

Office of the Commandant of the Marine Corps

Annual New Year's Band Serenade

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GENERAL JAMES F. AMOS: Michael, thank you -- last year we did this, ladies and gentlemen, we did this surprise concert, surprise Serenade at the far end of the parade deck in what used to be our John Phillip Sousa Band Hall, which is now Crawford Hall, because the Home of the Commandants was under construction. It was wrapped up like a big Christmas gift and for about eight months we unable to get into it. And we didn't move in until May. But I remember the promise we made as we stood on the portico at that end and we said we will be in, Lord willing, this year Michael Colburn, you and the Marine band. We will be able to invite you in back to the house, but more to that a little bit later on. But for the band, the Marine band, all the Marines out here, thank you. Ladies and Gentlemen, I am acutely aware that it is New Year's morning and I notice that a lot of us have grey hair that are in this thing. So we probably did not party like rock stars last night and so getting up to a Serenade on New Year's Day is a little bit easier probably for most of us. But we do have places that we could have been and we are here at the Home of the Commandants and I want like to thank all our guests. I want to thank you for coming this morning. There are Marine Aides that have been fixing that food and taking wonderful care of us, and if you get a chance to just say thank you and pat them on the shoulder, I would appreciate that. I know they would.

But for everybody that's here, you are VIP guests. You are a very important person, and thank you for being here. I want to acknowledge just a few extra folks, special folks in Bonnie's and my life. The Honorable Robert Hale, Secretary Hale, you're out here. He is our comptroller. I'd paid very close attention to Secretary Hale, because he is the exchequer of the Department of Defense and he controls the purse strings. It's good to have you back Secretary Hale. The Honorable and Mrs. Joe Westphal. Joe are you -- he's back over there. If you could just raise your hand, if you're back there? Joe is the Under Secretary of the Army and we're blessed by having he and his wife here. Colonel and Mrs. Barney Barnum, -- Barney will you raise your hand please? He's back there. Artillery officer retired Marine Colonel, hero of Vietnam and Medal of Honor recipient, Barney Barnum. General and Mrs. Peter Pace, the 16th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It's always a pleasure to have you back to the home. General and Mrs. Jim Jones, the 32nd Commandant. General and Diane, good to have a first lady back to the Home of the Commandants. Lieutenant General and Mrs. Steve Olmstead. Steve if you would raise your hand? He's back over here. Steve was a PFC at the Chosin Reservoir and worked his way up to Lieutenant General. He is a real hero and he is a great friend and a living Marine legend. So it's good to have you here, Steve. Sergeant Major Michael Barrett, Sergeant Major where are you? He's here somewhere. Raise your hand please. Got him, okay. Sergeant Major Barrett's down here -- his wife Susan is taking care of all the rest of the kids that are at the house, and it is great to have you here Sergeant Major. Master Chief Petty Officer and Mrs. Michael Leavitt, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard. Master Chief if you're here -- it's good to have you here. We had the Commandant of the Coast Guard here earlier; it's good to have him here. Chief Master Sergeant and Mrs. James Roy, Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force. Chief, you out there? Thanks for being out here today. General Norty Schwartz, Chief of Staff of the U.S. Air Force was here earlier as well. I heard rumors that Sergeant Major Carlton Kent is out there in the audience. Is that true? He is. He didn't bother to come by and say hello to me. But the -- sixteenth Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps is out there. And Sergeant Major Alford McMichael and his wife Rita are down there and it's good to have you here.

If you get the impression that there is nothing else to do when you are a retired Sergeant

Major but come here to these kinds of parties, that's not true! It's always great to be in your presence. It's good to have you here. The history of today's Serenade... last year when we did this, Colonel Colburn was kind enough to take the new Commandant under his wing and make sure that I understood the rich history behind this Serenade. It goes all the way back to Civil War days. And there are some Washington Post articles that indicate that it may even go back farther to 1806, 1807. But regardless -- by technicality it began 1865, the first New Year's at the end of the Civil War. And our Commandant then was Lieutenant Colonel Jacob Zeilin, he was the seventh Commandant of the Marine Corps, and he was living in this house. Now the house was a little bit different. I mean it was the same structure, but this porch was a porch, but it wasn't a closed in porch. But the house itself was basically the same. And the band, the Marine band, surprised, on that January morning, Commandant Zeilin and his lady by doing this Serenade, much like we have here today. Now I will tell you that I am blessed by having a Chaplain of the Marine Corps, Rear Admiral Margaret Kibben, raise your hand Margaret. She is the reason why you are out here without your jackets on today, ladies and gentlemen. Because when General Jones was the Commandant, I stood right over there and froze to death and it was 15 degrees outside. Thanks for the good weather Chaplain. You can imagine for a 147 years now, this tradition has stuck with the Marine Corps. Now our Corps is unique in that if you ever do anything twice, it becomes a tradition. And we've never seen a tradition that we didn't fall in love with and wouldn't die in a ditch over, so this is a 147 years of wonderful tradition. Surprising the Commandant and his lady -- we said last year that maybe we'd walk out in our bath robe -- and Bonnie in her curlers -- but then we thought a little bit better about it since CNN was over here recording this, but it's a great and wonderful occasion.

