



**Marine Corps Association Annual Dinner
Keynote Speech
General David Petraeus
30 July 2009**

Well, good evening to you all, and thanks, General Palm, for that very generous introduction. But you know the response: I just wish my parents could have been with us this evening to hear it—my father would have loved your kind words, and my dear old mother would have believed every last one of them!

And thanks, in turn, to you, Les, for your nearly 32 years of service to our nation as a Marine and for your continued service in the years since retirement including, of course, your stewardship of the great Marine Corps Association.

It's a true honor to be here tonight on the occasion of the third Annual Dinner of this fine organization. As all here recognize, I know, the Association does a splendid job helping to preserve the culture of the Corps and helping to link Marines to other Marines and Marines to society at large. So thanks for that, and thanks to all the folks who worked so hard to plan, organize, and conduct tonight's event.

It is also an honor to be joined by so many accomplished public servants: a number of our civilian colleagues from Capitol Hill and the Pentagon, active and retired Marines and veterans from our other fine services, and many of our partners in industry. And it's terrific to see so many familiar faces. One look at the VIP list, though, and I realized, as Les did, that I wouldn't be able to individually mention all of those who do deserve recognition. But I do want to thank you collectively for your admirable service to our great country.

Also in the audience tonight are a number of veterans whose sacrifice has been especially great. So let me add my thanks to our Wounded Warriors—for all you have given and for what you have endured as a result of raising your right hand and volunteering to serve when our country needed you. Thank you, moreover, for soldiering on in the face of the enormous physical and emotional challenges with which you've had to deal. Your example demonstrates the truth of Gandhi's observation that: "Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will."

Now as I attempt to share my impressions of, and experiences with, those who are privileged to wear the globe and anchor of the US Marine Corps, I'm reminded of an Army General named William Thomson. In 1956, he was asked

to address a group of Marines at an event similar to this one. A particularly forthright leader, General Thomson offered up front that his insight was bound to be limited, if only because he wasn't a Marine himself. "There are" he observed, "only two kinds of people who understand Marines: Marines... and the enemy. Everyone else," he noted, "has a second-hand opinion." In that spirit, I'd like to offer some of my own second-hand opinions, noting that I have formed them throughout a career in which I've soldiered alongside, and had the honor of sharing a fighting position with, some very fine Marines in some fairly tough spots.

Introduction

Over the years, in fact, I have come to admire many aspects of the Marine Corps. What stands out in particular, though, is the fact that while Marine tactics adapt to the times, Marine principles do not change—nor should they. Today, as in years past, the Corps strikes a unique and commendable balance. On the one hand, Marines display a stalwart resistance to change in those bedrock values that are the very foundation of what it means to be a Marine. On the other hand, Marines demonstrate a ready embrace of innovation that allows them to adapt to the environments in which they operate and to the enemies they face. Unchanging, unyielding, bedrock principles are thus joined by an equally strong ability to innovate and adapt. And the result is a balance that makes the Corps ideally suited to full-spectrum operations—or, to use General Krulak's description, to three-block warfare.

During the nearly 4 years that I was privileged to serve in Iraq, I witnessed both the raw courage and the intellectual finesse of US Marines. Nowhere was this more evident than during the extraordinary turnaround led by the Marines in Anbar Province. As you all know, the Anbar Awakening drew its first breaths in Iraq in late 2006 and then reached critical mass with the surge in 2007, setting off a chain reaction of awakenings across Iraq. It is not an exaggeration to say that the Anbar Awakening helped alter the course of events in Iraq, and I believe that generations from now, historians will continue to view it as a great example of the principled application of longstanding counterinsurgency principles. These practices are rooted in Marine Corps history, they were captured in the US Army and US Marine Corps Counterinsurgency manual, and they are being applied today in Iraq and Afghanistan.

And tonight, I'd like to discuss the bedrock principles of the Marine Corps and the spirit of innovation that I observed in Marines in Iraq and throughout my career. Having done that, I'll then describe how those characteristics served Marines so well in counterinsurgency operations in Anbar Province – and how they will continue to serve Marines and our country well for years to come.

