

United States Marine Corps

News Release

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Commandant Announces Decision in Afghanistan Attack Investigation

HEADQUARTERS MARINE CORPS, Washington, D.C. – The Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen James F. Amos, has concluded that two high-ranking Marine commanders must be held accountable for the consequences of last year's insurgent attack on Camp Bastion, Afghanistan.

After reviewing the findings of a four-month investigation conducted by U.S. Central Command at the Commandant's request, Gen Amos agreed that MajGen Charles M. Gurganus and MajGen Gregg A. Sturdevant "did not take adequate force protection measures within the range of responses proportionate to the threat."

LtCol Christopher Raible and Sgt Bradley Atwell lost their lives repelling the assault on Sept. 14-15, 2012. The attack also wounded eight personnel and destroyed six aircraft.

In reaching his decision, Gen Amos acknowledged the inherent risks of combat and the challenges faced by both commanders in striking the proper balance between aggressively pursuing the enemy and safeguarding their forces. He also commended them for their superb leadership in executing a complex mission throughout a vast area of southwestern Afghanistan. At the same time, Gen Amos declared command a "sacred responsibility" and concluded that the commanders, in overseeing the camp's force-protection plan, did not exercise the level of judgment expected of General Officers.

"While I am mindful of the degree of difficulty the Marines in Afghanistan faced in accomplishing a demanding combat mission with a rapidly declining force, my duty requires me to remain true to the timeless axioms relating to command responsibility and accountability," Gen Amos wrote in endorsing the investigation's findings. "Responsibility and accountability are the sacred tenets of Commandership."

The Commandant drew distinctions in assigning accountability.

As overall commander of Regional Command Southwest, MajGen Gurganus bore final accountability for the lives and equipment under his charge, Gen Amos concluded. While he worked to accomplish a challenging mission in the Helmand and Nimroz Provinces, MajGen Gurganus made an error in judgment when conducting his risk assessment of the enemy's capabilities and intentions at the Bastion/Leatherneck/Shorabak complex.

Gen Amos found that MajGen Sturdevant, who commanded the aviation arm of the Marine force, did not adequately assess the force protection situation at Bastion Airfield. Though his forces were positioned on the UK Bastion Airfield complex, MajGen Sturdevant remained responsible for assessing vulnerabilities and mitigating them with his own forces by having a layered, integrated, defense-in-depth.

“Marines can never place complete reliance for their own safety in the hands of another force,” Gen Amos wrote.

In light of these conclusions, Gen Amos has recommended to the Secretary of the Navy that MajGen Gurganus’s nomination for promotion to the rank of Lieutenant General, currently on hold at the Senate, be rescinded, and that MajGen Sturdevant receive a Secretary of the Navy Letter of Censure. The Commandant has asked both Generals, in spite of long and distinguished careers, to retire.

The Commandant concluded his endorsement by invoking the Marine Corps’ time-honored ethos.

“In the final analysis, every Marine is a rifleman and every Marine commander must properly position his command and his Marines to both successfully accomplish the mission and defend itself in any clime and place,” Gen Amos wrote. “We owe this duty to the courageous Marines like Lieutenant Colonel Raible and Sergeant Atwell, who so faithfully served our Corps.”

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