -- and of course, I'm fluent in kanji. It says, "Samurai Commandant". It's a hand-carved samurai warrior

and it was carved as a gift to the Commandant of the Marine Corps and it sits in my home today, Ambassador. So, when all the other gifts went back in the boxes at Christmas, that one stays out at my home. When you come to the Home of the Commandants I'll show you. "Samurai Commandant." And I treasure that. Thank you for what you do here.

This museum is a National Treasure. As I was driving up around to it, just like all of you, I'm reminded again of the shape of this building. Certainly it's not by accident and it's certainly particularly poignant today that we have our Iwo Jima survivors here; our family of Iwo Jima survivors, our friends, and fellow Marines, to come up to this building that is made and designed after that epic battle. So, I want to thank the folks here at this - our National Treasure museum -- for hosting this. I think we knew it was going to be great when we opened the doors up and cut the ribbon. I was here that November 10th when President Bush stood out front. That was also the day that he announced our next Medal of Honor recipient, Corporal Jason Dunham -- it was a wonderful day. We knew it was going to be significant. I don't think we understood, even on November 10th those years ago, that it was going to be as significant a place as it is today. It is almost the spiritual epicenter of the United States Marine Corps.

Twenty-five Marine-Options from VMI; you'll probably recognize all of these lads over there wearing those "horse blankets". It's good to have you here. I am told that we have midshipmen from Mary Baldwin. Are you here, any midshipmen from Mary Baldwin? Would you stand up? There you go. First of all, thank you for making the trip. By the way, for the VMI lads here, I am surrounded by VMI officers in my office -- my aides are from VMI. My military secretary -- raise your hand, Chip. See this? You could be him one day if you decide to become a United States Marine. I'm surrounded by VMI guys, so I almost feel like I could graduate there -- or graduated from there, but thank you for being here. But for you, both of our Mary Baldwin midshipmen and our VMI cadets, I want you to pay very close attention to today. I want you to listen to the words and think about what's happening here today. I want you to think about the courage and the fidelity of these American heroes that we honor here today, because this is what being a United States Marine -- this is what selfless sacrifice -- is all about. We use a term, and you know it's our motto -- "Semper Fidelis"; always faithful. Faithful almost to a fault and that term fidelity is what this reunion is all about.

We've already talked to the families and friends, the Iwo Jima veterans. We've given them a round of applause. I want to, as the 35th Commandant, welcome you. Thank you for making the trip here. Thank you for being a part of this. For grandchildren and great-grandchildren that carry on the legacy of your grandfather, your great-grandfather, thank you for doing that. Do not stop. Do not turn that loose. That is important to our Corps. We thrive on it and I'll talk a little more about that here in just a second. I've been the Commandant for a little over 16 months. And when you're announced, in that 90-100 day period before you take this job the newly designated, or nominated, Commandant has the opportunity to travel around and spend time with all the living Commandants. And there were seven of them. So, I spent time, visited, flew, left Washington, D.C., visited their homes and spent time with every single one of them.

One of my all time favorites is a Commandant by the name of Carl Mundy, Jr. And as you might imagine, I would get a lot of help as I was preparing for this job, particularly since I was going to be the first aviator Commandant. So, there was great fear and trepidation out there in retired Marine Corps land. "What is he going to do?"... But General Mundy was not one of them. And I got advice from all the living Commandants, but he sat down with me and he said, "Look, you're going to get a lot of help. Everybody is going to try to tell you how to run the United States Marine Corps." He said, "I'm going to give you" -- And

he has since given me a lot of advice and he is a mentor of mine and I call on him often; we talk at least monthly and in some cases weekly. But he said, "I'm going to give you one piece of advice that's the most important that anybody will give you." He said, "Jim, as the Commandant of the Marine Corps, you are responsible -- you are solely responsible -- for the spiritual well being of the United States Marine Corps and if you fail in that you will have failed as the 35th Commandant."

Well, I went back and I said, okay, well, I was raised Catholic, and I got kicked out of first grade by Sister Pauline, but I got back into Catholic school, somehow. Later on, I attended Baptist churches, so I'm kind of -- I'm becoming ecumenical. And then, at one time I attended a Presbyterian church so surely I'm well qualified to grab the spiritual reigns... and he could see the look on my face. He knew that I was shooting well below the 10 ring on the target. And he said, "I'm not talking about religion. I'm talking about what's in here. (Pointing at his heart) I'm talking about the spirit of the United States Marine Corps. I'm talking about what makes us different. I'm talking about who we are, Jim. And what we represent and what we do for our country. That's what I'm talking about. And if you ever lose that, you will have failed as the 35th Commandant of the Marine Corps."

