

**OFFICE OF  
THE COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS**

**CMC BIRTHDAY BALL**

**REMARKS BY  
GEN. JAMES F. AMOS,  
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS**

**RAY MABUS,  
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY**

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(Cheers, applause.)

GEN. JAMES F. AMOS: The secretary and I intercepted a bunch of lieutenants out there by the bar in the very back – shameful display of revelry – (inaudible, laughter).

Listen, it's good to – first of all, it's hard to imagine a birthday ball that is 3,000-strong, but Marines and family of Marines and friends of Marines – there are 3,010 of you here tonight. To the best of my knowledge, this is the largest birthday ball in the world. So ladies and gentlemen, give yourselves a round of applause – (inaudible, applause).

I need to get just a little bit of the formalities out of the way, so if you bear with me because there's some very, very distinguished guests – friends of our Corps – that are with us tonight. And I don't want to miss the opportunity to welcome them. I'm going to ask not that you stand. If you just put your hand in the air so we would know – they're pretty much right down here in the front row.

Obviously, Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus and his wife Lynne. Mr. Secretary, it's good to have you here. (Inaudible, applause) – Camp Pendleton and his lovely wife, Kathy, my high-school classmate – (inaudible, applause). Gary Roughead and his – (inaudible). He's sitting at this table right over here. (Inaudible, applause) – commandant and his wife, Diane at this table, right over here. (Applause, cheers.)

The Honorable Charlie Donovan (ph) is here. He's at this table right over here, a good friend of mine and – (inaudible, applause). Thank you. My trusted – (inaudible) – of a sidekick and very, very dear friend, Gen. Joe Dunford and his wife and his son. (Applause.) The Honorable Joe Gretchen (ph). He is a – (inaudible) – but he is a retired lieutenant general. He's been a dear friend of ours – all of ours – (inaudible, applause) and his lovely wife Susan.

The really great assistant commandant of the Marine Corps and Gen. Michael Williams' right arm – (inaudible, applause). Right, General? Col. Barney Bartman (ph) and his lovely wife Martha – Barney, where are you – you're hiding – (inaudible, applause).

Sgt. Maj. Carlton Kent and his lovely wife, Liz, Sergeant Major, stand up, the sergeant major of the United States Marine Corps. (Cheers, applause.) A young Marine that I met maybe four weeks ago – Marine Sgt. Johnny Johns (ph) – Johnny, raise your hand – DOD, wounded warrior – (inaudible, applause).

When I walked in to visit Johnny, there were a dozen POD (ph) Marines. That's a very small community – very tight fraternity. As you know, in this room, a very dangerous occupation. Johnny was laying there in bed. He left a couple of things in Afghanistan. The Marine Corps could have to go back and find them – then we're going to have to go find the

SOB that did it. Johnny – look at the big smile on his face – (inaudible, applause). So Johnny, it's good to have you with us tonight. Thank you, son. (Applause.)

I have one piece of business I need to get out of the way, and this deals with the secretary of the navy and the chief of naval operations. I'm happy to report that as of about 1100 this morning, you have a brand-new DDG 109, the USS Jason Dunham, which commissioned this morning – (inaudible, applause). It was a wonderful ceremony and Mr. and Mrs. Dunham, they're – what a wonderful couple.

Ladies and gentlemen, this an exciting time of the year for the Marine Corps. Starting about a week-and-a-half ago, birthday balls began to pop up all across our nation. They've continued on until this Wednesday in places like Afghanistan and on the 11 amphibious ships that are at sea.

I promise you, if there are 8,000 Marines, there were birthday cake celebrations at sea with our Marines. We have 31,000 Marines and our sailors, our corpsman, our docs, our chaplains with us deployed tonight. Twenty thousand of those Marines are in Afghanistan, and I promise you, on November the 10<sup>th</sup>, they stopped.

Some were able to go to a chow hall. And I'm sure there was a birthday cake there. And to the very best of Maj. Gen. Wilson's capabilities, he tried to fly birthday cake out to all the forward operating bases in – (inaudible). But I will promise you that there were places where Marines were in some of the deadliest areas up in the northeast corner of the Helmand province where Marines are fighting tonight – today – in a deadly fight.

There were Marines who didn't get a piece of cake, but they broke out their MRE, and they tore that piece of tin foil and pulled out that pound cake that we've all had – (cheers, applause) – took out some of those crystals, poured it into their camelback or their canteen or their – whatever bottle they have for water, and they made bug juice. And they celebrated with one another, the Marine Corps birthday.

It's an exciting time. There are many in this audience that have never been to a birthday ball in the Marine Corps. You're probably wondering, what is it about an organization that began 235 years ago in a tavern on the waterfront in Philadelphia where the head recruiter was a bartender – (laughter) – and it's lasted for 235 years. Here we are in this world-class hotel, dressed up like there's no tomorrow, celebrating the birthday of our organization. It is an exciting time.

Tonight, we're honored to have as our guest of honor, a good friend of the Marine Corps. I consider him a good friend of mine personally – the Honorable Ray Mabus. Before he gets up, I'd like to make a couple of comments. As I was going through his biography, I couldn't help but notice the similarities between his career and mine. He went to Harvard; I went to the University of Iowa. (Laughter.) He graduated summa cum laude; they kicked me out the door just trying to get me off campus. (Laughter.)

