

Office of the Commandant of the Marine Corps

Marine Aviation Centennial Gala

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

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GENERAL JAMES AMOS: Ladies and gentlemen, General Dailey and I walked out a couple minutes ago into the Drum and Bugle Corps after pinning wings on those young Marines. What a great night. I look at this location and I think about what a festive and actually beautiful setting it is. It's absolutely -- you ought to see yourself from this vantage point because it's absolutely beautiful. I want to thank you for being here. I want to welcome everybody very warmly. It has been a wonderful week of events and reunions. Just walking into the pre-reception or the reception prior to dinner, I got to see folks I haven't seen for four, five, ten years, folks that I flew with a long time ago. It's the same thing for General Dailey. It's the same thing for -- the Pat Finnerans, the Fred McCorkles, the Lancers, -- everybody else. You get to see folks that you haven't seen in such a long time.

We were at the [Andrews AFB] air show earlier today where they actually hosted the Centennial of Marine Aviation. Now, you think about where we have come as a joint force, years ago that was purely Andrews Air Force Base and things were different. Today you look up on that massive water tower at Andrews Air Force Base and it's got United States Marine Corps painted on the side of it. It's truly a joint base. At Andrews, the commanding officer there and the generals, Norty Schwartz, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, have opened this entire week up to Marine Aviation, the centennial and the celebration. It's been a great -- a great day for -- a great week for all of us, and I got to see a lot of old friends.

It is good to be here tonight, and -- and when you think about all that has taken place this week and what Marine Aviation and really, what the Marine Corps, has done for the last 236 ½ years, we get an awful lot of opportunities to stand up and speak publicly about our Corps. And tonight is about Marine Aviation, but I always go back to the root of why we're here and why Marine Aviation exists, and that's because of our ground forces. And they're on the ground -- it's early in the morning right now in Helmand Province, and we're in the air supporting them.

I want to give a shout-out to a few folks in the audience tonight, Senator Pat Roberts from the great state of Kansas and his lovely bride. It's good to have you here, Senator, and you're always welcome around your fellow brothers in Marine Aviation and Marines in general. He served 1958 to 1962, and if you walk in his office in the Senate, he has a veritable memorial of Commandants and Marines who he has had pictures taken with. Senator, it's good to have you here tonight.

General Jack Dailey who walked out with me, former Deputy Head of the NASA and now the head of the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum, he's here with us tonight. We'll talk about General Dailey here in a minute. I think Charlie Bolden is here. The head of NASA -- Panther, are you in here? There he is right over -- stand up and waive, Charlie. The head of NASA, Charlie Bolden. (Applause) Good to have you here, Panther. We've got seven Assistant Commandants of the Marine Corps, and I have a small warm -- in fact, a large warm -- spot in my heart for Assistant Commandants having been pulled through that knothole for 27 months, (Laughter) but we've got General Dunford, the 32nd Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps. Joe, waive your hand. (Applause) General Amos, the 31st Assistant Commandant, I'll waive my hand wildly. (Applause) General Nyland, where are you, Spider? Spider Nyland right over here, the 29th. (Applause) General Terry Dake, where are you, General Dake? (Applause) Way over there. General Dake, the 27th, General Dailey the 23rd Assistant Commandant, and I've been told that General Went (Applause) -- General Went is right here, waive -- waive -- waive wildly, General Went --sir, it's good to have to you here. (Applause)

All right, we've got -- I've been told, I've been assured by my aide that we have eight former Deputy Chiefs of Staff of Aviation; and then General Jones changed the name to Deputy Commandant of Aviation beginning, of course, with Lieutenant General Robling, where are you, Guts? (Applause) Right over here we got Glad Castellaw sitting right at this table. Glad, waive your hand crazily. (Applause) Spider Nyland is sitting right over there. He gets double-dipped tonight. Fred McCorkle, we saw him over there with his alligator shoes on. (Applause) General Dake is way over there; he had to pay his dues as well. (Applause) Harry Blot is here. Where are you, General Blot? Harry Blot, you're here somewhere. I saw you. There you are. General Blot, former head of Aviation. (Applause) I don't believe General Pitman is here with us tonight, is he? I don't think he is, but General Pitman was going to be with us, and General Fitch, I saw General Fitch here, where are you, sir? (Applause) Right there, General Fitch.

