

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH GENERAL JAMES AMOS

SUBJECT: THE MARINES AS AMERICA'S CRISIS RESPONSE FORCE

MODERATOR: THERESA WERNER, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

LOCATION: NATIONAL PRESS CLUB BALLROOM, WASHINGTON, D.C.

TIME: 12:30 P.M. EDT

DATE: TUESDAY, AUGUST 28, 2012

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THERESA WERNER: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Theresa Werner, and I am the 105th President of the National Press Club. We are the world's leading professional organization for journalists committed to our profession's future through programming and events such as these while fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club, please visit our website at www.press.org. To donate to programs offered to the public through our National Press Club Journalism Institute, please visit press.org/institute.

On behalf of our members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and those of you attending today's event. Our head table includes guests of our speaker as well as working journalists who are club members. And if you hear applause in our audience, we'd note that members of the general public are attending so it's not necessarily evidence of a lack of journalistic objectivity. (Laughter)

I'd also like to welcome our C-SPAN and our Public Radio audiences. Our luncheons are also featured on our member-produced weekly Podcast from the National Press Club available on iTunes. You can also follow the action on Twitter using hashtag NPCLunch. As our guest's speech concludes, we'll have a Q&A, and I will ask as many questions as time permits. Now I would like to introduce our head table guests, and I'd like each of you here to stand up briefly as your name is announced.

From your right, John Fales, aka Sergeant Shaft of the *Washington Times*; Carol Guensburg, an editor for Scripps Howard News Service; Viola Gienger, freelance

journalist in defense and foreign affairs; Colonel Chip Bierman, Military Secretary to the Commandant and guest of our speaker; Jim Michaels, military writer, *USA Today*; Mrs. Bonnie Amos, wife of the speaker; Marilyn Geewax, NPR and Vice Chairwoman of the Speakers Committee.

I'm going to skip our speaker for just a moment. Andrea Stone, senior national correspondent, The Huffington Post, member of the Speakers Committee and organizer of today's event; Brigadier General Paul Kennedy, Director of the Marine Corps Public Affairs and guest of the speaker; Lolita Baldor, nationally security military reporter, Associated Press; John Donnelly, senior writer and defense reporter, CQ and member of the National Press Club Board of Governors; Ken Delecki, freelance writer and editor, Commander of the National Press Club American Legion Post #20. Thank you all for joining us today. (Applause)

General James Amos became the 35th Commandant of the Marine Corps on October 22nd, 2010, succeeding General James Conway. His appointment made him the first career aviator to lead the corps and also marked the first time in almost 30 years that an assistant commandant was promoted to the top job. A former fighter pilot, he commanded the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing in combat during the early days of the Iraq war. Later as the commander of the 2 MEF, the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Force, he took delivery of the first operation V22 Ospreys, the sometimes controversial tilt rotor aircraft that has suffered a series of fatal crashes.

Amos has been one of the aircraft's biggest boosters, announcing earlier this month that the fleet would be cleared for operations in Japan after an investigation ruled an Osprey crash in Morocco in April was due to pilot error and not mechanical problems.

Amos has been stationed at NATO's Southern Europe headquarters in Naples, Italy, and at the Pentagon. On September 11th, 2001, his office was destroyed by American Airlines flight 77. Fortunately, he was in another part of the building when it hit.

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates nominated General Amos as Commandant in the summer of 2010. By choosing an aviator to redefine the role of the seaborne force that has spent a decade operating as a de facto second ground army, Gates showed, as the *Washington Post* noted, "a willingness to shake up established service bureaucracies." Seen as an innovative thinker about future combat, Amos was tapped with charting the course direction beyond the current war. Yet soon after becoming Commandant, Amos got mired in the culture wars when he became an outspoken opponent of the ending of the Pentagon's don't ask, don't tell policy, prohibiting gays from openly serving in the military. He predicted such a change during wartime would become a dangerous distraction and that could harm combat effectiveness.

But when less than a year later the Obama Administration repealed the policy, Amos wasted no time implementing the order telling marines in a video that "the Corps will step out smartly and faithfully to implement this new law." Later, he called the

repeal a non-event and said he was very pleased with how it had gone.

In another sign of the times, the most male, and arguably the most macho of the armed services, next month will enroll the first women in the Marine Corps's infantry officer school in Quantico, Virginia, although they remain barred from most ground combat units. Amos ordered an online survey of marines that ends this week gauging attitudes in the corps. And as he told the *New York Times*, "I'm not one bit afraid of the results on this. I'm very bullish on women."

More troubling to the General has been a series of breakdown in discipline and bad behavior that suggests a breakdown in values with the corps after decades of war. In two of the more widely publicized incidents, marines were seen on video urinating on the corpses of Taliban fighters, and in a separate photo posing next to a flag that bore a symbol similar to that of the Nazi SS. Concerned the incidents had brought discredit to the Marine Corps, Amos toured bases around the world to deliver a message that he would not tolerate allowing our standards to erode and to remind the marines that they are called to a higher standard.