Bedrocks of the Marine Corps

First, those bedrock values of the Marine Corps. These timeless, unchanging truths include an unflinching devotion to one's fellow Marines, a ready embrace of hardship, and a universal emphasis on the skills and the spirit of the rifleman.

Devotion to fellow Marines

Semper Fidelis, "always faithful," speaks of Marines' devotion to our country and to their fellow Marines—those with whom they fight and sweat and bleed. As you all know very well, *Semper Fidelis* is more than a routine greeting to a fellow Marine and far more than mere words on a red and gold bumper sticker. *Semper Fidelis* is a way of life. In 2004, in the town of Husaybah in western Anbar Province, Corporal Jason Dunham demonstrated just that when he used his body—and gave his life—to shield his fellow Marines from an enemy grenade. Corporal Dunham's extraordinary bravery that day made him the most recent in a line of 295 Marines whose service above and beyond the call of duty and whose selfless devotion to their comrades in the brotherhood of the close fight earned them the Medal of Honor. And next Saturday, when the USS Jason Dunham is christened in Maine, that warship will become the most recent of those named for a Marine hero. And I should note that I'm very pleased that my Deputy, Marine LtGen John Allen, who was the Deputy Commander of the Marine force in Anbar Province in 2007, will have the honor of representing the Commandant of the Marine Corps at the christening ceremony. I am sure it will be a great celebration.

Hardship

Alongside this unique sense of devotion, there's another bedrock of the Marine ethos: an affinity for hardship. As puzzling as it may be to those who don't "get" what it means to be a Marine, Devil Dogs believe in hardship as something through which to gain strength. And from this hardship, this shared adversity, Marines, individually, and the Corps, collectively, possess a storied determination in the face of hardship and adversity. Who can forget the recruiting commercial that used to air during NFL games comparing the forging of a Marine sword through heat and pressure into hardened steel to the forging of a raw recruit through the heat and pressure of basic training into a hardened Marine? I was an Army Lieutenant Colonel at the time that spot used to air, and it was so inspirational that I almost resigned my commission to sign up for the Corps! Come to think of it, in fact, another bedrock element of the Marine Corps is unquestionably having the best recruiting ads on television! [PAUSE] But this concept is not just an advertisement. The Marines' sense of toughness permeates the Corps' lore as well as its reality. To recall an illustrative story, a Soldier is trudging through the muck in the midst of a downpour with a sixty-pound rucksack on his back. "This is tough," he thinks to himself. Just ahead of him trudges an Army Ranger with an 80-pound pack on his back: "This is really

tough," he thinks. And ahead of him is a Marine with an 90-pound pack on. And he thinks to himself, "I love how tough this is!" Then, of course, 25,000 feet above them, an Air Force pilot flips aside his ponytail and looks down at them through his cockpit as he flies over. "Boy," he radios his wingman, "It must be tough down there."

Well, TV commercials and all joking aside, we've all seen that Marines truly and consistently live up to their reputation. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as continuing engagements all over the globe, have led to an increase in the operational tempo of the Corps—as we have seen in all of our great services. It seems that nearly every Marine I talk to in the CENTCOM AOR is on his or her second or third or fourth or even fifth tour. Yet, despite our country having asked so much of our Marines, the Corps' recruiting and retention statistics continue to exceed all expectations. They demonstrate not only Marine fortitude, but also a continued desire of young men and women to become and to stay one of the few and the proud.

Nothing has demonstrated that better than the pace at which the Corps has grown in recent years. A few years ago, recognizing the strain on the Corps, Congress authorized an increase in the Corps' endstrength by 27,000 Marines. When the Corps started expanding back in 2007, the thinking was that it might be possible to add about 5,000 additional Marines a year. Well, as many here know, the first year the Corps actually grew by 7,000; the second year, the Corps grew by 12,000; and now, in the third year, the Corps is on track to grow by some 8,000 and to complete the expansion this summer—in half the time anyone anticipated. And it could have grown even more this year! Clearly the knowledge that hardship and sacrifice are part of serving our Nation in the Marine Corps has not scared the newest generation of US Marines; in fact, the awareness of the challenges in Marine life actually appear to have attracted those in the new generation of Marines.

