

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

MCA FOUNDATION GROUND DINNER

**REMARKS BY
GEN. JAMES F. AMOS,
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GENERAL JAMES AMOS: Thank you... Listen, I was pretty impressed earlier on when we asked all the four division commanders to stand up. I know them all well. I'm excited about them leading our Marine divisions. How about you just stand up one more time? All those division commanders, please get up one more time. How about a round of applause?

I'm so proud of you guys...this is not epic but this is unusual, and I'm excited to be here. And I'm honored to be where I am in life right now. [We] talked a little bit about the [passage of Commandants], and many of you were there. But I'll tell you, the truth is, is that you have a sense of the process because we've all been Marines for a long time. And so you've been to enough parades and you understand how it works.

If I'd have ever had any idea that I would stand out on center walk, I'd have paid a hell of a lot more attention when all the previous Commandants took command because when Bonnie and I walked out there, having some sense of the mechanics of the change of command but not quite understanding the spirit of it and what we were going to see when we walked out and turned around and looked at the audience, it was a magic time. It was a magic day; the weather. Secretary of Defense just hit it out of the ballpark. It was a wonderful occasion.

So we were very honored to be in the positions we are. We have several brides with us tonight. Let me start with Joe Dunford's bride Ellyn. Liz, Sergeant Major Kent's bride – absolutely a superstar – has put up with all of this and all of us for these many years. Liz, it's good to have you here. Diane Tryon is sitting there next to Rick. She's a sweetheart, has put up with, again, all the deployments and all of the things that we do, so these are special ladies at this table. There're special ladies all throughout this audience. And I'd just like to thank you.

I thank the spouses that are here, that have been so gracious and tolerated some tough – some tough times, some tough careers in our lives.

We've already said good evening to General Mundy and General Dunford, so I won't go through that.

What I thought I'd do here tonight is talk about just a couple of things. Let me just kind of break this up in chunks. I want to take you back to this day 10 years ago and just kind of reacquaint you on what the Marine Corps was doing. We'll turn the clock forward to take a glimpse of where we are today.

I want to talk to you a little bit about what's going on in Afghanistan right now. And I'll just sample a little bit of some of the things that are important. [General] Dave Berger talked about what the ground board focused on, and I'm very, very appreciative of that because there are some – what I consider to be – critical things in the planning guidance that will help set the conditions for the Marine Corps to be successful over the next two decades.

And then what I'd like to do is just tell you about a great young Marine that'll warm your heart. I always like to kind of conclude on that because it gets us back to the ground truth and reminds us why we wear this uniform, why business helps the Marine Corps do what we're able to do and gets us back to home plate.

Ten years ago, we were about 10 months away from 9/11. We're sitting in the Pentagon – I was there. I was at Marine Aviation as the one-star; eventually worked my way up to work for General Bedard at PP&O. I had Dave Berger's job at PP&O. And we were sitting around and thinking about what the Corps was doing. We were at 176,000 Marines. We were really a UDP- and a MEU-focused Marine Corps. The MEUs were the absolute crown jewel.

If you want to find some action somewhere, you work your way onto a MEU. If you're a fixed-wing guy like I was – an F-18 guy – your chances of doing that were pretty slim. So you were kind of relegated to be a UDP kind of Marine. You would find yourself in Iwakuni or Okinawa, over there with your units whether it be a battalion or squadron...we just had kind of a hodge-podge of our logistics and we've now cobbled it together and finally got it together the way it ought to be.

But that's the way it was. We drove around in Humvees that had canvass sides on them – when we bothered to put canvass sides on them. We drove around in those NTBRs – never thought one bit about armoring a vehicle. Didn't spend a lot of time thinking about culture. Heaven help us if we worried about language training.

Things like distributed operations – just unheard of. We didn't even consider it. Hadn't thought one bit about the kind of world we were going to operate in for the next two decades, not because we weren't smart enough. We just didn't need to. We were kind of content with where we were.

Then the airplane flew in the side of the building on September the 11th and the world changed.

Well, think about where we are today. We talk about female engagement teams – FETs. We talk about law enforcement teams; bringing in LAPD and Chicago police officers – not to do road network stuff but to help us with investigations, to help us get inside of racketeering and the criminal element of the world we live in and operate in.