Amos is the son of a Navy aviator who couldn't have been too pleased when young James got kicked out of the first grade in his Catholic school for misbehaving. However, he recovered and went on to graduate from the Navy ROTC program at the University of Idaho before beginning his military career. Now 65, Amos and his wife, Bonnie, have two grown children and six grandchildren. They have been married for more than 40 years, and like most military families, have moved innumerable times. They now live in the longest continually occupied building in Washington, D. C., but thanks to renovations of the historic 1806 house, they didn't move in until a year after they took the job. And now I would like to introduce our speaker, General James Amos. (Applause)

GENERAL AMOS: You know, after that introduction, I'm reminded of my early days in Idaho. And every spring, you'd run out and you'd grab all the young bulls and heifers that had been born the year before and then you'd gather them all together and some pretty unseemly things would happen to the young bulls. And it would all end up with one humiliating act of branding with a red hot branding iron, and then we'd wish them farewell and good day as we launched them out across the prairie. When I look out in this audience and I think about my introduction, I sort of feel like that young heifer or young bull that you're wishing good day and going to launch me out in this audience of everybody here.

Listen, thank you very much. I purposely am going to keep my remarks, my opening remarks short so that I can answer your questions. There's no shortage of things going on around the world today. I mean, some of it I'm in the middle of, some of it I'm on the fringes of. But we certainly have visibility on all of it. But I'd like to talk to you about a recent visit I-- Sergeant Major Barrett and I just came back from Afghanistan in the second week of last month. And then followed up shortly thereafter, we went to the Pacific to visit marines in the Pacific, Guadalcanal for the 70th anniversary of the landing on August the 7th; Australia, where we have marines in line with our new strategy. And

then all the way up to Okinawa, Korea, and Tokyo.

And finally, I'd like to just comment on really what the Marine Corps does for our nation. You know, we talked a little bit about implication or the innuendo as the second land army, and that's really not why America has a Marine Corps. And I'll talk to you a little bit about that here in just a second. But my visit to Helmand. I've been going there now for almost four straight years in various capacities and jobs. My experience on the ground in combat was predominantly in Iraq on two tours. So Helmand, I've been paying very close attention to; the culture is different, the landscape is different. And really, the war is different. And I will tell you from my early visits four years ago to the last one just last month, I've watched it steadily progress and turn more favorable and more favorable. I'm aware of, I'm acutely aware, of the green on blue. That was very painful for the United States Marine Corps. I'm aware of the latest headlines today that I saw this morning of the Afghan citizens that have been murdered by the Taliban. So all of this is going on.

But I need to tell you that each time I go there, I don't just hang around the marines, I actually hang around the 215th corps commander of the Afghan National Security Force. I've known Major General Malouk for many, many years. He's a former mujahideen fighter for the Afghans. And he is probably the premier corps commander, my estimation, in all of Afghanistan. And I'm out with him as he travels around and visits his soldiers. So while we bring the numbers of marines down in accordance with the President's drawdown of the surge, which I support by the way, as we bring those down, don't lose sight of the fact that we've also increased the Afghan National Security forces 20,000 in Afghanistan, just in our zone and all in the Helmand province. So, it's a little bit like a teeter-totter. It's not either/or, it's not look what's happened, there's a vacuum. There actually is a very capable Afghan national army on the ground in the Helmand province.

And as I visited on this last trip, talked to the commanding officers, Sergeant Major Barrett and I would get in that V22 and we would fly all over the area very safely and very efficiently, I might add, and we would land at every-- our goal was to go to every combat outpost where we had marines. And we did our best. And I came away this time more positive about the change than I have in all the other times. I know that almost is probably counterintuitive, but the last thing my regimental commander said as we got on the V22 way up in the northern part, up in the area very close to where the Afghan civilians were murdered by the Taliban yesterday. As we got on the airplane, he pulled me aside and he said-- this is a marine colonel-- and he said, "Commandant, I need to tell you one thing. I just want you to hear it from me." He said, "We're going to be okay. Things are going very, very well with the Afghan National Army. Their commanders have stepped up, their young soldiers have stepped up. Doesn't mean there's not going to be problems, doesn't mean there's not going to be some tragedies and challenges. But," he said, "we're actually doing quite well."

So I just wanted to pass that to you. There's every reason, I think, for optimism. It doesn't mean that there are not going to be issues. It doesn't mean that I'm not going to

have to look at the moms and dads of my marines and put my arms around my spouses and family members and hold them dearly because of some great tragedy. That doesn't mean that's not going to happen. But if you step back and look at where this is trending, I think we have every reason for optimism, certainly down in the Helmand province. And it's well led by not only our commanders and our British forces and our allies, but also by almost more importantly, by the Afghan leadership down there to include the provincial governor.

So, that was the visit there. Switch to the Pacific, if you would for me, please, kind of talk-- bear with me for a minute. The trip began in Hawaii and ended up in Tokyo and went for many days, never staying in one place at the same time. Just continuing on, bouncing through the Pacific. Down in Australia, to talk to the senior leadership of the military part of the government down there about the realignment of forces in the Pacific. What does this mean to the marines? As you know, we ended up in Darwin up in the northwest corner of Darwin. So we went from Canberra down in the southeast corner where it was 35 degrees, to Darwin, in about four hours, 4 ½ hours, and it was 88 degrees. And yes, we ate some kangaroo, yes we ate some crocodile and got a little bit of taste of the culture.

But more importantly, we were with the marines, the 200 marines, that were up in Darwin that were training with their Australian counterparts. I think that's a relationship that's very positive. Our two governments have agreed to that. Should end up somewhere down the road once the two governments are satisfied with the pace, somewhere around 2,500 marines up in Darwin and that area training with their Australian counterparts.