Every Marine is a rifleman

Nearly two decades ago, General Al Gray, the Corps's 29th Commandant, underscored the importance of a third bedrock principle of the Corps. He re-emphasized the long-held edict that, "Every Marine is a rifleman." This is a simple, but hugely powerful concept—one to which, I might add, I firmly subscribe as well. The key insight, as you all know, is that the skills of riflemen cannot be exclusive to the infantry. Not only are the skills themselves important, the process of developing them also infuses a fighting spirit in each and every Marine who trains to master them. In the World War II Battle of Wake Island, for example, after the Japanese destroyed most of our aircraft, pilots such as Marine Medal of Honor recipient Henry Elrod led supply clerks and cooks in a desperate, final defense of the island. Now having cooks and logisticians in the thick of the fight is hardly uncommon these days, as the modern battlefield has no front line. But decades before the modern battlefield became a reality, back when there

generally were front lines and rear areas, Marines understood that the skill and the ethos of the rifleman must be universal.

Embrace of Innovation

As I noted earlier, I have long admired the Corps holding firm to its bedrock principles. But, I have also long admired the way in which the Corps embraces innovation— such as the development of expertise in amphibious warfare and in counterinsurgency operations.

Amphibious warfare doctrine

The Corps's development of amphibious warfare doctrine is an example of the Marine tradition of innovation at a critical moment. In the years following the First World War, brilliant Marine strategists such as LtCol Pete Ellis foresaw a war with Japan. Such a conflict, they believed, would likely require moving Marines by ships to shore under hostile fire—a daunting task, particularly as the memory of the disastrous Gallipoli campaign during WW I was still fresh in the minds of all at that time. But the Corps had a leader who was up to the challenge—the great General John Lejeune, who, I'm proud to note, was also the only Marine General to command an Army division, the 2d Infantry Division, which he led in WW I. Embracing the demand for innovation, General Lejeune doggedly drove the study and development of amphibious warfare doctrine. And in so doing, he helped develop the tactical insights, the skills, and the equipment that proved crucial to victory in the island-hopping campaign of the central Pacific during WW II.

Counterinsurgency doctrine

But well before those amphibious innovations helped to secure victory in battles such as Guadalcanal, Tarawa, and Iwo Jima, Marines fought smaller wars in places such as the Philippines, Morocco, and Nicaragua. Indeed, while Marines have fought in all of our country's major wars, they have an equally long tradition of fighting on the periphery, in so-called “small wars,” assaulting, for example, Chapultepec Palace in the “Halls of Montezuma” or fighting the Barbary pirates on the “shores of Tripoli.” This history has uniquely equipped the Marine Corps for today's operations—for in our era, the periphery has moved to the center of our national security concerns.

The Corps has played a pivotal role in the development of the doctrine to deal with those wars on the periphery—what we now know as counterinsurgency doctrine. At the same time that Lejeune's innovators set forth amphibious doctrine in the *Tentative Manual for Landing Operations*, in fact, others captured the Corps's experiences countering insurgents in the classic *Small Wars Manual* – a manual, I might add, that I have studied since I was a young captain serving in Central America. Indeed, Marines were very much among the few and the

proud who continued to study counterinsurgency doctrine throughout the 20th century. Unfortunately, across much of the military, we were, by and large, intellectually unprepared for many of the challenges we encountered in Iraq and Afghanistan. Well into those wars, we faced a doctrinal gap. And when my shipmate Jim Mattis and I convened a group of Soldiers and Marines to sit down with representatives from across the Department of Defense, the US government, and the academic world a few years ago to bridge that gap, the *Small Wars Manual*, as well as the Vietnam War insights of Marines such as LtGen “Brute” Krulak, served as important sources of insight for our work. They also constituted an intellectual link between the doctrine of today and the innovation of Marines past.

