

Office of the Commandant of the Marine Corps

**Warrior Hope & Care Center, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina
Ribbon Cutting Ceremony**

**General James F. Amos,
Commandant,
US Marine Corps**

December 7, 2012

GENERAL JAMES AMOS: Thanks, Nick. After those cracks about those 53s flying over, you might want to think about getting those Major insignias back. You'll make a hell of a fine Major. Ladies and gentlemen, it's an honor to be here. Thank you for coming out. I'm looking in the back at all the folks with the purple jerseys on. We have our Marines in the bleachers, our ladies that have put their heart and soul in volunteer work in various organizations, our Navy brothers and sisters that have helped build this. Somewhere out here I'm sure in the audience are the construction companies that actually put their fingerprints on this. So I want to thank everybody. All the Generals, all the notables have been recognized. Their spouses were not, so for all the spouses of our leaders, I want to say thank you. Thank you for being here today as well.

You know, something like this, you look at it now and you go... well, this makes complete sense. This shouldn't be a surprise to anybody that we would build this wonderful facility to take care of our men and women that have been wounded or injured. It's just the right thing to do. But the fact of the matter is we didn't know. So when you're doing war planning and you're actually going to step off on a mission, you actually start at the end state. You say what is success going to look like, and you begin there. It doesn't matter whether you're attacking an objective or whether you're going to step across the border in 2003 and you're going to try to overthrow Saddam Hussein or you're going to try to stabilize the ribbon of civilization that runs through the Helmand River Valley in Afghanistan. You start with the end state, and you say this is what success is going to look like and you define it, and you always work towards that, all the things that you do. Every aspect of your mission you work towards that end state because that's success. That's what your Commanders, that's what your leadership is going to say good, you've done well.

When we began this, we didn't have an end state. We didn't even think about an end state. I mean none of this was out here. We didn't have an end state because we were irresponsible. We just didn't have an end state because we didn't know any better, and it was kind of ignorance on our part. As we look back, we almost say, "Well, shame on us." Well, the fact of the matter is our sights were set pretty low in preparation for crossing the border in 2003, and yet it changed almost overnight. That's how this organization came into being, just out of the heart and soul of people that cared.

We talked two years ago when we cut the ribbon on the barracks and this place was just kind of marked out; it was a concept. But we cut the ribbon there and those of you that were in the audience I told a little bit about how it all began, how this barracks and then the battalions and the regiments began. And I talked about the support we got, but we didn't talk about this part. So let me take you back just a little bit because there's some folks in the audience that -- I want all the young Marines that will be working out of here and working out in here to understand how something begins and germinates just from a thought and an idea.

There are two ladies that are sitting right down here, Shannon Maxwell and Robin Kelleher, and I'm going to ask both ladies if you'd stand up, please. Stand up, come on. I want you to stand right up here next to me. I don't want you to hide down here and -- come on. All right, now turn around so everyone can see you. All right, this is how it all began. Nick, I appreciate you giving me credit, and my mother, if she was still alive, would say preach on preacher. But it didn't begin with me. It began with these two ladies. Tim Maxwell and -- is Tim in here somewhere? Tim's not here. But it began with Tim Maxwell and his recovery,

trying to figure out what happened in his brain. How do you get his life back? And Shannon, with the children, they were struggling through that. And this whole National Intrepid Center of Excellence for TBI and Psychological Health is going to be built over here is revolutionary. What Arnold Fisher started and Ken Fisher started up at Bethesda building a NICoE facility is revolutionary. It's the only place in America -- it's probably the only place in the world that's like that, and it's so successful we're building one down here.

So when this is done, this complex -- and it's not a campus. I mean this is a working complex -- will be like no other place in the world except for the west coast because we'll have replicated it out there as well. But when Shannon was trying to figure out okay, how do I help my husband? And she and Robin, two very, very good friends, both married to Marine Lieutenant Colonels, said, you know, we need more than what the hospital can give. And that's not a condemnation or a pejorative comment on the hospital. It's just they needed more because we didn't know. How do you help somebody recover from a traumatic brain injury? How do you get them to physically rehabilitate? And so the two ladies came to my office along with another great American -- come down here, ladies, follow me down here, come on. Bobby, stand up. That's an order, General. Get up here. Stand right here. Stand right next to Robin.