So, the Pacific, more specifically, why? First of all, America is a Pacific nation. Five of our most important mutual defense treaties are in this region of the world. Here's some statistics that I think will kind of help bring everything into focus. The Asia Pacific area is home to 61 percent of the world's population, 15 of the world's 28 mega cities are in the Asia Pacific area. Twelve of the top 15 U.S. trading partners for the United States are in Asia Pacific. Here's a statistic as we think about Isaac and the potential for natural disasters. More than 70,000 people are killed every single year, not every decade, but every year, by natural disasters in the Asia Pacific area. That's a little over \$35 billion worth of damage each year. You think about all those opportunities for marines and U.S. forces to help our partners and our fellow nations in the Pacific as they recover from the natural disasters that are so prevalent.

We are America's expeditionary force in readiness, we're a crisis response force. That's what we do. We get to places very quickly. Ideally, we do that aboard naval ships. All of this is paid for, the equipment on there belongs to the Marine Corps, the ships belong to the Navy, and we are forward deployed and ready to respond. Secretary Panetta said when the realignment is done with the Pacific, we'll have 22,000 marines west of the international dateline.

That's a backyard that we're very familiar with. We cut our teeth in World War II in the Pacific, starting all the way down with the 2nd Marine division down in New

Zealand. And so as we worked our way around that part of the world, it became almost a spiritual experience for the marines that were traveling with me. Because when you step on the ground and walk across Red Beach at Guadalcanal and you realize just what landed there, those selfless, great patriots not only from our country but from Australia, as well, and you realize that we do have a lot of experience in the Pacific. It is a backyard that we actually are very familiar with. Yes, our youngsters aren't, but some of us oldsters are and so we're not the least bit intimidated about the strategy. We think it absolutely makes sense.

Finally, the last point I'd make is back to my point about America's crisis response force. You know, the issue of a second land army has come up several times and usually my comments run like this. First of all, I make no apologies for being on the ground in the Anbar province. We settled right in next door to our allies, more specifically the United States Army. And we fought there pretty hard. (Laughter) Ray, I didn't mean it to come out that way. But our partners, and we've been on the ground shoulder to shoulder with the United States Army, really, for the last almost nine years.

But we settled down in the Anbar province because we were told to do that. We crossed the border in March of 2003, all of us at the head table were there, and that went very, very quickly. Then the hard work in Iraq began in February the next year, and it lasted for a long time, and you know that. So we settled there, it's not why America buys a Marine Corps or funds it or why Congress, but we did it and we did it pretty damn well. And I make no apologies to anybody. We left there about 2 ½ years later feeling very good about having set the conditions for the greatest opportunity for success in the Anbar province.

So go forward with me to the Helmand, to Afghanistan now, and we're exactly in the same boat only smaller in number. But again, I make no apologies for being on the ground in Helmand shoulder to shoulder with our coalition partners. That's what has happened for up to 237 years of Marine Corps history. But America buys and funds a Marine Corps to be forward deployed and forward-- to be America's 9-1-1 force. We used to say that, usually and typically before 9/11, by the way. That was a kind of a bumper sticker for the Marine Corps in the '80s and the early '90s, the 9-1-1 force. We are. I mean, that implies you can get there, you can do something rapidly, you can do it tonight. We say we respond to today's crisis with today's force today. Not 30 days from now, not four months from now, not 45 days later after I've cobbled together a force and we train. We actually sit at a very high state of readiness.

And that's what America wants. America needs a force that can do that. America needs a force that it can get put on a ship or put on a plane and can leave tonight. And they have their stuff with them. They don't need to eat in a chow hall, they don't need to sleep in what we affectionately, and you know, we call tin cans over in Afghanistan or Iraq. You actually can sleep in some pretty rough conditions. And that's what we do. We respond rapidly and we have a high state of readiness.

I'll close with just some numbers here on what you get for the amount of money that you have with your Marine Corps. Actually, we're right at 8 percent of the total Department of Defense budget. That's everything. That includes what we call blue in support of green, the aviation that we get from the Navy, the United States Naval aviation. It's 8 percent of the total Department of Defense budget. And for that, you get a corps that sits poised and ready to do just exactly what we did in Libya when the two ships came up and the marines were poised providing some decision space for our leadership. You not only get a force that can go down rapidly to the Philippines to help with the after effects of a cyclone that has passed through there two weeks ago the way we did, and we've done over and over again. But for that 8 percent, you get 11 percent of the fixed wing tactical aviation in the Department of Defense. You get 15 percent of the maneuver of the gauge for ground forces. And you get 18 percent of the rotary wing and tac helicopters in the entire Department of Defense. And you get it all for 8 percent of the budget.

And in addition to that, you have a force that sits 24 hours, 7 days a week, 365 days a year ready to respond to today's crisis with today's force today. Thank you very much, and I'll be happy to take your questions. (Applause)

MS. WERNER: Can you please discuss the impact of the sequestration on the Marine Corps?

GENERAL AMOS: I'll be happy to. Lots of discussion, I've been asked the question by Congress and often in the press. What's the net effect of that? When you look at the military today, you need to think in terms of capacity and capabilities. In other words, we need to have our nation-- whatever capacity or nation agrees to and says we have to have, you've got to have it. And in that capacity comes some given amount of capabilities. As it relates to the Marine Corps, if we end up with sequestration, it will disproportionately affect the Marine Corps. Remember I said that we're only 8 percent of the DOD budget. By definition, sequestration is somewhere across 10 to 11 percent across a variety of categories; manpower, procurement, operations and maintenance. So, even though it would proportionately be applied to the Marine Corps the same way, the effects would be disproportional because our numbers are so small, our budget is so small, that the effects would actually, in some cases, cause us to end up canceling programs, not being able to reset the Marine Corps after 11 years of straight combat coming out of Iraq and Afghanistan. And it, quite honestly, would stunt any kind of modernization. So, very, very dangerous and disproportionately felt by the Marine Corps.