Another piece of history that is interesting for this Serenade is that in 1944 General Alexander Vandegrift was the Commandant of the Marine Corps, and he was a hero of Guadalcanal, Medal of Honor recipient. He commanded of all the Marines of Guadalcanal. And in 1944 began a tradition that when the Commandant changed command, actually did that on New Year's Day. So in 1944 -- from 1944, and General Vandegrift was the 18th Commandant of the Marine Corps, to the 25th Commandant of the Marine Corps, the Serenade actually kicked off the new term of the brand new Commandant, and that stayed that way until the 25th Commandant. So over the years the Serenades have become quite famous, written about them in the *Washington Post*. I had my staff pull a bunch of articles up and last night it was interesting. In 1957 General Pate, Lieutenant General Pate was the Commandant of the Marine Corps and this is what the *Washington Post* wrote on January 2, 1957, "The 1957 party world started on a gay note yesterday with the annual New Year's Day Serenade and breakfast at Marine Barracks Washington. Since Civil War days it has been a custom for the red-coated Marine Band to surprise the Commandant and his lady with a mid-morning concert. Then also with keeping with the tradition, the Commandant surprises the band members by asking them into the Commandant's home for breakfast. Then General Pate casually told the 100 band members "if they had nothing else to do" he just happened to have some hot-spiced rum in the kitchen for them." Well Mike, we're gonna have some hot spiced rum here in a minute. We have some in the kitchen, so we are going to keep the tradition warm and alive that General Pate started.

Most Commandants have been very fond of their bands; they've grown close to them. Bands have been an important part of the Marine Corps, not only in war fighting, but also in recruiting. The drum and fife were the instruments that we used to march off into combat for

well over a century, but we have some early correspondence from Lieutenants to Commandants, saying that we thought perhaps the band might actually help our recruiting efforts. And so we pulled a couple of these out and I'd ask that you listen to the words because even a century and a half ago, you can almost see how our recruiting themes came into being in the 21st century. On April 8, 1807 Lieutenant Charles Johnson wrote to the Commandant, Lieutenant Colonel Wharton, from the New York Navy Yard [and I] quote, "From the report of the recruiting office at Alexandria, the frigate *Chesapeake*, I find with the assistance of a little music that a few good men might be provided. I have therefore to request, if convenient, that you assist me with a Drum and Fife Corps." One letter on December 4, 1809 written to Colonel Wharton, again the Commandant of the Marine Corps, speaks to the value of music in recruiting. It says, "If I had some music, some few fine men would possibly be procured here," signed your obedient servant, Arch Henderson, Lieutenant, USMC, Commanding. In fact Secretary Gates, when we did the change of command last October, a year ago this past October and the band performed so magnificently out here on that October 22nd, Secretary Gates came up to General Conway and I. He looked us in the eye and said, "Not on my watch will the axe fall on the Marine Band." So we're safe. So what I have to do now, ladies and gentlemen, is make sure that the Secretary Panetta has that same band.

Mike, thank you. Thank you to this wonderful Marine Band, they are magnificent, they always are. They're magnificent on the parade deck that's incubating for the winter right now. It's hard to believe that parade season is over, but it's also hard to believe that it will begin again. The practices will start soon. You performed over 800 performances this past year. You've talked to us about traveling to the southeast with this wonderful group of musicians, that represent us -- represent the spirit of the Marine Corps and those rich traditions. I want to thank you for all that you've done. Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for being here today, being a part of this. I want you to enjoy your New Year's Day. I hear rumors that there is football on TV, so I want you to enjoy that. And as promised last year Mike, we are in fact living in the Home of the Commandants, and I intend to keep up with General Pate's tradition. So if you have nothing better to do, Colonel Colburn, you and your red coats, I would invite you into the house for some afternoon brunch and in the meantime, Colonel Colburn, let's "splice the main brace."
(Applauding)

Very good, Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you very much, God bless you and Happy New Year to all of you.

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