Secretary Mabus is here with his lovely wife, Lynne. The thing I'd like to – the comment I'd like to make tonight is, he left his wonderful home – they did – Lynne, their daughter – left their home to join, again, public service. He left what would no doubt be a substantial income, a life that was considerably more comfortable. And both of them moved to Washington, D.C., to become a public servant.

Lynne, thank you for being a part of that. Thank you for being part of the team that is willing to take yourself and your daughter and leave Mississippi and your home – or as we said when I lived there, Mississippi (ph), and move to Washington, DC, and become part of our Navy and Marine Corps family. So God bless you, and thank you. (Applause.)

Secretary Mabus did go to Harvard – got his law degree there. He's an Ole Miss graduate. He has a pretty good story – career. But let me make a couple of highlights before he comes up and takes the microphone.

Number one, he entered politics and has wonderful experience – a fourth-generation Mississippian. He entered politics, eventually becoming the youngest governor in our nation in 1988, as the governor of that great state. He left there and went on to be the ambassador to Saudi Arabia. He's commanded Marines before. He had his MSG attachment – this is not his first birthday. But in Saudi Arabia, his Marines took wonderful care of him, and that's where the relationship began with the United States Marine Corps.

Ladies and gentlemen, he's our 75<sup>th</sup> secretary of the Navy, CNO and I couldn't have a better friend. They couldn't have a better – (inaudible) – Department of the Navy. Ladies and gentlemen, the 75<sup>th</sup> secretary of the Navy and our good friend, Ray Mabus.

(Applause.)

**SECRETARY RAY MABUS:** Commandant of the Marine Corps – former commandants, CNO, special guests, particularly wounded warriors. You know, the whole notion of the Marine Corps to me is wrapped up in one very apocryphal story – that was told in a far-off battlefield – there was a single Marine holding the top of a hill as wave after wave of the enemy came after him. And the battle raged all day.

And at the end of the day he still held the high ground, and the enemy was preparing to send in more troops. And one of their number came stumbling out of the dust and the smoke and said, go back, go back, it's a trap. There are two of them. (Laughter.) That's the United States Marine Corps. (Cheers, applause.)

The Marine Corps has evolved a little bit in the 235 years since Samuel Nicholson (sic) recruited five volunteer companies to act as sharpshooters in the riggings of Navy ships and part of boarding parties to go onboard British ships. They've gone from the wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 20<sup>th</sup>, through amphibious operations and now to desert and mountain warfare. But that evolution hasn't changed them that much. A Marine and a rifle is still the core of the Corps. (Applause.)

The lessons that Marines have learned in counterinsurgency and irregular warfare from the last 200 years, they are putting into practice today. The great amphibious assaults across the Pacific in World War II keep being repeated at Incheon with the Korean heroes we honor tonight – and in Kandahar. Early in the Afghan war, Marines came from the sea – this time in planes – to attack the airfield.

The Marines still come from the sea in places like Haiti and Pakistan to deliver humanitarian relief, disaster assistance. And through all this, the Marines have been an incredible team. The Marine Air-Ground Task Force – there is no more formidable fighting operation. The infantry, the artillery – Marine air, Marine logistics – operating as a complete team with the United States Navy. Two services, one fight.

Throughout the history of this storied Corps, there has been an unbroken line of patriotism, of courage, of heroism. Col. Rothwell (ph), born in 1912, to Lt. DeWalt (ph), born in 1989, represent that unbroken red line that stretches as far as we can see in the future.

I want to talk just for a second about three individual Marines. One is Hector Cafferata of Fox Company in the Korean War. He was on the video, a Medal of Honor winner and one of three from Fox Company that held out in unbelievable conditions against unbelievable odds and emerged victorious.

The second is the Marine that Gen. Amos mentioned – Jason Dunham. (Cheers.) Jason Dunham, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, leading the patrol in Iraq, heard the sound of gunfire and took his unit toward it, coming across a group of insurgents. They got into a fight – a grenade fell free – Jason Dunham threw himself on the grenade and saved his fellow Marines.

And today, as the commandant said, the newest ship in the United States Navy – DDG 109 – the USS Jason Dunham. For the next 35 to 40 years – (applause) – for the next 35 to 40 years, as that ship goes around the world and is seen by hundreds of thousands of people, the name, the actions, the heroism of Jason Dunham will live on.

And finally, on Wednesday, it was my honor to go to New Hampshire to present the Navy Cross to the mother of Michael Ouellete, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Marines. Came under fire in Afghanistan – grievously, mortally wounded – directed the defense, brought in close air support and refused to be evacuated until all his Marines were accounted for. He died during his evacuation.

Those three Marines are three of tens of thousands who have worn the uniform of the United States Marine Corps, that unbroken line from 1775 until today. And when you see those battlefield ribbons on the Marine Corps flag, every single one of those represents a battle or a campaign that Marines fought in, that Marines died in, that Marines were victorious in. It represents that long unbroken line of heroism, of courage, of honor, of character.

Happy birthday, Marines. Semper fi. (Applause.)

(END)