MS. WERNER: An article written by Marine Captain Katie Petronio fiercely questions the wisdom of placing females in the infantry. Why do you believe that this is a good plan and do you intend to go forward with integrating females into the infantry?

GENERAL AMOS: A couple of points. First of all, we've had lots of women in combat. I mean, that's kind of the big issue to begin with. Lots of women in combat and we've got them in this room right here sitting around the table in uniform. So women in combat have not been an issue.

We have had closed-- we've had units that have been closed to females that we just opened up; artillery, tanks, AmTracs, light air defense and combat engineer, and we've opened those up to officer and staff NCOs. So that's in the process right now of filling-- I have every expectation that that is going to be a huge success. Early indications are that that was precisely the right thing to do. As it relates specifically to women in infantry, we have a series of-- we have three things that are going on right now. Number one, we've got a survey out to all marines and we're in the process, and you referenced that in your opening comments. So that is yet to come in. It will come in and it will answer a variety of questions. It'll talk to us about women in combat, women specifically in infantry.

The second part of this is I need to get past hyperbole and get past intuition and instincts and I need to get facts. So we are, next month, our infantry officer course at Quantico, which is where we train infantry officers. I mean, if you're going to be an infantry officer in the Marine Corps, you will spend 13 weeks at Quantico going through some very, very difficult training. So that's the standard. That's the measure to make an infantry officer in the Marine Corps. So, when asked the question about how are we going to do this or how could we do this, I say, "Well, just keep-- I'll do just exactly what everybody's told me to do." Just keep the standards the same.

And so we have, starting next month, at least two female volunteers. We only bring in 125 female officers a year, so we're not a very big organization. But it has to be volunteers by law. So we have two coming in next month, and maybe some more, and we're going to start that. We'll collect the data and then we'll see where we are on that thing. And I'm glad you made the comment that I'm not the least bit afraid of the data. Actually, I'm not, and then I'll be able to look Congress, Secretary of Defense, Secretary of the Navy in the eye and say, "This is my recommendation" when we're all through.

The last thing is we have a series of physical tests that are going on right now, collecting data, of certain aspects of physical strength for both male and female. And that's in the process of being included. So I'm optimistic and we're going to go through this thing and we're going to do it the right way and set the conditions for success.

MS. WERNER: What have been your guidance to the female participants and their commanders?

GENERAL AMOS: Say it again?

MS. WERNER: What has been your guidance to the female participants and their commanders? What guidance are you offering them?

GENERAL AMOS: Oh, okay. I took, for instance, these units that had been closed that I was telling you about, and I brought all 19 battalion commanders and all 19 sergeants majors in and Sergeant Major Barrett and I probably two months ago, and met with every one of them. Looked them in the eye, just a face to face, and said, "Listen, you

need to do this thing the right way. You need to understand that I don't want anybody in your unit--" you know, predominantly all male. I mean, they've been male, probably, for the history of the Marine Corps. "Just to understand where we are in life today, and I don't want anybody--" and I specifically looked at the two senior leaders, the listed and the officer, commanding officer, and said, "You're responsible for the command climate in that unit. So you set the conditions such that our females can succeed." And that's the guidance I gave them. And I have every indication that-- in fact, I got some early information last week from one of the battalion commanders. He's got five; two officers and three staff NCOs and said, "How's it going?" He said, "Hit it out of the ball park." He said, "They're just doing terrific." So my expectations are pretty high.

MS. WERNER: How do you think young men marine infantry will feel about the female first lieutenant platoon commander in a combat zone?

GENERAL AMOS: I think there's going to be some anxiety. I think I'd be disingenuous if I said it any other way. I think like anything else, they're going to work their way through it. So, let's gather the information, let's figure out where we're going. What's the best course of action for me to recommend it to Secretary of Defense. But I think in anything, we are, I'm proud to say, the world's greatest war fighting organization. I'm a little bit prejudiced. But change doesn't come easy to the United States Marine Corps. But when it does, when it's rooted, it lasts for forever. So I think we'll work our way through that.

MS. WERNER: What is the status of the replacement presidential helicopter since the previous elected replacement, the VH 107 was canceled due to cost overruns?

GENERAL AMOS: I don't have the exact details on it. I know that the program has been-- in fact, there are two pieces of presidential lift that are being into a program now. One is the main lift, which will be the 747. And the second one would be the presidential helicopter. So there's been no selection at all. There is a series of opportunities that are out there. I do know that it's now moved forward and it's a priority. I can't tell you where it is with regards to the budget. I just know it's not on the back burner anymore, it's actually moved forward and we need to find a replacement for the president's helicopter.

MS. WERNER: How has the introduction of the MV-22 Osprey to Okinawa and the opposition it has created affect our relationship with Japan?

GENERAL AMOS: You know, remember I said the last stop on my way back from the long trip in the Pacific was in Tokyo. And I'll tell you, I spent a lot of time in Japan. I've never seen the relationship between the United States and the government of Japan stronger than it is today. Again, that may seem like it's counterintuitive, but I'll tell you what. My sense is when that horrible earthquake followed by the tsunami and the tragedy of the nuclear reactors hit, and our two nations responded immediately and specifically the Marine Corps down in Okinawa, poised and ready and flew out the next morning completely without even having been asked, and brought up those old CH-46

helicopters, the 44 year old helicopters that we're replacing with the Osprey, that, our C130s, hundreds and hundreds of marines, thousands of them at sea on ships, to help the Japanese, I think that did more for the relationship between our two nations than probably anything has in decades.

