

## Opening Remarks for Media Roundtable 14 December 2010

Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

Sergeant Major Kent and I just returned from a visit to our West coast bases and air stations. There we met with our Marines and their families so that I could introduce myself as their new Commandant, tell them about my planning guidance, and answer their questions. I told them of my four top priorities which are: to provide the best trained and equipped Marine units to Afghanistan; to rebalance and posture the Marine Corps to meet future challenges; to educate and train our Marines to succeed in distributed and increasingly complex environments; and to keep faith with our Marines, Sailors, and their families. With the weather as cold as it is now, I'm questioning our sanity in returning to DC.

I want to begin today by telling you about Afghanistan. Your Marine Corps is operating primarily in the southwest of the country in Helmand Province.

Up and down the Helmand river valley, our Marines are making significant progress in providing security and building the capacity of the Afghan military and police forces so that we can responsibly transition to full Afghan control.

Let me take you back to a year ago, when we first landed in the middle of Marjah and pushed out. After some hard fighting there, many people, including the press, started to ask if we could win in Marjah. They asked if it was too tough – if we were in over our heads. You don't hear a thing about Marjah anymore do you?

When was the last time anybody in this room can remember somebody saying, "I wonder how Marjah is doing?" MajGen Rich Mills, the Marine Commander in Afghanistan, came on the net last week to talk about it. You can go down into Marjah right now in the uniform I am in – without body armor. Marjah has made great strides. As MajGen Mills said last week, the battle for Marjah is over. Marjah...like Fallujah and Ramadi – arguably two of the most feared places Iraq – is quiet.

When was the last time you heard anything about Fallujah or Ramadi? You can't think of it, and neither can I.

That's good news. Helmand Province is coming along, and I'm encouraged by that.

A recent poll conducted taken amongst the Afghan people found a notable shift in public opinion in Helmand where we have been conducting extensive counterinsurgency operations.

The number of people in Helmand who described their security situation as good jumped from 14% in December 2009 to 67% today. This poll is reflective of the progress we have made in Helmand province, and is one indicator that we are turning the tide there.

Throughout Helmand Province, the story of your Marines is one of heroism, of courage, of fidelity, and of sacrifice. It is the essence of what Semper Fidelis – the Marine Corps motto of "Always Faithful" – is all about. The Marines throughout Helmand are encouraged. Their morale is high, and they know they will prevail.

Ok. Shifting focus. I also want to talk to you about the future of the Marine Corps when it comes to the Joint Strike Fighter.

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In 1998, the Marine Corps decided to transition from three aircraft to one - specifically from the F-18 Hornet, the AV-8B Harrier, and the EA-6B Prowler to the STOVL F-35B.

The forecast is that we will save \$1B per year in operations and maintenance alone by having one type of aircraft. That was a good business decision then...and it still is. We also decided in 1998 to skip a generation of aircraft...to skip recapitalizing our fleet of TACAIR with a fourth generation aircraft, in favor of the fifth generation F-35B. In doing so, we saved billions of dollars over the last decade by avoiding spending money on third and fourth generation aircraft in anticipation of fielding a single 5<sup>th</sup> generation aircraft that can perform the many missions inherent in the F35B.

For the record, our F-18s and Harriers will run out of service life around 2018 to 2020.

We currently have four F-35Bs undergoing testing at Patuxent River down in Maryland...I will visit the team at Pax River on Friday of this week. Flying quality-wise, the aircraft is flying fine in horizontal flight and vertical flight. We do have some matters dealing specifically in mechanical design related to the transition from horizontal to vertical flight, but I am told that we have engineering solutions for these issues. I want to reemphasize...these are mechanical fixes. I am confident that the engineering expertise resident in the program will solve these matters.

The programmatic health of the STOVL variant of the F35 is a matter of great national interest. Right now, we have 11 aircraft carriers and 11 "big deck" amphibious ships - so our nation effectively has 22 carrier-type capital ships to do our nation's bidding. We need to put fifth generation aircraft on all 22 of those ships if we are to maintain operational flexibility for the National Command Authority and the Combatant Cmdr. The dilemma is that while the F-35B can land on both aircraft carriers and big deck amphibious ships, other models of the F-35, namely the A and C variants, cannot land on the big deck amphibious ships because they are not STOVL capable. This means that, without the F-35B, our nation will only have 11 capital ships, instead of 22, capable of carrying fifth generation aircraft. This is a 50% reduction in capability.

I want to leave you with this final thought about the role of the Marine Corps in our national defense. There has been much discussion of late about the Marine Corps conducting sustained ground combat operations ashore. I make no apologies for responding to our nation's call to serve in this capacity when tasked to do so.

Throughout our 235 year existence your maritime-based Marine Corps has been asked by our nation to come ashore periodically to fight protracted land battles. It was the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiments that attacked forward through a retreating allied army line at Belleau Wood 40 miles east of Paris into the "unbeatable German Army," only to soundly defeat the Germans...stop the advance on Paris...and thus turn the tide of the war. It was your Marine Corps who MacArthur landed at Inchon in the enemy's rear and who fought their way south to help liberate Seoul.

It was these same Marines who faced the 9 Chinese Divisions 60 years ago last month at a place called the Chosin Reservoir...all as part of an extended land campaign directed by our national leadership. From Viet Nam, to Desert Storm, to Iraq and now to Afghanistan, our nation's leadership has turned to the smallest of its services, and uttered the timeless words...SEND IN THE MARINES. We are our nation's crisis response force...that is why we exist.

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In preparation for my assuming command of the Marine Corps I wanted to clearly define where the Corps fits in our nation's defense.

The following mission statement is the product of our efforts and clearly articulates what we do for our nation.

“The Marine Corps is America's expeditionary force-in-readiness – a balanced air-ground-logistics team.

We are forward-deployed and forward-engaged: shaping, training, deterring, and responding to all manner of crisis and contingencies.

We create options and decision space for our nation's leaders. We respond to today's crisis...with today's force...today.

We are our nation's middleweight force. We are light enough to get there quickly, but heavy enough to carry the day upon arrival. We are capable of operating independent of local infrastructure. We operate throughout the spectrum of threats – irregular, hybrid, and conventional – and the shady areas where they overlap.

Marines are always ready to respond whenever the nation calls...whenever the President may direct. We protect the American people by defeating our nation's enemies.

I'd now like to open the floor for your questions.