

Office of the Commandant of the Marine Corps

Dedication of Wilson Hall

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

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GENERAL JAMES F. AMOS: Kris, thanks for the comments, the kind comments on the right man theory. I think that applies to that man right there, that wonderful husband, Mrs. Wilson, of yours and all those other commandants. I am a long way away from that. Ladies and gentleman, this is exciting and don't worry about the thunder. It's not going to happen over here. It's not going to rain on us so we'll just kind of let it go around us.

I want you to look at this building because this is almost a miracle to think that that United States Marine Corps would have something this nice, this new. It even smells like a new car, so normally all that stuff goes to the Navy and the Army and the Air Force. Somehow, we managed to get this and I am very, very grateful to Sauer and NAVFAC for doing this for us. It is absolutely wonderful. Kris, thanks again for the kind comments.

Ladies and gentleman, welcome. Welcome to a ceremony that, quite honestly, we have been looking forward to and planning for well over a year. I appreciate your attendance and it's exciting that we are here to cut the ribbon on this wonderful facility. I am certainly going to talk about General Wilson here in just a minute, but first I want to speak to his wonderful family.

Mrs. Wilson, I was reacquainted with what Kris Stillings said about that southern hospitality when I sat next to you this morning and you leaned over and you said in that famous southern drawl of yours "It's delightful to see you again, General Amos." Ma'am, it's a pleasure to have you here, First Lady of the Marine Corps. We're delighted. Again, it's been 14 years since Bonnie and I first met you. We joined you and General Wilson in 1998 when I was a brand new General Select at John Phillip Sousa Band Hall where we all had dinner together that night. I joined you at the table and it was a great honor. Mr. and Mrs. Taylor, thank you for coming up from Birmingham. It's an exciting time for the family. I know it is and the rich history, thank you for being here and being able to help us recognize and pay homage to your father and your father-in-law. This building is going to remain a living testament to the accomplishments of a man that is larger than life.

To Jared and Louis, it is good for me to meet you. Jared is finishing -- he's got about another year left at William and Mary Law School -- and then he's going to go to California to grow a ponytail and get an earring and become a lawyer out there and chase ambulances; but Jared it is good to have you here. Louis finished the Naval Academy in 2010. How he ended up in the Navy is beyond me. It's a subject he's going to have to confront with his grandfather when he finally gets to heaven somewhere down the road, but a little bit seriously, he goes to Nuke Power -- in fact, he is at Nuke Power School. Now you need to know he just came off the USS Makin Island, one of our absolute newest ships, just came off cruise, so he's been with Marines so you get extra credit for that Louis. But our nation needs fine young officers and leaders for the future and I know your grandfather is going to be very proud of you.

General Mundy, it's always a pleasure to have you in the audience, sir. You followed General Wilson closely as a Commandant later on, carrying on the many policies and programs that helped establish our Corps following a long period of conflict in Vietnam and I want to tell you personally, thank you for your friendship, your mentorship. I mention you often in my public remarks for the things that you've taught me since I was Lieutenant Colonel Amos many, many years ago.

I'd like to take a few moments and make some comments about General Wilson, but I'm certainly not going to effect a recount of his biography as you all have that before you; I'm confident that you've read it and I'm equally as confident, or even more confident, that the family knows it by heart. But as a three-war veteran and a charter member of our nation's greatest generation, General Wilson's career covered what is likely the defining moment in our nation's history, certainly defining period for our Marine Corps.

That said, I'd like to comment on the Corps that General Wilson took command of in 1975. A Corps seen from the eyes of a freshly promoted captain whose name was Jim Amos and I remember the times vividly. The Corps was 196,000 Marines strong when General Wilson took command. He would shepherd the draw down to the Corps to 185,000 by 1979. Our nation had been out of Vietnam for two long years, yet the scars persisted from eight long years of combat. He took command of a Marine Corps that was struggling to regain some of its' character and national capital, character and national capital that had been spent in the jungles of Vietnam. The Corps' equipment was in desperate shape, most of it needing to be completely replaced. All during a time when Congress and the American people were weary of war and were loathe to spending more money on its Armed Forces. Drugs within our Corps were rampant. Duty officers and duty NCO's often risked their lives during late night barracks tours. I remember those visits vividly. Racial tension was palpable within units. It spilled out into the barracks courtyards and across our bases and you could feel the tension. Many of our non-commissioned officers and staff non-commissioned officers were products of war-time rapid promotion rates. Almost universally, they lacked the leadership skills and maturity of experience to help lead our Corps forward in the challenging times that lied ahead. Marines across our Corps looked and often acted like, well, anything other than a United States Marine. It seemed that few were willing to do anything about it.

America remained loathe towards its men and women in uniform in 1975. It was tired of spending its national treasure in Southeast Asia and the Pacific and thus, America decided to pivot to Europe and take the challenges of a cold war opponent, in Russia. And lastly, there were persistent calls that spoke out against the relevance of our Corps. There were those in the Defense and media sectors that believed that there was no significant reason for our nation to continue to have a United States Marine Corps. They called into question the amphibious mission and validity of the Corps and by extension, placed its mere survival in jeopardy.

This was the Corps that General Lou Wilson inherited in 1975, but he was in good company, as the other three services were even in worse shape than we were in. And then the unimaginable happened. General Lou Wilson took command and all of his leadership experience and all of his many skills that had been so keenly developed during the Pacific campaign of World War II and the frozen hills of North Korea, and in the jungles of Vietnam, they all came together during the summer of 1975. There was no doubt to any of us who was in charge of the Marine Corps anymore. It was this tall, southern gentleman, Lou Wilson. He was our Commandant. He printed a poster of himself standing in his Charlies with his hands on his hips and his finger pointing to all of us who dared look at and it read "get in step and do it smartly". I remember that poster to this day and I deeply regret I didn't keep it because it was legendary. He began mandatory drug screening when not a single other service chief was even

interested in the program and yet drugs prevailed across all four services. Listening to his mid-grade leaders, he instituted the Expeditious Discharge Program. Thirty days and you were out the front gate wondering what the hell happened to you. He put the fat bodies on notice and began discharging those Marines who failed to meet his high standards. General Lou Wilson was larger than life. He was precisely the right man at the right time in our Corps' history. For me personally, Lou Wilson changed and saved the Corps. It seemed that it happened almost overnight and yet I'm confident, especially now in the position I'm in, that it took him all 4 years and it was hard work. From my perspective as a young captain, General Lou Wilson saved our Corps.

Two hundred years after the founding of our Corps and during some of its darkest days, he came along in history and corrected our heading to true north. His is the single greatest example of what one Marine can do for his Corps. Mrs. Wilson, family, friends, the future of our Corps will pass through the halls of this grand building named after the legacy of your husband, your father, your grandfather and your close friend. There is no doubt in my mind that over the course of this building's existence, many young lieutenants will pass through and even so, one or two will be called upon to save our Corps. And when that critical moment happens, and rest assured it will indeed happen, they will look back confident in their compass heading, because they have stood in shadows of a giant of a man, General Louis Wilson.

Colonel Stillings, Kris, thank you and your staff. We've already applauded you but this is an absolutely wonderful ceremony. Thank you for putting it together and for all that you've done to make this day the day that it is. Shepherd this building, shepherd our Marines, shepherd the future of our Corps very carefully, Colonel. God bless the United States and health to the United States Marine Corps. Semper Fidelis, Marines.

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