So, when I was in Tokyo with the senior leadership of the Ministry of Defense, I'll tell you what, I could not have been more warmly received. So I think we'll work our way through the Osprey. The Ospreys are down in Iwakuni, Japan, right now. They're sitting there, I saw them. We flew in there, all 12 of them, they're sitting out there. They're being maintained, but in accordance with the agreement with the Japanese government, we're not flying them. And as you know, the Japanese sent their assessment team to the United States this month, they were briefed on the mishap. They got the investigation, they saw the video and they actually flew in the airplane. So we have been completely forthright with regard to that tragedy that happened in Morocco. And I think the Japanese, my sense is, the government of Japan and the people are very appreciative of our just honesty on the matter. So I think our governments will work their way through this thing and when the time is ready, we'll fly the airplanes.

MS. WERNER: What is the new geography of the Marine Corps going to look like now that Australia and Guam are being built up and Okinawa is starting to draw down?

GENERAL AMOS: Secretary Panetta has said 22,000 west of the international dateline. If you go to the southern part of mainland Japan, Iwakuni, we've got a significant amount of marines there. That's really our-- what we call our tactical aviation, our F18s, harriers and A-6Bs will find their way in there again probably in the next couple months. But that's where the tactical aviation is. And that comprises, probably, about 3,500 marines and sailors. That actually will be built up a little bit with the new agreement. We're going to bring C130s up there from Okinawa. We'll draw the force down on Okinawa, down to about 10,200. I think that's the agreement that our governments have worked to. We'll end up with about 5,000 marines, give or take, probably a couple hundred, it'll be rotational forces on Guam. Predominantly what we call unit deployment, units that flow in, that come from the United States, leave their families back home, come at a very high state of readiness, trained, rotate in and out, train with some of our coalition nations in the Pacific. So we'll have that there.

We'll end up with, down the road when-- and again, the government of Australia is the pacing item in how quickly the buildup is on Australia, but we should end up with about 2,500 marines in Australia. We're going to end up with some more marines in Hawaii. So we'll end up with rotational forces in and around the Pacific which really is good for the strategy. I mean, it sends a very strong signal that the United States is very interested in Asia Pacific.

MS. WERNER: With all the budget cuts and everyone screaming that they have no money, why do the Marine Corps still not allow marines to homestead in a specific region, especially if the marines are doing their deployments?

GENERAL AMOS: Why are they not allowed to, is that--?

WALTER POPPER: Uh-huh?

GENERAL AMOS: You know, it's interesting. That came up about two or three weeks ago. I can't remember how it came up. I've watched this ebb and flow over my 41 years as a marine, I've seen some commandants come in and say, "You're not going to homestead, you're not going to be in a place more than three years maximum." Some have said four. You know, I haven't looked at that yet, but as we look at how we live within our means, that's probably not something that-- or probably is something that I'm going to need to look at. So I don't have an answer for you right now. I'm not against it. In many cases, it kind of makes sense. There are needs for the Marine Corps to kind of move marines around, go to schools. You get promoted, you no longer have a slot in your unit.

But I do think there's probably some benefit to longer tours in certain locations. But not wholesale, but I think we can save some money with it.

MS. WERNER: As a deprived Navy child that only moved twice in 30 years, I appreciate being able to stay in one place. Can you please address the issue of the former Navy SEAL who has written about the bin Laden raid? Are you concerned about the loss of classified data and the precedent that it is setting for former special operation personnel?

GENERAL AMOS: You know, I can't really speculate on that. Honest to goodness, I'm reading the exact same thing you are in the press. So I don't know anything more about it than you do. I know a lot of SEALs. I've been out with the special ops forces in Afghanistan, predominantly. They do great work. I'm proud as can be over what happened in the raid against bin Laden. I kind of bust at my seams just thinking about what an effort that was. I can't imagine how difficult. But I can't speak about right/wrong, should they or shouldn't they? So I'm just going to kind of wait and see what happens with our government as it relates to the publisher and the author.

MS. WERNER: Are you at all concerned that so few of our citizens and political leaders today have military experience?

GENERAL AMOS: You know, I get asked that question-- I do get asked that question a lot. And I remember being a youngster and a commandant's always kept track of precisely how many members of Congress that served in the military and how many were marines. Remember, there's no such thing as a former marine. You're just a marine in a three piece suit, or whatever. But, we did that as if everybody that hadn't served wouldn't love us. And the truth of the matter is as I travel around Congress, both in the Senate and House side, and clearly the majority have not. But I got to tell you what, when I walk into an office, I meet with some of our members of the House and the Senate on both sides of the aisle, you talk about being warmly received, people are interested in

what ground truth is, you know what? I think we're going to be just fine with it. I don't find it a problem. Quite honestly, maybe in some cases it's an advantage because a member that has not been in the military actually is motivated to get ground truth. So I find it's not refreshing, but I'm okay with it.

MS. WERNER: What are you doing to address the alarming suicide rate among our combat veterans?

