

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

**COMMISSIONING OF USS JASON DUNHAM**

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

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GEN. JAMES F. AMOS: Thanks Mr. Secretary; thanks for the wonderful introduction. Good morning ladies and gentlemen; it's great to be here. As our secretary of defense says, anytime we can get out of Washington, D.C., it's a great occasion. But this is a particularly good one and a particularly grand one, the commissioning of this wonderful ship.

Several of you, Rep. Kline, Rep. – (inaudible) – Under Secretary Burke (ph), Vice Admiral Dan Holloway (ph) with Fred – Dan – (inaudible) – Commander Scott Spirev (ph) and the crew of the USS Jason Dunham, Marines, sailors, family members and friends it's an honor to be here for what is truly a great day for both the United States Navy and Marine Corps team.

The timing of this event could not have been better. From a personal perspective, I am delighted to attend my very first ship commissioning as the new commandant of the Marine Corps as Secretary Burke has said. In this case it's named after a true American hero. I think it's fitting that we commission this ship named for a Marine just three days after the 10<sup>th</sup> of November – a birthday shared by both Jason Dunham and the Marine Corps – and two days after Veterans Day where we honor all the military of past and present.

Just as the Navy and the Marine Corps are inexplicably linked in history, this ship serves as a tangible link between our two services and embodies the greatness of the Department of the United States Navy. Finally, it's just an historic day for the Navy that it is the 12<sup>th</sup> for the United States Marine Corps as one of our heroes of our Corps, Medal of Honor recipient Cpl. Jason Dunham joins Gen. David M. Shoup, the 22<sup>nd</sup> commandant of the Marine Corps and Vice Adm. James B. Stockdale, both the Medal of Honor recipients as namesakes on the finest class of destroyers to ever sail those seas – (inaudible).

I can't think of a better single example of the shared bond between our two services than the ship of the United States Navy bearing the name of a United States Marine. It is a powerful example of our tradition and heritage as defenders of this great nation. I am thrilled to be a part of today's event.

The commissioning of the naval vessel shares its roots with the earliest days of our nation, although at that time there was very little ceremony. Orders to carry a ship, quote, “into deep water, take you on board her cannon, ammunition, water, provisions and stores for a complement of seamen and Marines and preparing her in every respect for sea,” unquote – (inaudible, background noise) – the captain felt the ship was ready to take to sea, the ship was placed into commission and very little ceremony and no celebration. I'm sure there were moments during the past 18 months when Commander Scott Braun (ph) and his crew would have been delighted to come back to this tradition.

But today has finally arrived and we owe thanks to all those who contributed to making this event a huge success. First, the assistance of – (inaudible) – who graciously extended her hospitalities to our sailors, our Marines and our family and friends, your efforts are deeply

appreciated. Thank you. Second – (applause) – second, to the men and women of Bath Iron Works, your uncompromising and diligent construction of this magnificent ship demonstrates the unparalleled capability of the American worker. Mr. – (inaudible) – on behalf of all United States Marines, please pass on our heartfelt thanks to your talented and tireless employees.

To Commander – (inaudible) – chief chamberlain and the officers and sailors of Jason Dunham, your fidelity and sacrifice that brought this vessel to life. You have the enviable task of employing her full potential in the defense of our nation throughout the globe. I know each of you will display the same honor, courage and commitment as did Cpl. Jason Dunham. Thank you for your service. (Applause.)

Dan and Deb, none of this would have been possible without you. You have borne the heaviest burden, the sacrifice of a son. But Jason's actions will not be forgotten. Your son, honored through this ship, stands shoulder to shoulder with the greatest men and women in our nation's history. Thank you for all that you have given and all that you continue to give. You embody all that is honorable in our American families. (Applause.)

The values and patriotism you and the 1,900 citizens of Scio, New York, nurtured in Jason, laid a foundation for his selfless actions. It was his selflessness that inspired Jason to join the military. He had a strong desire to serve his country, but as befitted his competitive nature he wanted to challenge himself as an infantryman in the United States Marine Corps. It was selflessness that made him always want to help out the little guy, the underdog. This is what endeared him to his men. They knew that Cpl. Dunham cared about their welfare more than they did.