And I've got to tell you having watched and having been the Deputy at Aviation and then watched it closely for 12 years, that's a hard job, and every day it's struggling with all the issues that we do, but you think about the goodness that Marine Aviation has today. I'm just looking at those V-22s and I was looking at those new H-1s, the Cobras and I just think about all the battles, all the issues, the times that we have -- that these great patriots have stood in front of Congress and have stood in front of our senior leadership and said we need these airplanes. Now, think about where we are today. Congratulations to all of you. (Applause)

Ladies and gentlemen, we've got MEF Commanders in here, we've got MARFOR Commanders in here, we've got retired patriots. I saw Keith Stalder sitting over there a minute ago; we've got Squadron Commanders, Wing Commanders, Group Commanders...welcome. It was fun for me to come in here and see this because I get to see youngsters that are now Squadron Commanders and Squadron Commanders that are now Group Commanders; you get to see them grow up, and then one day they're wearing stars and are Commanding Generals of our aircraft wings. Ladies and gentlemen, I'd be in a lot of trouble if I didn't introduce the first lady of the Marine Corps, my lovely wife of 41 years, Bonnie Amos. (Applause) We've got Medal of Honor recipient Dakota Meyer, Sergeant Meyer, where are you my friend? (Applause) There he is right there, ladies and gentlemen. (Applause) I've come to know Dakota well, and I've even got a picture of him kissing my wife in my office in my home. I think the world of him, and, Dakota, it's always good to see you my friend. And I'll tell you what, he likes the camaraderie, he likes the Marine fellowship. He hates having to be called out like that. That's just him. He's the most humble man I've ever met, and he's one of those -- you know, this last year in the Marine birthday, we had a video and it was about the indomitable spirit of Marines, and Dakota Meyer is absolutely living proof of the indomitable spirit of our young men and women in our Corps today.

Ladies and gentlemen, we've got our aviation pioneers, the Golden Eagles here tonight. (Applause) An important part of our history in aviation are our enlisted Naval Aviation Pilots, the NAPS, the Silver Eagles, and there's one here tonight that I would like to recognize since I own the microphone for the next minute or two. He's the reason that I believe that I could -- and I actually truly believed that I could fly in the very first place. He's the man that encouraged me as a Boy Scout to get my aviation merit badge as my first one. It's my father, retired Lieutenant Commander Jim Amos, Navy seaplane pilot and Silver Eagle. Big Jim earned his Naval wings of gold as a 1st Class Petty Officer. Dad, would you stand so everybody could -- (Applause) The good thing about being around aviation is we just like to clap a lot, and (Laughter) dad,

thanks for the inspiration. Thanks for the smells of aircraft. I got to -- this morning I was asked the question at the air show how I got into flying, and it was really just hanging around airplanes and getting to hang around my dad's airplanes and smelling fuel and -- and looking at airplanes, so it inspired me.

We've got Marine Corps Association Award namesakes. We're going to present awards here shortly; I'll just run through them. An award named after Lieutenant General Fred McCorkle, Colonel Don Davis, Colonel Robert Gibson, Master Gunnery Sergeant Danny Radish. They're all present tonight so they will be here as we present awards in their names. We're honored to have everyone here tonight; thank you for your fidelity to our great Marine Corps.

Secretary Panetta on Wednesday night summed it up, and we saw that in the video here, that we have Marine aviation for one reason and one reason only and that's to support those young Marines on the ground doing the heavy lifting of our nation. He was exquisite on Wednesday when he spoke at the Marine Corps War Memorial, and he talked about the very beginning of Marine Aviation. He took us back to its birthplace in 1912, when he talked about Alfred Cunningham. But from its birth in 1912 to flight operations in the Helmand Province, off the deck of the USS Enterprise in the Arabian Gulf, as we gather here tonight, to the islands of the Pacific, Marine Aviation remains the able partner to our brothers and sisters on the ground.

Earlier today, I spoke to the crowd about the spirit of innovation in Marine Aviation. I took us back to 1919 when we began introducing close air support in Haiti. We went back to the 1940s where we flew 14,000 sorties over Okinawa in support of our brothers on the ground. In the late 40s, we introduced helicopters. Much to the disbelief of many back here in Washington, DC, we bought the Sikorsky Dragonflies and the Piasecki Flying Bananas, and as war broke out in Korea a mere 18 months later, we deployed Marine Helicopter Transport Squadron 161 and conducted the first helicopter transport of troops in combat to include evacuating our wounded. Marine Aviators helped bring vertical and short takeoff and landing, V/STOL, aircraft in the 70s, into the United States of America, and today, Marines continue to pioneer vertical flight with the F-35B, the STOVL variant of the Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter. Marines, along with our Air Force brothers, also pioneered the use of tiltrotor technology, and today, we who fly in today's magnificent machines stand on the shoulders of many of you in the audience this evening and those whose vision and great courage have brought us well into the 21st Century.