GENERAL AMOS: Boy. Three years ago-- and by the way, we've got a family member of the marines in here that has been affected by this a couple of years ago. About three years ago, we hit the top of probably the most we'd ever-- in fact, the most we'd ever had since we started tracking, and it's 52. We put a full court press on the leadership and interestingly enough, it was the young corporals and sergeants that came forward and said, "Let us do this." So we spent no shortage of effort and put together interactive videos with real marines using the language that real marines use, which surprise everybody, we would actually put something in print like that. And the marines talked to one another in this. And it was led by noncommissioned officers.

The next year, the suicide rate dropped to, I think, to 39 from 52. Last year, it dropped to 32. This year, we've gone back and now we have the same interactive video. I mean, that's what the youngsters of today, they're electronic. They learn by that. As long as you don't try to throw much garbage at them. And we've got it for young officers and really what I call our baby marines. You know, our brand new ones. So we've got that out there.

But even at that, even with the attention of the leadership, I think all the services this year were feeling it. And I guess what I would tell everybody here, it is through no shortage of great effort and leadership on the part of all the services to try to abate this. But this year, I think, is going to be a tough year for all the services.

MS. WERNER: Three marines received no criminal charges, but non-judicial punishment for urinating on dead Taliban bodies. Why the slap on the wrist?

GENERAL AMOS: Actually, it wasn't a slap on the wrist. Non-judicial punishment in the punitive nature of the military, Uniform Code of Military Justice, which regulates all punishment has a series of articles, Article 134, Conduct Unbecoming an Officer, these kind-- one of the articles is Article 15, that's Non-Judicial Punishment. That's where the commanding general or the commanding officer has the authority to take a young marine that has stepped out of line to any degree and certainly it's in the best judgment of the commander, you can bring that young man or woman in to what we call Article 15 Non-Judicial Punishment. And you can award a fairly significant amount of punishment.

You'll notice yesterday, the press talked about all the different-- the article talked about all the different things that could be awarded as non-judicial punishment, but it didn't say what was awarded yesterday. So I'll tell the audience here, and I'm not really

at liberty to talk about that, but it was not a slap on the wrist. Those three marines, each instance, is a different circumstance. Each instance is a single human being that had different roles to play in this. So I'll tell you that it was not a slap on the wrist.

The other thing I'll tell you, and this is the extent I can talk because there is a remaining group of marines that are also going to be held accountable. And that is forthcoming. So, it wasn't a slap on the wrist. I'm confident in Lieutenant General Mills, who's our commander, commanding general. Used to command all the marines in Afghanistan about a year and a half, two years ago. He knows what he's doing, he understands the theater, he understands combat marines. He's an infantryman by trade, I got complete confidence in him. I think when it's all said and done, everybody will look back and go, "The marines did the right thing."

MS. WERNER: Will the additional soldiers that are yet to be charged, will they be charged with non-criminal or criminal offenses?

GENERAL AMOS: To be honest with you, where I am right now, I can't talk about that. Because anything I say as the commandant becomes presumptive. People then interpret that as, "Oh my gosh, I got to do that because the commandant wants it done." So, I can't really talk about that.

MS. WERNER: Can the non-judicial process be career ending for marines?

GENERAL AMOS: Going to be what?

MS. WERNER: Career ending?

GENERAL AMOS: I don't know. I think certainly in some cases it can be. Each case is different. And where I am right now as a commandant, other than the fact that I spent six months traveling around the Marine Corps talking about the heritage brief, about ethics and combat ethics and who we are and who we're not, on this matter I have purposely stayed away from it. I have to. Otherwise, I'll stick my nose in something that the commandant has no business in. So, I can't tell you whether it's career ending or not.

MS. WERNER: Some have said that the Navy and Marine Corps plans to convert ships and planes to biofuels represents a costly distraction. Is this program really worth it?

GENERAL AMOS: You know, I think it's been in the press and we even talked about it in testimony not too long ago. There was an effort, a very large effort, in the Pacific exercise called RIMPAC which brings in all the Pacific Rim countries and centers around Hawaii, to burn biofuels on a certain number of the ships and a certain number of the airplanes. That was not a Marine Corps initiative. But I'll tell you what. I support the efforts for alternative fuel. We're doing a lot right now in our little small piece of the world in Afghanistan and combat outposts with regards to alternative fuel. Not so much biofuel, but batteries, solar, wind, natural insulation and this kind of thing. So I'm a big

believer in alternative fuels. In our case, alternative energy. But the biofuel, I think, is probably just one step along the way.

MS. WERNER: Is the draw down going to affect the number of new technology aircraft equipment purchases since not as many are required? If not, are the new pieces of equipment going to be put into preservation status to be used as future replacements?

GENERAL AMOS: I think the plan right now, as we know it, with the Budget Control Act of last September, October, which is about \$487 billion levied against the Department of Defense over ten years, there's no question that that's going to have an impact on the amount of things that we're able to buy. Sequestration is, as I said at the very beginning, that's really going to change the amount of things, whether it be aircraft or vehicles, recapitalization of ground vehicles and that kind of thing.

So I don't think that there, at least in my service right now, we've not adjusted the top numbers, what we call the program of record, on what we're planning on buying on EV-22s, JSF. But I think probably over time, we're going to-- especially if sequestration is, we're going to have to take a look at the total numbers.

MS. WERNER: Four months ago, you began a campaign to fight sexual assault in the ranks. Have you seen any progress yet, and what are the biggest challenges and obstacles?