Before departing for his combat deployment to Iraq, he said I want to make sure everyone makes it home alive. He meant it and his men believed it. On April the 14<sup>th</sup>, 2004, Cpl. Dunham, a machine gunner with Kilo Company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, led his squad on patrol in the western city Karabilah in Iraq. While searching a vehicle for weapons, Cpl. Dunham was attacked by an enemy insurgent. In the midst of wrestling with Cpl. Dunham, the insurgent dropped a live grenade with the intent of killing himself, Cpl. Dunham and – (inaudible) – Marines.

Jason warned his Marines of the danger and then in the ultimate act of selflessness and bravery he covered the grenade with his Kevlar helmet and his body. As a result of the wounds suffered during the grenade explosion, Cpl. Dunham would pass away eight days later at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland with Dan and Deb by his side.

This selfless act has inspired our entire nation. In his book, "The Gift of Valor", Michael Phillips recounts the story of Jason's humanity and his heroism. Throughout the book he describes the many people who played an important part in Jason's life. It is those people who form the soul of this great, war-fighting vessel.

As I look at this mighty ship I am struck by the detail of its construction and the complexity of its operation. But as she sits here today, USS Jason Dunham is more than a mass of iron and – (inaudible). She is a symbol of the lives that Jason Dunham has touched. Deb and

Dan, Justin, Kyle and Katie (sp) – they are part of the USS Jason Dunham. (Inaudible) – Kelly Miller, two of Cpl. Dunham’s Marines are alive today because of Jason. They are part of the USS Jason Dunham.

Trent Gibson, Brian Robinson (ph) and Adam Warren (ph) – Marines who shared the hardships of war with Jason are a part of the USS Jason Dunham. Dr. Heidi Kraft whose almost spiritual connection with Jason and her subsequent actions at a remote hospital in the deserts of Iraq allowed him to make it home to America – she is part of the USS Jason Dunham.

(Inaudible) – who have served as informal crisis counselors for hundreds of distraught families at our naval hospital in Bethesda formed an instant kinship with the Dunhams and aided them through the final hours of their son. They are a part of the USS Jason Dunham.

Petty Officer Jeremiah Bird, the crew member on the – (inaudible, background noise) – who hand-stitched a – (inaudible) – Dunham family is part of the USS Jason Dunham. The countless Americans who have shown up, often times, unannounced at the Dunham’s door simply to shake hands and offer condolences to the family, they are a part of this mighty warship.

Staff Sgt. Mark Juarez who was with Cpl. Dunham in Iraq six-and-a-half-years ago and who was seriously wounded in Afghanistan last month – he continues in his recovery today; he also is part of the USS Jason Dunham. And finally, McKayla (ph) Dunham, the newest member of the Dunham family, born last month and Deb and Dan’s first grandchild. She is part of this great warship as well.

For the captain and crew of Jason Dunham, as you embark on this powerful new warship and continue your selfless service to our nation may its namesake inspire you to the pinnacle of naval excellence. On 14 April 1865 in Washington, D.C., President Abraham Lincoln made the ultimate sacrifice for his country. One-hundred-and-thirty-nine years later, Cpl. Jason Dunham on a dusty road in western Iraq did the same.

The day of 14 April the sacrifice both men made for their country link these two great Americans throughout history. And it is fitting then that it was Lincoln who said, “in the end it’s not the years in your life that count; it’s the life in your years.” And the life that Jason Dunham led and the heroism and bravery he displayed continued to be an inspiration to all Americans that live daily on board this great vessel. Thank you, God bless you; Semper fidelis and Semper fortis. (Applause.)

MR. : Thank you, Gen. Amos, for those inspirational and heartfelt remarks. Secretary Warren (ph), I would be honored if you would join me in place of Jason Dunham –

(END)