Ladies and gentlemen, I tell you what, that's why we're here today; VMI cadets and Mary Baldwin midshipmen; I want you to pay attention because that's what this is about. This is about that sense of that spirit that runs inside of us that causes us to be Marines. It was imparted into us in the hills at Quantico. It was imparted into us on the parade decks of Parris Island and San Diego. It is who we are and why we are different. We're not weird different. We're different. We march to a different drum. We have a different since of willingness to sacrifice. We have an enormous capacity for faithfulness and fidelity. That's why that motto is absolutely critical to who we are.

I want to put today's -- actually, the significance of what happened after the landing, in 1945 -- I would like to put it in kind of historical context for you. We know that 70,000 Marines, sailors, Coast Guardsmen and soldiers landed February 19th. They didn't all get on the beach February 19th, 1945. We know that, but they continued to come ashore. And we know that the 20,000 Japanese soldiers were commanded by a courageous general, by the name of Kuribayashi. He had plenty of opportunity to plan for this for the last several years prior. It should be understood that he was every bit as much a warrior as those Marines that landed on that island. But before that, some things had happened that had changed the world for forever, December 7, 1941. After the attack -- and I've had 2 assignments in Hawaii... I've re-enlisted Marines over on the Arizona Memorial. I've raised the flags, I've been on boats out there, flown over it; had lots of opportunity to reflect on what that must have been like. But go back to the United States of America and across our nation at that time and a lot of veterans can talk to us about what was the mood of America. Besides being angry, there was probably a sense of "how did this happen?" "Is this a sense of defeat? Is it temporary? What's going to happen?" There was a sense of -- I would suspect -- of great questioning. "What's going on in our nation? What's happening?" June, 1942, at a little island that I have been to, most people have not, in the middle of the Pacific called Midway. And it became almost the bellwether for the change in the war. It gave the United States of America the sense that - this could be done.... that there may be days ahead of us that are better than December 7, 1941.

In 1943 and 1944, the campaign down in the southern part of the Pacific in the Gilbert and Marshall Islands was taking place at places like Tarawa, Kwajalein, and Eniwetok. And for the first time, American forces had penetrated what we would call kind of the outer perimeter of defenses for the Japanese Empire. In 1944, Marines fought hard in Tinian, Saipan, Guam and Peleliu -- epic battles. It's interesting today that we're

returning. Now the United States of America, as you know, is full of citizens from Guam; American citizens. But, we're about to put Marines back on Guam. We're working through that right now. But I've had the privilege of being back to Guam many times... had the privilege of walking the ground, the runways at Tinian, being at Saipan driving around the island, flying around Saipan. And the Marines are returning back to their roots. While this was going on there was a war raging in Europe. Unlike any other time that I can remember in our history we were actually engaged almost geographically at opposite sides of the world in World War II. And in 1945, in February, when the landing was taking place at Iwo Jima on the European front Allied Forces defeated the last great German offensive west of the Rhine River. Later the next month, the Allied Forces crossed the Rhine into Germany. Hitler's army was in disarray. VE Day, or Victory in Europe, was just a mere two months away and happened on 8 May 1945. And yet, in that very same period of time, February of that same year, 70,000 Marines landed on Volcano Island. For the first and only time in our history of our Corps, there were more casualties on the Marine side than on the enemy's side. 20,000 wounded in action and over 7,000 killed in action. The Japanese lost everybody, save just a few. They fought a courageous fight to the end. My suspicions are that our veterans would say that they were worthy opponents.