GENERAL AMOS: Whoever asked that question, thank you. I'll tell you, we convened last May what we called an operational planning team. And that may not mean-- let me just explain what that means to you. When we were preparing to cross the border into Iraq, or do operations in Afghanistan, you bring together the best minds that you have, and from a variety of different sources and you do the planning. So it's collaborative, it's cross-military occupational specialties, talent, everything. And that's the way we do business when we're going to do something really, really important and very difficult and challenging.

So, I hand picked 20 marines, officers and staff NCOs. The staff NCOs were all sergeants major except for one, who was a master gunnery sergeant. The officers were all commanding officers led by a general. He'd just come out of Afghanistan, former division commander, a great, great leader in his own right. And I pulled the regimental commanders and all these high priced leaders from across the corps and for two weeks convened the operational planning team to define the problem of sexual assault in the Marine Corps. In my corps, what's the problem? Help us all to understand what ground truth is. And then armed with ground truth, how do we proceed? How do we turn this around?

So they did that. They gave me-- I sat-- in fact, Bonnie sat with me when I took the second debrief from them. And then they went away for two weeks, they came back for another two weeks, and we finished up. They developed a campaign plan to eradicate sexual assault in the Marine Corps. I think it's revolutionary. It's very directive. I think

it's all inclusive. It is being led now by the senior leadership of the Marine Corps. I brought all the generals in. We've only got 85 generals in the Marine Corps. I brought all of them in with the exception of probably half a dozen that were deployed back to Washington the second week in July. And we spent two days going over all the data, all the information from sexual assault OPT. Introduced the campaign plan to them, and then I directed them with their responsibility in this.

So now, we've got the campaign plan, we've got classes going on. And guess who's leading the classes? It's not some young 21 year old corporal, it's the general officers, it's the colonels, it's the sergeant major. So we needed to have buy in from the very top and I think we've got that. So where are we headed? We're headed to zero. Will we get there? I don't know, we're a part of society today and this is probably one of the most challenging things I have to deal with as a service chief. But I'll tell you what. My women are just as-- I've only got 13,700, I think 700 females out of 200,000 total. So again, I've got a small slice of females. But I've looked every single male marine in the eye that I could, while the sergeant major and I were traveling, and I said, "You need to understand that my females are just as important to me as my males are." And I think they believe me. I think right now, they believe me.

So, this is a fight. This is not going to be won this year or not going to be won next year. And I'll tell you what. I'm absolutely bound and determined that we're going to do something about this thing. One of the things that absolutely has to happen right up front is our females have to be confident enough in the leadership, both the officer, commanding officer, sergeant major, their bosses, to come forward when something has happened. They have to be confident enough to come forward and say, "This happened," and not be afraid of some type of recompense, being drug through the facts publicly. They need to be able to come. So that's what we're trying to do. This is a personal thing with me. We intend to turn it around in the Marine Corps. (Applause)

MS. WERNER: Of those 85 generals, how many of them are female?

GENERAL AMOS: I'm sorry, everybody was clapping. What have you got?

MS. WERNER: Of the 85 generals, how many are female?

GENERAL AMOS: Goodness. I don't know, probably four. How many? Four? I think four.

MS. WERNER: Do you think by having more females in senior officer positions will help change the culture of the corps?

GENERAL AMOS: I don't think there's any question about it. I think they absolutely will and I'll tell you, the ones we've got are just-- they're phenomenal. We have a young brigadier general that is down at Parris Island, the head of the recruit depot at Parris Island, the very first female. Imagine that, okay? All the females go, "Uh-huh." All you males in here go, "Holy smokes." We train young recruits at Parris Island. It is

the most storied recruit depot in all of the United States of America. Nobody puts out a tougher product. We got a young female brigadier general selected last year in charge of it. And by the way, by all accounts, she's hitting it out of the ball park. So I think the answer to your question is yes.

MS. WERNER: Have you been able to maintain your recruiting goals without lowering your academic or physical standards?

GENERAL AMOS: Absolutely. In fact, it's almost-- it's been interesting. When we were directed by the President in 2007 to grow the Marine Corps from 186,000 at that point up to 202,000, we set a time frame. We said five years. The commandant at the time was Jim Conway, who's spoken here several years ago. And Commandant Conway said, "I don't want to do it in five years, I want to do it in four." Well, the recruiting command and everybody went, "Whoa, now wait a minute. This is going to be really difficult." In fact, we actually completed it in about just a little over three years.

So you think, "Well, how did you do that? You must have lowered your standards?" Actually, it was just the opposite. The DOD standard, for instance, for numbers of percentage of high school graduates for recruits is 90 percent. So in other words, if you bring in 100 recruits every year, the DOD standard says you have to have 90 percent. We're sitting at 99.8 percent high school graduates. When we started that in 2007, we were sitting at about 96.2, as I recall, was the figure, give or take half a percent. Numbers of waivers for things that-- you know, small felonies, crimes, things of that nature, dropped by probably a factor of at least a half, maybe even more than that.

The kids, and I call them kids because they're my young marines, and it's said affectionately, but they're smarter. Our drop out rates because of their intellect, have dropped by 50 percent both in boot camp and follow on. So, physically, mentally, morally and I think spiritually, they're probably the finest marines we've ever seen in 237 years.

MS. WERNER: Why has the integration of gays into the marines gone so well? And are there still some problems?