We met one day and these two ladies had an idea. It was written out on a legal pad. We want to build a facility that can treat our wounded, mentally and psychologically and physically, and we want a place where our families can go. We want a place that can help them. We weren't using words like 'transition.' We didn't even know what that word meant. They just had a vision, and they said we're going to start raising money to build the facility. Now you think about something that's hard. We're going to get volunteers. We're going to get corporations. We're going to do PT runs. We did our first 10k run here. Bob Dickerson ran it, and he won it. He was a stud then. I don't know what the hell's happened to him since then. (Laughter) They had the first 10k here, and they were worried about well, I wonder how much money we'll make, and they made \$4,000, and they went holy smokes, people want to come out and give. And that's where it began, and so they began collecting money and doing things across the country to build this.

They came to Bob and I and they talked about buying a house out in town because they surely would never get it built on the base, surely the government would never allow that to happen. I mean that's mission impossible. So they were going to buy a home out in town, so that the families could stay there, and the Marines could get treated. We didn't know where the doctors and nurses and medical folks were going to come from. We were talking maybe if we build it, they'll come. They continued to raise money, and then all of a sudden we finally woke up, the leadership of the Marine Corps, and said we don't need you to build this. Let us build it, and you take that money that you've gotten from all those faithful donors over the years, they gave it out of good faith and hope, and let's put it in things in this building, and they said yes.

We sat down up at Headquarters Marine Corps with the Installation and Logistics Marines and they kind of drafted this thing out, and we hand-jammed it into Congress, and Congress said good and they approved it. And I'll tell you the next hurdle, and only the Marine Corps could do this as an institution, it now left the hands of these two wonderful ladies and General Dickerson and entered the bowels of Headquarters Marine Corps. (Laughter) And we took ownership of this thing, and we came up with different names of this facility, the Devil Dog Killer Training Facility, the -- you name it. I mean we came up with every name, and they all

sounded pretty cool. I was the Assistant Commandant, I got all the children down in my office and I said you don't understand this thing began with the Warrior Hope and Care Center. That was the name of it. They said sir, where the hell did that come from? And I said wash your mouth out with soap there, lad. It came from two wonderful ladies who have a heart as big as Dallas, and that's the reason why it's named the way it is, and that's how it came today. Congress came forward and said I'm going to take care of it. We're going to do this thing.

But, again, it began with a vision of these two ladies and the support of Major General Bob Dickerson. It would not have happened -- you need to understand that, and the people in the town -- Paul is over here. He was introduced a little bit ago, and Paul knows that. It would not have happened had it not been for Shannon or Robin and for Bob Dickerson. When we go inside here in a minute -- I just raced in for a second -- it's going to knock your socks off. You're going to go in there and go holy smokes. I mean this is something that the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs would like to have. It's that powerful. So that's why we're here. We're here and we finally figured out what the end state was. It took us since 2003 to figure it out. The end state is this: The end state is that complete level of care all the way from the physical to the mental to the spiritual to the family that Nick was talking about. That's the end state, and we're finally there.

So, ladies and gentlemen, this is a tremendous day for the Marine Corps. It's a great day for Jacksonville, for Onslow County, for all the folks in here from this great city. You know, when Bob Dickerson was cleaning out rooms over here for something called -- they didn't even call it the Wounded Warrior Barracks. We didn't even know. We just wanted them to have rooms. And talking to guys like Bill Jurney deployed in Afghanistan and saying Bill, give me your wounded, and then it went from seven rooms to eight to 15 to 10; one floor, two floors and now we've got a barracks. So it's visionaries like Bob Dickerson, Robin and Shannon that we owe this gratitude, not to anybody else, Nick, and the people of this town. This town came forward, guys like Itchy Popkin, backed up his truck out there, put new beds, televisions, sofas, chairs to take care of our wounded, ill and injured.

So, ladies and gentlemen, it's a great day. I want to make sure that you understood who the who were in this thing. It's these three that caused this to happen today. God bless you. I'll see you inside everybody and Semper Fidelis. Ooh-rah. (Applause)

(END)