Twenty-seven Medals of Honor were awarded out of Iwo Jima. Later on in my career, about when I was a young one-star, I had the opportunity - because I used to talk about the epic Battle of Iwo Jima - and I was struck by the young man, Jack Lucas. Many of the veterans here know him. Jack was the youngest Medal of Honor recipient in our nation. I think he still is to this day. And I used to talk about Jack in my speeches and I tried to dig up as much information on Jack as I could. He had lied and got into the Marine Corps at 14, came out of a military high school. He looked a little bit older and because he understood military discipline, he passed for a 17-year-old and he joined the Marine Corps and then fought his way -- actually he was a stow-away, because he got locked up in jail in Hawaii while the ships were in route. And he stowed-away with his cousin aboard one of the Navy ships and didn't even have a weapon. He was found out by his cousin's platoon commander and company commander and they eventually gave him a weapon and they said, "We need everybody we can get" so Jack Lucas landed on day one on February 19th. He went on to be a Medal of Honor recipient. A pretty colorful character in his own right and it was several years later when I was speaking publicly I got a phone call and he says, "General, I hear that you've been speaking about me favorably and I'd like the opportunity to meet you." From that point on Jack Lucas and I became very good friends. I buried him about three years ago down in Mississippi in full military honors.

That's the caliber of young men that landed on that island. There was no shortage of sacrifice. There was no shortage of fidelity. Well, the battle that took place on Iwo Jima set the stage for what eventually ended the war on VJ Day on 14 August 1945. When that flag went up, I suspect that our veterans in the audience would say, "I missed it. I didn't see it, because I was actually a little bit preoccupied. I was pretty busy." Wherever you were on that island, whether you were on the runway, whether you were headed to the center part of the island - Wherever you were I suspect that you missed it, but there were Marines that looked up and saw it. And my suspicions are that it gave them a sense of "We're going to be okay. We're going to complete this."

What it must have been like to see the flag and what that meant is huge, but when Joe Rosenthal took that picture, he just snapped it. You know the story. Many of you have met Joe Rosenthal, before he died. He had no idea that it was going to turn out to be the photograph -- probably the most famous of all combat photographs ever taken in the history of our nation. I can imagine what that photograph of the flag raising meant back to the fellow Americans when all of a sudden it showed up in movie theaters and actual film

footage and it showed up in the front pages of newspapers. My sense is that it encouraged our Americans and they said, "This will soon be over." And it was. That photograph and what took place in that battle on Volcano Island -- I keep using the term epic, but as I said as the Commandant of the Marine Corps, I get to travel and visit Marines and go through history; year after year of what has taken place in our 236 ½ years existence.

That was a defining moment for the Marine Corps. It joined just the small handful - in my estimation - of other defining moments. At Belleau Wood -- we didn't have nearly the numbers at Belleau Wood -- we had two regiments of Marines, but they turned the tide in World War I. They stopped the German advance 60 miles outside of Paris, France and the Germans became vulnerable for the first time. That battle at Iwo Jima joined Belleau Wood; it joined those Marines from the 7th Marine Regiment that fought at a Chosin Reservoir and came out. They joined the hands with the group of Marines that fought at Hue City and those that fought in Fallujah in November of 2004. And now, just a year ago, those that fought on the streets in Marjah and the central part of Helmand Province. This battle has defined the nature and the spirit of the Marine Corps. And it describes fidelity and a willingness to sacrifice, second to nothing in our history.

Ladies and gentlemen, then Secretary of the Navy Forrester made that famous quote. He said -- you know what it -- in fact, it may even be up on the wall in here, where he made the statement... He said, "The raising of the flag on Iwo Jima means a Marine Corps for another 500 years." Now, I remind Congress of that every day. In fact, I was at a hearing yesterday for the House Armed Services Committee, for three hours, and I tried to remind them that we have at least another hundred years left, so any efforts by the Army or anybody else to do away with the United States Marine Corps will fall on deaf ears. Sixty-seven years later, after that epic battle, that landing on February 19th, you gathered here. You will gather at Mt. Suribachi next month, some of you will. Those of you that can't make it this year will gather in spirit, but this goes back to what General Mundy told me. If we ever lose that spirit -- and I've included you now -- this is more than just the responsibility of the 35th Commandant. That's why I said if you are a junior, a grandson, a granddaughter, a great-grandson, or a great-granddaughter if you ever lose that spirit than surely our Corps will cease to exist.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for being a part of this, for family members that have come from all around. For those Iwo Jima Veterans, I am honored to be in your presence. I remember one of the battalion commanders' right over here at dinner that night two years ago. His granddaughter came up and she said, "Would you come over and have your picture taken with my grandfather? He wants to meet you and he would be honored to get the picture taken." I went over there.

He stood up out of his wheel chair and he said, "General, I am honored."

And I said, "Sir, sit down. I'm going to kneel down at your feet here and so we're all at the same level, I'm the one that's honored." Ladies and gentlemen, God bless every one of you and Semper Fidelis.

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