We now don't even think about deploying Marines unless we've got, in some cases, a 30-ton Buffalo. We don't think about sending a Marine platoon out unless that platoon commander, often a second lieutenant, has the same communications package, the same ability to receive digital overhead imagery, the same ability to get communications throughout the entire battle space, the same thing that a battalion commander had 10 years ago. We wouldn't think about sending airplanes airborne now without considering ISR or being overhead in a presence mission. We do that today and it's just at the drop of a hat.

Things have changed for us. The whole world has changed. We've got culture training, we've got language training. We would no more go someplace in the world today – I don't care

whether it was someplace we are not right now. We would no more consider going there without asking ourselves, okay, is there a Foreign Area officer that can help us? What's the language of this country? What's the culture tell us about our interaction with the people of that country? When we start doing human IPB we would no more consider going anywhere without having stepped back and thought about that today.

We think about protection. We think about what the enemy is going to do. We think in terms of an ending today – not a state, not somebody that has a flag behind them or wears a uniform. We think today when we go on a battlefield about somebody that looks like a ragtag, indigent person, but that person probably has category 4 or 5 weapons, has access to money that we would never see at the time, even in the United States Marine Corps budget. They have state-like capabilities; they have access to cyber space and they spread their word through cyber space. That's the enemy we fight.

...When you sit down and you start thinking about what the world is going to look like and how the Marine Corps is going to fit in that – and that's really where you've got to begin if you're going to write a planning guidance. You can't sit down and say, well, ladies and gentlemen, on December 2nd of 2000, this was good enough and it's way the it's going to be in December the 2nd of 2010. You've got to think about, okay, what's changed? How does the Marine Corps fit? What's the world going to look like?

So once we got past the initial part of it we started talking about what the world was going to look like. We spent a considerable amount of time and – and the genesis was, we knew we weren't going to get it completely right but we couldn't afford to be completely wrong so we think that piece of the planning guidance as it describes the future security environment's probably pretty close. It's interesting; it seems to match a lot of organizations and think tanks who I respect on what they believe we're going to be involved in.

So then it became...what's the Marine Corps going to do then? How do we fit in that security environment? And that's when we began to try to describe the mission of the Marine Corps....

If you've seen the planning guidance [you've seen] that little blue callout box. Because the intent behind that callout box was, if you drop dead, and if you've read that callout box, you'd be going to heaven understanding precisely what the Marine Corps is going to do for our nation for the next couple of decades, so what was in that box was very, very important.

We talked about being forward engaged and forward deployed. We're certainly forward engaged and forward deployed in Afghanistan right now. We're not that in other parts of the world where we absolutely need to be; we will get there again. The Pacific is our theater. We've just put our toe into AFRICOM; we have a small foothold into South America. But those are the places the Marine Corps needs to be forward engaged and forward deployed.

We talk in there about being a middleweight force and you could not imagine how much time it took to try to figure out what we were going to call ourselves. And I had a lot of help. I mean, I spent a lot of time, I talked to almost every living commandant about that. I talked to a

lot of folks to talk about it because I said, look, it's important; we have to be able to describe ourselves. We have to know where we fit in the spectrum of conflict and the spectrum of capabilities that work inside that spectrum of conflict.

You know, when the Marine Corps...came out of Desert Storm and we were introduced to the JFACC then somewhere about 1993, we came up with the JFLCC, Joint Force Land Component Commander, and then we moved on to a Joint Maritime Component, so everybody had their niche.

And the Marine Corps – I remember because I was on the MSTP team as a deputy and we were elbowing and fighting our way; we've got to be this guy, we've got to be that, we have to play in that arena.

When we sat down to try to describe where we operated and what we did, we came to the reality that we couldn't be all things to all people, so we needed to articulate what we were going to be – and we are that middleweight force.

I thought about being a lightweight force and I thought...no, I don't want to do that. Nobody wants to be a lightweight. Okay, then send in the heavyweights. No, those are all fat, old guys they can't defend and they can't fit on ships and you can't put them on airplanes because they're either overweight or they're oversized; send in the heavyweights!

And I can give you example after example of other services that couldn't get to a place in time because they were too heavy, so we don't want to be that. We want to be that middleweight force, and if you use the analogy of a boxer – and that's how we kind of came to this thing – you want to be able to box up. If you're a middleweight and you want fight in the heavyweight division, you can [move up a weight class]. If you want to box down, you can do that.