GENERAL AMOS: You know, I don't think there is a problem. I don't see it, I don't hear about it. And you know when I was asked, and you talked about my position early on. When I was asked during my confirmation hearings what my recommendation would be, and I made my recommendation. And then I was asked by Chairman Levin, who I think the world of, he said, "But General Amos, if the law changes, what are you going to do?" I said, "Well shoot, Chairman, that's easy. We're the world's greatest-- we'll obey orders. We do that better than anybody does." And we have. And so I'm very proud of how the Marine Corps has-- how this has all gone. I travel through the corps, I'm in combat over there, as you see, as I talked about, often. I was just through the Pacific. I mean, I get in front of the marines often, as often as I can, so also I get away from Washington. And I'll be honest with you, I never hear-- I don't even get a question. I don't hear anything. I'm not seeing anything at all. So I'm very pleased with how it's

turned out and very proud of the marines.

MS. WERNER: What do you see as the biggest challenge facing the Marine Corps today?

GENERAL AMOS: I think the matter of going from a force of ten years of war, and all of us, have been in an environment of what I call an environment of plenty where because of the war, both in Iraq and Afghanistan, we've been able to not only buy what we needed but to buy what we wanted. There's a difference. And so right now, there's an education going on within my service on what's good enough. And I've got young lieutenants, they're actually captains today, and young majors that this is all they know. I mean, if they needed something, they got it. And it's only us old guys that can remember some of the austere times and periods.

So I've gone back and I've actually read what previous commandants have said about these periods of what I call period of austerity and I think we're in a period of austerity right now. We'll come out of it as a nation and we'll come back into a period of prosperity somewhere down the road. But probably the greatest challenge I have right now is just making sure the Marine Corps gets back to being balanced and understands that we are in a period of austerity and we need to be asking ourselves what's good enough? And then armed with what's good enough, then what's left over with regards to modernization. What do we have to absolutely modernize? Joint light tactical vehicle is one of those decisions. We're not going to buy 23,000 of them to replace all our HumVee, we're only going to buy five, five thousand. So that's a matter of our HumVees are good enough. So it's a matter of kind of a culture change, a mental shift. I think that's probably my greatest challenge.

MS. WERNER: During your time as commandant, what do you consider your greatest accomplishment in the Marine Corps?

GENERAL AMOS: Well, it may not be over yet. So, stay tuned. I don't worry one bit, I don't sleep at night-- or go to bed at night worrying about the commandership and combat of the young men and women that are in Afghanistan. I don't worry about the leadership out at the pointy end. And I don't worry about the education. I mean, I think we're doing pretty well. I mean, I feel good about that. I don't wring my hands. Doesn't mean we're not working it, but I don't wring my hands.

I think when it's all said and done, I will probably feel the most proud if I could shepherd the Marine Corps through the period of time that we're in right now. The time that really started about a year ago last-- really, last summer-- and shepherd us through these very challenging fiscal times and still be able to give the United States of America, you, a credible crisis response force and to be able to balance all of that and come out the other end so that when the 36th commandant comes along, then he can look back and say, "You know, those are tough times. But I'm glad we had the leadership of the 35th commandant to shepherd us through." (Applause)

MS. WERNER: We are almost out of time, but before that I have a couple of housekeeping issues. First of all, I want to remind you of the upcoming luncheon speakers. On September 6th, we have Kathleen Turner, actress and Chair of Planned Parenthood's Board of Advocates, will discuss reproductive rights and the state of women's health. On September 7th, Bruce Allen, general manager of the Washington Redskins, will discuss the team's upcoming season. And on September 12th, Tony Perkins, President of the Family Research Council, will discuss the role of values in the November elections.

Second, I'd like to present the General with our traditional Press Club mug and medallion.

GENERAL AMOS: All right.

MS. WERNER: And great for coffee when you're really working hard on solving some task in the Marine Corps.

GENERAL AMOS: Two o'clock in the morning, I'll be drinking coffee out of this.

MS. WERNER: And I do have one last question for you. I understand that there has been some controversy over Chesty, the Marine Corps bulldog, being promoted to sergeant and was wondering if you could explain?

GENERAL AMOS: Well, there was a great article in the *Wall Street Journal* this Sunday. Who read the article about Chesty and Bravo, the Secretary of Defense's - did you laugh? Yeah, we all laughed pretty hard. Harlan Ullman wrote that article and when we had Secretary of Defense over to be our guest of honor, I think it was the third week in May, 16th of May, as I recall, and most of you've been at the parade on Friday night there. So it's a grand occasion and Sylvia's wife was with him and he asked me, he says, "Well, do you mind if I leave Bravo in the home of the commandants during the parade?" And I said, "No, bring Bravo with you." I see Bravo every day in the Pentagon. Or almost every day. I said, "Bring him down center walk with you.

So, down comes the Secretary of Defense and he's got that great looking Irish setter and all of us and Sylvia, and Chesty, our bulldog, our mascot, didn't even blink an eye. Didn't even pay attention, didn't even bark. And at the end of the parade when Bravo walked out on the arm of the Secretary of Defense, Chesty almost came out of his blouse. I mean, he was growling, and I'm a little bit worried because he's a little bit portly. I'm worried he's going to have the big one right there on the sidewalk. And I'm going to have to give him CPR. But he was after Bravo. And so Harlan Ullman wrote this up. I recommend you pull it up on the web, probably the funniest thing you've read in a long time. So thanks for asking.

MS. WERNER: Thank you. How about another round of applause for our speaker? (Applause) I want to thank all of you for coming today. I'd also like to thank

the National Press Club staff including its Journalism Institute and broadcast center for organizing today's event. And finally, here's a reminder. You can find more information about the National Press Club on our website. Also, if you'd like to get a copy of today's program, please visit us at press.org. Thank you, we're adjourned.

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