Tonight's guest of honor is one of those great Marine warriors. As many of you know, our guest of honor this evening is a very distinguished Marine Aviator, General Officer and Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps. From his winging in 1958, to his retirement in 1992, General Jack Dailey accumulated over 7,000 flight hours in a wide variety of aircraft and helicopters. During his two tours in Vietnam, he flew more than 450 combat missions. Later he served two tours in the aviation hallway. He commanded Marine Aircraft Group 11, the first Marine Amphibious Brigade in Hawaii, and the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing. He served as the 23rd Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, and after retirement, he served as the Assistant Administrator of NASA. Today, he continues to serve the aviation community as the Director of the National Air and Space Museum, at the Smithsonian in Washington, DC. Ladies and gentlemen, fellow Marine Aviators, fellow Marine aficionados, please join me in a warm welcome to our distinguished guest of honor, Jack "Zorro" Dailey. (Applause)

GENERAL JOHN "JACK" DAILEY: Thank you, General Amos. Can anybody tell me what I could say at this point that would make any difference? (Laughter) The first Marine Corps Aviation Association reunion I went to was in a back room of a bar. We were drinking beer and eating peanuts, and Shooter Zangus was playing the accordion. (Laughter) We've come a long way. This is truly a spectacular and fitting ceremony for this hundredth anniversary. Everything's been said tonight, but I'm going to say some of it again, if you don't mind because I think it's really important to us as Marines to think about some of these things. We do it every year on our birthday, and it's not often that we'll have a hundredth anniversary of Marine Aviation, so we need to take advantage of this opportunity. By the way, in aviation or space, things happen. We went from the first manned-powered flight to walking on the moon in 66 years. The United States of America did that. (Cheer) But there's no discipline that has a performance curve that can match that. The thing that's interesting about it because of that, there are essentially so many milestones and things to celebrate, which is perfect because we do celebrate every one of them. But there are milestones that signify performance that's unparalleled in other industries that you would see.

There are several pretty significant anniversaries in 2012. The Dulles Airport is going to be 50 years old. Apollo 17, the 40th anniversary; our last trip to the moon was 40 years ago. The United States Air Force is 65 years old this year, and try as they may they'll never catch us. (Applause) I can't take credit for that because the British Marines tell me that on every one of our birthdays. (Laughter) Lockheed Martin is a hundred years old this year. It's interesting that both the Lockheed brothers and Mr. Martin started their companies at the same time and now have reached their hundredth anniversary. So there's such a wide variety of very important things happening, but we're here tonight to talk about the 100th anniversary of Marine Aviation. And we've heard about Alfred Cunningham, and I had some great stories about him, and I can't tell you now because you've already seen him. But Cunningham, look at this guy. Here he's a Marine Captain sent there, he's never flown, doesn't even know how to do -- we ordered him to flight training, they didn't have an airplane for him to fly. He got there, they gave him an airplane that would not fly and said taxi this thing around for a while until you get the feel of it, and then nothing happened. They didn't get an airplane, so they sent him away TAD. We'll call you back when we get another airplane.

The services decided their birthdays, their -- their anniversary -- the Army celebrated their hundredth anniversary in 2009, and it was based on the fact that they bought the right flyer over here at Fort Meyer in 2009, and from then on, continued to procure aircraft. The Navy celebrated theirs in 2011 when they bought the Curtis Triad. The Marine Corps celebrates our anniversary based on the fact that we sent Cunningham to training when he didn't have an airplane. (Laughter) We didn't have any airplanes, and it took awhile before we got them. But we sent somebody there who knew what he was all about and what he was going to do. So following the time when he actually got checked out and got his wings, he started building an aviation force, and he had a mix of aircraft. I'm not sure how they could maintain them because none of them were even close to being the same, but in that deployment, the first deployment, that was to Santo Domingo. No Navoids of any kind. It was -- pilotage is tough over the water, just like it is over the desert, but they flew down there, and when these guys went out, they launched the whole squadron. Whoever got off first had the lead. They were lost a lot, (Laughter) and it was understandable, but they were doing things. World War I started, he showed up and offered his services. The Army said, "No, we don't want you flying in our

planes.” He kind of went around, continued to search and ended up doing antisubmarine patrols in the North Atlantic. But he did something; he found a mission and he became important because he was doing something that nobody else was doing at the time.