We want to be that force that sits right in the middle so that when the President calls and says, "Let's send in a force...to do the nation's bidding in a major theater war." that we can do that. And we can. And that's the kind of force we're building with the Force Structure Review Group.

Conversely, we want the President, the Secretary of Defense and the National Command Authority to say, you know, we've got issues in Haiti; let's send the Marines now. Well, you know what? We did that last June. We went down there with two Marine expeditionary units; you think about that. Five thousand Marines.

And when everybody was clogged up at that airport...Marines were out there. There were nine amphibious ships out there; not the standard six. Nine. And we were coming to shore in our amphibious tractors; we were coming to shore in our helicopters and our MV-22s and we took our ROPUs [reverse-osmosis purifying units] and we took the water and we took food and we fed the Haitians and we provided [assistance].

We want to be able to be that force that does that. We want to be able to do the stuff in the middle; we want to have the talents; we want to have the education. That's why when we

start talking about doubling the amount of command-and-staff college graduates resident at Quantico, that's important; when we start talking about tripling the amount of captains that go through Expeditionary Warfare School, that's important. When we start talking about the second-tour squad leader and devising a course for that young Marine so that he can go back and lead in combat in a distributed environment, that's why that's so important.

Yesterday morning, we made the Chairman of the House Arms Services Committee, Ike Skelton, an honorary Marine. Ike Skelton is the father of professional military education for the U.S. military. Much of what we have at Quantico during the [modern] era is a result of Ike Skelton's tenacity and support. From fiscal buildings to the structures and staff and seats to the scholarships, everything has a lot to do with Ike Skelton.

And I made the comment yesterday to him – I said the Marines that we have in Afghanistan today that are spread out over 10,000 square miles, you've got young sergeants on their second tours as squad leader, and they're by themselves with their Marines and they're making international decisions; they need to be educated. We need to help them. We can't leave them hanging out there – the same way we can't leave our captains or our majors or our lieutenant colonels [out there]. Education is important.

The Force Structure Review Group is not something to be feared. There's lots of things that pop up in articles. The truth of the matter is, the secretary of Defense announced when he was in San Francisco at the Marine Memorial Club several months ago...[he] gave us an opportunity and a mandate to take a look at reshaping the Marine Corps post-Afghanistan – not during Afghanistan. Nobody is asking us to decrease the dwell between our infantry units – but post-Afghanistan, and we need to do that.

So it's been going now for about three months. We got a lot of bright Marines. But the truth is that this is an organization that should not be feared. I think the last time a commandant had an opportunity to shape the Marine Corps of the future, it was General Carl Mundy.

And he had General Chuck Krulak [as] his go-to guy. So we're going to reshape the Marine Corps. We're going to build it in the form of capabilities. There will still be flags, there will still be battalions, there will still be CLBs, there will still be squadrons. There will still be divisions and wings and MLGs, so don't walk out here with acid in your stomach.

But we are going to shape the Marine Corps such that we can provide capabilities to the National Command Authority. And we're doing that right now. So we'll report out in January. It's pretty exciting.

Let me switch gears to a conversation I had today. Spent about 30 minutes with Major General Rich Mills on VTC. Cyber [capability] is pretty amazing when I can look at a commander on the ground and it's in the evening in Afghanistan.

And several of us were in my office, and Rich was on the other side and I asked him to give us an update. And I try to do that every week so that we would always know what we could

do for Rich Mills and his Marines and sailors in Afghanistan. And Rich said, you know, sir we're doing great.

Rich is optimistic. I get asked that question by the press; I get asked that question by Congress often. I get asked that question publicly just about wherever: How are we doing? And of course, the expectation at the other end of that question is: Well, we're not doing [very] good.

We're doing great. Now, this isn't "Pollyanna;" this isn't Marine bravado. But I will tell you that we have every reason to be optimistic about what's happening in Afghanistan – certainly, within the zone that we understand and the zone that we operate in, which is the Helmand province.

We're in a tough fight right now up in Sangin, up in the northeast corner of our AO. It's an area that's been ruled by the Taliban for a long, long time. But before I go to Sangin, let's talk about Marja for just a second.

Larry Nicholson took his brigade into Marja about the middle of February. We remember – it was all over the press.... And it was a hell of a fight. The place had not had anybody in it for years; laced with IEDs and the enemy was there.

