

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

FLEF'S NATIONAL LEADERSHIP AWARD

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

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(Applause.)

GEN. JAMES F. AMOS: While I was preparing my remarks to come here, I asked my staff – I said, tell me about this luncheon. And they said, sir, it's just going to be a very small gathering, with just a few people. (Laughter.) Now, I lost track of the size that it was going to be in New York City, and I walked here and now I know what my daughter felt like when she walked out on the stage – (inaudible).

I'm traveling with a pretty good troop over here, and I seem them kind of on the far side. I'm going to ask my wife of four decades, Bonnie, would you please stand up so you can see the wife of a Marine. (Applause.) We've been married 40 years and she's put up with all of this. Right next to her is the –excuse me – the sergeant major of the Marine Corps, Carlton Kent. Sergeant Major, would you stand up? That's right. (Inaudible, applause.) He's traveling with his child-bride, Liz, and Liz, it's good to have you here.

Ladies and gentlemen, it's a pleasure and an honor to be here. I will tell you that there is a kindred spirit between the United States Marine Corps and the Federal Law Enforcement Foundation. You, serve – those officers that have served behind the badge – they serve out of selflessness and dedication. There's a willingness to give up their life for the benefit and the good of all of us in this great country.

And they sacrifice their family time to serve us, very similar to those of us that serve behind the eagle, globe and anchor in the United States Marine Corps. So there's a natural affinity, and it's the reason why I'm here today – primarily, not to accept an award, but to say thank you to all those men and women that serve behind the badge. It's no secret that many of them, by the way, to include our great firefighters in this wonderful city, have served initially as United States Marines. It's no coincidence.

I've been commandant of the Marine Corps for about three weeks, in fact, exactly three weeks ago today, almost to the hour, I took the color (ph) Gen. Jim Conway, who was our 34th commandant. And I published my Commandant's Planning Guidance to all 202,000 Marines and 212,000 family members that serve our Corps.

And in that are four major priorities and one of those priorities is to keep faith with our Marines, our sailors and our families. It's simple but it's challenging in these times and it's difficult and I think about what the Federal Law Enforcement Foundation does in keeping faith with the families of those federal agents that serve behind that badge.

So I want to say thank you. Thank you for all that you do. Thank you for showing up today and being a part of this. There is great fidelity among you; I understand that and I'm grateful to be a small part of this and receive this award on behalf of all those Marines.

As we gather here it's just about 10 o'clock at night in Afghanistan. We have 20,000 young men and women in the southern part of Afghanistan in the Helmand province fighting what is arguably in the part of Afghanistan, probably the most difficult part. Kandahar sits just off to the right as you look at a map just to the east of it and to the west of it over the border there's Iran and to the south and east of it is Pakistan.

I get asked as I travel around this great nation of ours talking to Marines, Marines from all the generations and their family members, Americans that have never served in the Corps but for whatever reason have a great affinity towards us and have a warm spot in their heart about what being a Marine is all about.

And I get asked the question often sometimes from veterans – not so much anymore from World War II because unfortunately, that generation is dying off – but from Korean War veterans and from Vietnam veterans and veterans have fought since then. I get asked the same old questions.

General, do the young men and women that are part of the Marine Corps today, do they still have courage? General, do the young men and women today still have the will to give up themselves and sacrifice their lives for a cause that is greater than them? General, do the Marines of today, of the 21st century, the millennium generation, do they still have the ability to love one another as only Marines can? Then finally, the last question that always comes: General, do we still make them like we used to?

If you'll join me for just a second, this last June I'd like to introduce you to a corporal by the name of Clifford Wooldridge. Cliff is a Marine corporal with a couple combat tours under his belt attached with Weapons Company, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines. Cliff came from Port Angeles, Washington, stands 6'3", 220 pounds, all-high-school, all-league football player and wrestler.

Cliff was a vehicle commander in a town called Musa Qala which is up in the northern part of Afghanistan's Helmand province where the Marines are located today. And on 18 June of this year, 2010, his section of his vehicles came under intense enemy machine-gun fire.

And as the vehicles returned fire, the squad of Marines including Cpl. Wooldridge jumped out, dismounted and moved towards the sound of the guns. I will tell you, ladies and gentlemen, that completely knocks the Taliban on their heels when they shoot and the Marines come charging at the sound of the guns. They don't know what to do about that.

After moving through the tree line, the squad under the command of Cpl. Wooldridge came upon a group of 15 heavily armed Taliban fighters preparing to ambush the Marines. While the rest of the squad remained in place, Cpl. Wooldridge led a fire team around a corner and came up behind about 15 heavily armed Taliban. Once in position, Cpl. Wooldridge initiated his own ambush, ruining the Taliban's day, killing five and wounding three and the remainder fled.

While he added his young group of Marines together to do an assessment of what had just taken place, where they thought the enemy had gone, Cpl. Wooldridge heard voices from around a corner of a compound wall. Without hesitation, he rushed towards the voices around the corner and found himself face to face with two heavily armed Taliban 25 meters away. He instantly engaged both Taliban with his automatic weapon killing them both –

MR. : Yeah! Ooh-rah!

GEN. AMOS: – and in doing so ran out of ammunition, himself. As he took cover around the wall, so he could reload his weapon, around the corner came the muzzle of a machine gun. Cpl. Wooldridge, without hesitation, dropped his weapon immediately and grabbed the muzzle of that weapon and pulled that Taliban fighter out from under the cover, face to face with 220 pounds, 6’3” of a fighting Marine.

As the two grappled for control of the weapon, the enemy fighter released the machine gun understanding that he was not going to be able to overpower this all-high-school wrestler and football player. He grabbed for one of his hand grenades and saw that in an attempt, that he could kill himself and take Cpl. Wooldridge with him.

Before the enemy had time to pull the pin on the grenade, Cpl. Wooldridge beat the fighter to death with several butts across the head – (cheers, applause). For his great heroism under fire, Cpl. Clifford Wooldridge has been nominated for our nation’s second-highest award, the Navy Cross.

Ladies and gentlemen, I’m here on behalf of the 202,000 Marines that fight our nation’s battles. We’re proud to do it; we love the sea; we love being Americans and we still make them precisely like we used to. God bless everyone and your families. (Applause.)

(END)