Anbar Awakening

Beyond developing today’s counterinsurgency doctrine, Marines have also helped lead the way in employing it. And because it is such a great example of the approach to counterinsurgency that we are pursuing throughout the Central Command area of responsibility, I want to take a few minutes to recall Marine actions in Anbar Province. Given the Corps’ long history of involvement in unconventional warfare, the Marines in Anbar in 2007 were, in a sense, returning to their roots. And the Corps’ commitment to bedrock values while embracing innovation equipped the Marines in Anbar to meet the challenges they faced there.

The events in Iraq in 2003, of course, freed the Iraqi people from the grip of Saddam Hussein. Even so, in the aftermath of liberation, a perfect storm broke across the vast, Sunni-dominated Anbar Province and in other Sunni areas. The Iraqi military was disbanded. De-Ba’athification threw thousands—tens of thousands, in fact—of largely Sunni government officials out of their jobs and many state-owned enterprises were closed. As a result, most adult Iraqi males in Anbar found themselves unemployed, feeling disenfranchised, and angry. This perfect storm represented a perfect opportunity for what became known as al Qaeda in Iraq. AQI portrayed itself to the people of Anbar as the force of liberation from and revenge against the Coalition forces and the predominantly Shia leaders of the new Iraq. The fight was on.

The insurgency grew steadily throughout the first three years of the war. Then, in the spring of 2006, violence exploded to horrific levels in the wake of the Samarra mosque bombing. Our Marines and Soldiers and Iraqi partners responded by killing and capturing thousands of insurgents and militia members, but the rising tide of violence did not abate. In Anbar, Marines held to the bedrocks of the Corps in each of their fights. But the bedrock values were not enough -- defeating the insurgency would also require great innovation. As the Deputy Commander of Coalition forces in Anbar in 2007, then-Brigadier General John Allen, later observed, "It was clear that unless we went after the underlying factors that fed the insurgency, we were not going to win this war. Put differently,

we were learning the hard way that we were not going to kill or capture our way out of Anbar Province."

In fact, we came to recognize that the key terrain in Anbar was the human terrain and, especially, the human terrain controlled by the tribes. Nearly all Anbaris held allegiance to their tribes and found there a degree of social order amidst the chaos. In turn, the insurgency depended on the support—or at least the acquiescence—of the tribes, but it wasn't long before al Qaeda began to overplay its hand. AQI leaders and fighters took local tribal women to be their temporary wives, brutally enforced their interpretation of Sha'ria Law, harshly punished any association with Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces, and carried out innumerable acts of indiscriminate violence. Further, al Qaeda leaders began directly undercutting the business interests of the sheikhs, taking over their sources of livelihood to finance insurgent activities. When the sheikhs pushed back, al Qaeda turned on the tribes. Better armed, organized, and resourced – and shockingly unscrupulous and violent – al Qaeda wreaked havoc from Al Qaim to Fallujah.

This turn of events, though, created the opening we needed to deepen our engagement with the tribes. The sheikhs were becoming desperate as AQ intensified its murder and intimidation campaign and became intent on breaking the will of the tribes. By the end of 2006, the sheikhs had begun to understand that this fight was turning into a struggle for the very identity and survival of their tribal system. As a result, sheikhs started coming forward to the Coalition forces to discuss an alliance to throw off AQ. This was the opening we needed.

Working for the Marines forces that had overall responsibility for Anbar Province, Army Colonel Sean MacFarland and his brigade of Marine and Army battalions in Ramadi developed in late 2006 and early 2007 a very important alliance—one with Sheikh Abdul Sittar Abu Risha that helped to usher in the Anbar Dawn. Anbar Dawn was a series of operations and initiatives designed to create alliances with the tribes to deny al Qaeda access to their tribal lands square mile by square mile, and in the process to deny al Qaeda access to the people of the towns and villages around Ramadi and then around the rest of the Province. While our Marines and soldiers in the province courageously conducted kinetic operations against the insurgents based on the information provided by newly cooperative tribes, these kinetic operations were in many respects the most straightforward part of the campaign. More difficult was finding innovative ways to build the trust with our local partners that would demonstrate our resolve to stand with them. Building this trust involved protecting the leaders who quite literally put their necks on the line. Indeed, earlier attempts at such alliances in 2005 ended with the key Sheikhs being murdered. Aware of the history, Colonel MacFarland parked an M-1 tank section in the front yard of his new partner, Sheikh Sittar, and the first local force trained was Sheikh Sittar's security detachment. Building trust also required living among, and sharing the risks with, those whose trust we sought; training, equipping, and funding security forces

capable of protecting their own neighborhoods; and, once an area had been cleared of insurgents, doing the hard work of rebuilding not only local infrastructure, but also local governance and rule of law. Those in Anbar did all this and more.