Of course after World War I, we actually got a wakeup call because we found out we didn't have any fighters. We had to buy French and British fighters and we better get going with that, and we did. And so the 20s and the 30s for us were a big time in terms of trying to, first of all, show the world that the Marines had aircraft. They did that through two different, but related activities; one of them was air racing, and the other was air shows. Marines love air shows, you know. (Laughter) We were talking about when the shuttle came in last month, people said, “How many passes is he going to make? And I said, “Look, he's a pilot. He looks out the window, sees a couple hundred thousand people, he's going to circle all day, (Laughter) we're going to have to shoot him down.” But this 18-plane squadron -- what was called Marine Fighting Squadron 9, a great name -- had a routine that they would do where nine aircraft would do a horizontal figure 8, and the other nine would then do a loop through the holes in the figure 8, and their recovery from those loops was at 50 feet; very thrilling for people and also hazardous. They had their share of accidents, but they would go out and do this, and they became so popular that people were getting upset with them because they were stealing the show in places like the Miami Air Races.

Christian Schilt won the Schneider Cup in the RC3C Curtiss Racer that we -- by the way, happens to be in the Smithsonian right across the river if you would like to see it come on over, free of charge. (Laughter) Then he went to Nicaragua and rescued wounded Marines and actually some who were not wounded to get them out of Quilali where they had been ambushed and trapped. The innovation that was used, he took an observation plane, took the wheels off of it, put bomber tires on and then flew in there so he could land on unimproved surfaces. That's what they do in Alaska today. They think they invented it. He was doing it back in the 20s, got the Medal of Honor, first Marine Aviator to get one. So it's -- it's things like that; people doing things but in the meantime, the knowledge of Marine Air was growing.

The Marine Corps has a unique situation in that it's the only service that's ever had to justify its existence, and there have been several major attacks. The most serious of which was right after World War II, and one of the things that made us do was to really think about how we could be relevant to the needs of this nation's military forces. And that's when the Marine Air Ground Logistics Team concept came and started to develop, and it took awhile because we didn't have the right equipment, we didn't have the right knowledge in terms of what we were trying to do, but we went out and started doing this and it -- and it worked. And it got better and better, and then now, what we have today that -- and I say this without reservation there is no aviation force in the world that can match the United States Marine Corps. (Applause and cheering) That's not bravado; that's fact, and if you take any metric that you want to use for judging performance, knowledge base and creativity and innovation, there's just nobody that can match it.

There's a heritage of this because at Marine Fighting Squadron 9, when they weren't doing air shows, they had to go shoot and bomb and that sort of thing. By the way, there was a target on the base at Quantico. Pretty neat. Here's a bull's-eye right on your base. That wouldn't be good if you were having somebody coming after you, but it was great -- it didn't have much admin time to get you actually to the range, but the thing is they won the Navy “E”

for excellence in gunnery and bombing three years in a row. That means they beat every other squadron in Naval Aviation, and people started getting a little concerned about that, so the next year 65% of the personnel in that squadron were transferred. So I think the Navy did it...I don't know who it was. (Laughter) But that's a true story, and, in fact, they may have been getting too big for their britches, and they did get toned down considerably. So we've heard about the pioneers, the heroes, and by the way, Boyington was in that squadron. He ran out of gas on his first flight in the F4-B4, landed on the rifle range; early in his career he was neglecting some of the regulations and things that governed military flying. But we have all of these people who have done things and achieved great success, established a reputation and defended it under attacks of all kind successfully because of the performance was there to back it up and unfortunately, many of them are not here tonight because they've made their last takeoff.

But the good news is that those who are going to lead us into the future are here tonight, and you have a responsibility to carry this heritage forward, but you can do it, and I have total confidence in you because you're better trained, better prepared than anybody who's gone before you. And it's because of this incredible system that's been developed through MAWTS and the WTI program and the interservice activities and the willingness and the ability to go out and find out what everybody else is up to. So it's there, and it's ours to keep, and that's what we need to make sure we do, so I charge all of you to give it your very best, which I know you will. And the other thing about the Marine Corps is that the Marines have an uncanny way of putting the right person in the right place at the right time. And what could be more appropriate than having the Number One Marine be the Number One Aviator on the 100th anniversary of Marine Corps Aviation? Ooh-rah! (Applause)

NARRATOR: Ladies and gentlemen, General Amos will now present General Dailey with a special memento in honor of his outstanding contributions to Marine Aviation and to our Corps.

GENERAL JAMES AMOS: General Dailey, I know that you hang around a lot of aviation memorabilia, but I don't know that you have one of these. Since we began with propellers and eventually went into jets, we wanted to give you, as our guest of honor, an aviation propeller that you can hang on your wall. Mimi will let you put it on a wall we hope, and it says, "Presented to General John R. Dailey, Director of National Air and Space Museum, celebrating a Centennial of Marine Aviation, Guest of Honor, 19 May, 2012, Semper Fidelis." General Dailey, we hope you find a place you can hang that on your wall. (Applause)

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