Well, today Rich said – which I thought was pretty telling. He said "Sir, do you remember the old yellow school?" He said, "We just rebuilt it for the sixth time. The enemy has destroyed it five times. And the Marine Corps has rebuilt it the sixth time. School's open; it's in session. You can walk down Marja right now without any body armor on. The local government's in place. The district governor is in place. All the teams are in there to help – interagency teams, national teams to help Marja. And Marja is doing great."

That's what's going to happen up in Sangin. We need to stay the course. If you remember what we went through in towns like Fallujah and Ramadi when [it was] tough going. But I'll tell you, Rich Mills told me this morning..."we are very close to finally eradicating the Taliban control up in Sangin. "

He's just about doubled the size of his force up there. They've got a very stalwart infantry battalion up there led by a wonderful battalion commander who I spent 30 minutes with on the VTC after Rich Mills. Jason [LtCol Jason Morris, Commander Officer, 3/5] and I talked face to face. And he just said, "Sir, just hang with me... we've just about got it done." Tanks are going up there. They're in the country right now. They're getting armored up. Third Battalion, 5th Marines will have those tanks here shortly.

So that's the last holdout in Afghanistan for us. So I think that's good news. It doesn't get out – I want you to know it. I want you to understand that the commanders on the ground have passed that to me.

And I want to transition just for a second to a wonderful story about a great Marine in June of this year – June the 18th out of the west in Musa Qala. 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines went on the ground. And a young sergeant – he was a corporal then, by the name of Clifford Wooldridge

– he’s from Washington, [from] Port Angeles. 6-foot-2; he weighs 220 pounds; just a star high-school football player and basketball player. Joined the Marine Corps.

This was Cliff’s second tour in combat. He was the vehicle commander on a convoy out of Musa Qala. He was passing along; they came under extreme enemy machine-gun fire. And as all Marines do, they stopped and they jumped out of their vehicles and the squad that was with Corporal Wooldridge ran after the sound of the guns.

Now, I will tell you every intelligence report we read – that absolutely befuddles the Taliban because they shoot and they think we’re going to run in the other direction. In fact, when you shoot at a Marine squad, platoon, convoy, they’re going to get out and they’re going to come after you. You’re not going to get away. And if you do, you’re going to count yourself lucky.

So Corporal Wooldridge took his squad and they chased out after the sound of the guns. And they came upon 15 enemy Taliban held up in a tree line. Wooldridge – his squad stopped. He took a fire team, went around, outflanked them and came up behind them and gave them the surprise of their life. He killed five, wounded three.

While Wooldridge was standing there with his Marines trying to figure out, okay, let’s make an assessment of what happened, how are we doing, anybody wounded – he heard a voice. In fact, he heard a couple of voices coming from the other side of the compound wall just about 25 meters from him.

Without hesitation, Corporal Clifford Wooldridge took his weapon – he was carrying a SAW – raced over there, rounded the corner, face-to-face with two gnarly Taliban and killed them both – emptied his SAW, ran out of ammunition. He backed around the corner. And while he was in the process of reloading his M249, a muzzle came around the corner – of a machine gun about five meters away from him.

Without hesitation, he dropped his SAW. And Corporal Clifford Wooldridge reached over and grabbed the barrel of that machine gun and gave it a yank. And out coming – hanging onto that – was the nasty, burly Taliban fighter. Wooldridge grabbed him; they started wrestling. And after a couple of minutes of hardcore wrestling, this Taliban realized he was not going to have his way with this 220-pound Marine. And he dropped his machine gun and reached for a hand grenade and attempted to pull the pin to kill himself and Corporal Wooldridge.

Wooldridge, being the smart, young lad that he was, grabbed the hand grenade, tossed it away and then grabbed the Taliban’s machine gun, butt-stroked him about five times in the head and killed him dead. Now, Sergeant Wooldridge has been nominated for our nation’s second-highest honor for courage in the face of the enemy: the Navy Cross.

We have every reason to be optimistic about what’s happening in that country. The Marines are in a tough fight. There’s great sacrifice. I don’t mean to downplay that one bit. We buried a son of one of our brothers last week – of one of our general officers. And it was tough.

But the battalion that that young lieutenant came from was the same battalion that I talked to the commanding officer today.

Their spirits are up. They're ready to take the fight to the enemy, and they're doing it every single day. We have every reason to be proud and optimistic.

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