To foster the revival of Anbar Province, our forces fought fiercely with an irreconcilable foe while working simultaneously to cultivate the loyalty of those deemed reconcilable. Our Marines lived the description often applied to them: "No better friend, no worse enemy." As many in the audience here tonight know, Al Qaeda did not go quietly into oblivion, but fought viciously to maintain its dominance. Marines, Soldiers, Sailors, and Airmen, together with our Iraqi partners, fought back, fought hard, and fought skillfully.

Eventually, we reached a tipping point. The Coalition demonstrated its ability to protect the population and its long-term commitment to the fight, and insurgent attacks started to drive more Anbaris to our side. From Ramadi, Marines worked to spread the movement across Anbar Province. Then it spread into Baghdad and elsewhere in Iraq. Violence went down steadily and civic life sprung anew from what was often quite literally ashes. Together with the surge, which reinforced our commitment to protecting Iraqis and enabled the conduct of a comprehensive counterinsurgency campaign – and with the defeat of Jaysh al Mahdi, the Sadr militia, in April 2008 – the Anbar Awakening had a transformative effect on the security environment in Iraq, serving as the basis for the subsequent political progress taking place today.

Conclusion

In closing, the battle in Anbar Province, just like our Marines' current fight in Helmand Province in Afghanistan, required the capacity to innovate, to learn, and to think deeply about complex and very difficult problems...all the while holding firm to the bedrock principles of loyalty and devotion among skilled, hardened warriors. Marines have proven that they possess this capacity and that they are more than up to the task.

Recall again the devotion of Corporal Dunham, the young Marine who dove on a grenade to save his patrol in an extraordinary act of valor. As I look at the audience, I see several generations of Marines inspired by heroes like Corporal Dunham and similarly determined that their own lives will also touch the lives of others.

Indeed, some of you here tonight may have arrived at an age at which one begins to wonder what he has accomplished in life and what footprints he has left in the sands of time. I want to reassure you in that regard, for you—as individual Marines and as part of the great tradition of the Corps—have left deep footprints and a clearly marked path of accomplishment, valor, sacrifice, and selfless service.

Others here are still in the midst of their careers or are just beginning their lives of service and they may be wondering what footprints they are destined to leave. You can take courage in the example set by the many Marines who have gone before you—their footprints will guide you.

President Reagan once said that freedom “is never more than one generation away from extinction,” and he urged each generation to do what is necessary to preserve freedom and to pass it on to the next. He made that observation at the height of our nation’s struggle against Communism, a struggle in which many here served—in Korea and in Vietnam, in Latin America and in Europe. Heeding President Reagan’s charge, the Cold War generation preserved our freedoms and passed them forward.

Today we find ourselves in another great struggle, this time against the indiscriminate violence, oppressive practices, and extremist ideologies of organizations such as al Qaeda. Corporal Dunham’s story illustrates vividly how young Americans are standing up to these threats to our freedom, fulfilling their duties as part of what many have labeled America’s new Greatest Generation. And as today’s Marines join the long column of American combat veterans, they extend into the future a Corps made strong by its principles and made better by its courage to adapt.

So tonight, on behalf of every Soldier, Sailor, Airman, Marine, and Coast Guardsman serving in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere in the Central Command area of responsibility, I want to thank you for your service, thank you for your example, and, finally, thank you for your support of those serving our nation in harm’s way – knowing that as we strive to accomplish our missions, we will cherish, uphold, and protect the values of courage, sacrifice, and patriotism that each of you have embraced so admirably. Thank you very much. *Semper Fi!*