

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus  
Secretary of the Navy  
The Commandant of the Marine Corps' Birthday Ball  
Saturday, 13 November, 2010

Commandant of the Marine Corps, former commandants, CNO, special guests - particularly wounded warriors.

You know, the whole notion of the Marine Corps to me is wrapped up in one very apocryphal story that was told in a far-off battlefield – there was a single Marine holding the top of a hill as wave after wave of the enemy came after him. And the battle raged all day. And at the end of the day he still held the high ground, and the enemy was preparing to send in more troops. And one of their number came stumbling out of the dust and the smoke and said, go back, go back, it's a trap. There are two of them. That's the United States Marine Corps.

The Marine Corps has evolved a little bit in the 235 years since Samuel Nicholas recruited five volunteer companies to act as sharpshooters in the riggings of Navy ships and part of boarding parties to go onboard British ships. They've gone from the wars of the 19th century and the 20th, through amphibious operations and now to desert and mountain warfare. But that evolution hasn't changed them that much. A Marine and a rifle is still the core of the Corps.

The lessons that Marines have learned in counterinsurgency and irregular warfare from the last 200 years, they are putting into practice today. The great amphibious assaults across the Pacific in World War II keep being repeated at Inchon with the Korean heroes we honor tonight. And in Kandahar, early in the Afghan war, Marines came from the sea – this time in planes – to attack the airfield.

The Marines still come from the sea in places like Haiti and Pakistan to deliver humanitarian relief, disaster assistance. And through all this, the Marines have been an incredible team. The Marine Air-Ground Task Force – there is no more formidable fighting operation. The infantry, the artillery – Marine air, Marine logistics – operating as a complete team with the United States Navy. Two services, one fight.

Throughout the history of this storied Corps, there has been an unbroken line of patriotism, of courage, of heroism. Col. Rothwell (ph), born in 1912, to Lt. DeWalt (ph), born in 1989, represent that unbroken red line that stretches as far as we can see in the future.

I want to talk just for a second about three individual Marines. One is Hector Cafferata of Fox Company in the Korean War. He was on the video, a Medal of Honor winner and one of three from Fox Company that held out in unbelievable conditions against unbelievable odds and emerged victorious.

The second is the Marine that Gen. Amos mentioned, Jason Dunham. Jason Dunham, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines, leading the patrol in Iraq, heard the sound of gunfire and took his unit

toward it, coming across a group of insurgents. They got into a fight, a grenade fell free and Jason Dunham threw himself on the grenade and saved his fellow Marines.

And today, as the commandant said, the newest ship in the United States Navy is DDG 109, the USS Jason Dunham. For the next 35 to 40 years as that ship goes around the world and is seen by hundreds of thousands of people, the name, the actions, the heroism of Jason Dunham will live on.

And finally, on Wednesday, it was my honor to go to New Hampshire to present the Navy Cross to the mother of Michael Ouellete, 3rd Battalion, 8th Marines. He came under fire in Afghanistan, was grievously and mortally wounded, directed the defense, brought in close air support and refused to be evacuated until all his Marines were accounted for. He died during his evacuation.

Those three Marines are three of tens of thousands who have worn the uniform of the United States Marine Corps, that unbroken line from 1775 until today. And when you see those battlefield ribbons on the Marine Corps flag, every single one of those represents a battle or a campaign that Marines fought in, that Marines died in, that Marines were victorious in. It represents that long unbroken line of heroism, of courage, of honor, of character.

Happy birthday, Marines. Semper fi.