

Office of the Commandant of the Marine Corps

USS Arlington Commissioning

**General James F. Amos
Commandant
United States Marine Corps**

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GENERAL JAMES F. AMOS: Allison thank you for that very warm welcome. Ladies and gentlemen by the way it's a lot warmer here in the sun. Ladies and gentlemen, family and friends, good afternoon. It's great to be back in Norfolk again. My family and I lived here many, many years ago when I was a young major. Our kids still talk about it with great fondness.

It's an especially glorious day for the United States Marines and our Navy and Marine Corps team. To all of our distinguished guests who have already been recognized, again, welcome and thank you for being here on this crisply beautiful Saturday afternoon.

I continue to be particularly grateful for the many talents of Allison Stiller, our Deputy Assistant Secretary of Navy for ships. She is a brilliant leader of our shipbuilding programs who in light of current fiscal crisis has truly learned how to cut Solomon's baby at precisely the exact spot. Welcome Allison and thank you for all that you've done.

My good friend Admiral Bill Gortney, thanks for your strong leadership in fleet forces command and for your friendship since our days together onboard Roosevelt.

Mr. Irwin Edenzon, President of Ingalls Shipbuilding and the entire Huntington Ingalls team who put their keen intellect, their energy, their sweat equity into building this magnificent warship, thank you Irwin. You've done it again.

Ladies and gentlemen how about a round of applause for all the employees for Ingalls one more time please. (Applause)

Last but certainly not least I want to recognize as Congressman Moran has done, the 9-11 families and the first responders. I recognized several of you when you stood up. I think I even recognize the captain's wife for Flight 77 and her son who is a third class at the Naval Academy. Thank you all for being here today for your sacrifice.

Ladies and gentlemen, again, if you'd join me in a round of applause in recognizing with gratitude those great patriots.

A welcomed addition to the fleet Arlington represents our country's newest generation of amphibious warships. Make no mistake this vessel and the many other San Antonio-class amphibious warships represents America's commitment to security throughout the world. The Arlington and the Marines and Sailors she will carry will add mightily to the quiver of American diplomacy. The USS Arlington, New York and Somerset serve as a reminder to us of all that we lost on 9-11. More importantly they stand as a clear and distinguishable message to those who opposed democracy. This ship and those of her class represent America's resolve.

I'd like to take you back with me nearly 12 years ago to that fateful Tuesday morning that changed our lives forever. Our memories are etched with visions on news cameras reporting live the magnitude of what was taking place in the mid-morning hours of September the 11th when commercial jets hit the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and the fields of Pennsylvania. Not since the attack on our

fleet at Pearl Harbor in 1941, had our nation's true character been so clearly tested.

I remember that crisp fall Tuesday morning well. I was a young one star general who had moved to a newly renovated portion of the Pentagon on the fourth floor in the outside ring overlooking Arlington Cemetery. It was a wonderful view. Like most Americans that morning I had the news running on the TV and I remember sitting spellbound as I watched what was going on in New City. Like most of us it wasn't clear what had caused the first crash but then came the second and we knew instantly that our country was under attack.

I was out of the office at the time when American Airlines Flight 77 slammed into the side of the Pentagon where my office and my staff were located. Terror followed quickly by explosions and smoke and then fire consumed our spaces. My staff miraculously escaped. We never re-entered our offices again. They were completely destroyed.

While a modern generation's day of infamy just as Pearl Harbor was 60 years earlier, I saw the attacks bring out the best of America's character. While it was the worst of times, in many ways it became a defining moment in our lives. The devastating toll of the attacks were eclipsed only by the awe-inspiring stories of heroism that emerged from those days when our nation responded to tragedy with an indomitable spirit, unconditional compassion, fierce national pride and an unshakable resolve. In the words of a great New York patriot and philanthropist, we will never forgive nor will we ever forget.

Heroism and selflessness were commonplace across our great nation that fateful day. There are countless stories of service members and first responders who ran to Ground Zero to help the many victims, to help their fellow Americans. On the day of these attacks and in the weeks and months that followed, we saw the best of America's character all across our country.

Who can forget the flags draped across every bridge and every overpass. The flags attached to every car and truck and the solemn gatherings of remembrances across our great nation. At that moment strangers became neighbors. Partisan politics disappeared as partisans became partners. We set aside our personal differences and we were only defined by a single word. We were Americans.

Most importantly this tragedy reinvigorated the selflessness, the character and the patriotism of our great country. It demonstrated to the world just who we are and what we stand for. The impossible happened. America changed overnight. All of a sudden it wasn't about politics anymore. The tragedies of September the 11th galvanized Americans and gave us a resolve and a commitment to something greater than ourselves. Our nation and our neighbors became important again.

For me 9-11 brought out the true character of America and displayed it for all to see. It demonstrated the very best of what America has to offer. Sergeant Major Barrett and I carried those memories and that sense of America unity with us halfway around the world a year later in back-to-back combat tours. Nine-eleven reminded me that the American spirit and the American character are thriving in countless working individuals in the communities across our great nation.

Today Arlington along with her fellow capital ships, New York and Somerset, will serve as visible reminders to the peoples of this world that the American spirit, that same spirit that defined our great nation over 237 years ago is alive and well in the soul of the American people.

As Marines we pride ourselves in maintaining a high state of readiness and a forward deployed lifestyle. Both allow us to live up to Congress' specific direction...to be the most ready when our nation is the least ready. Forward presence matters. It demonstrates commitment. It confirms to our partners that we are all in it together. Deterrent, engagement and crisis response are not collateral duties to the United States' naval forces. They are the national security imperatives of our United States Navy and Marine Corps team. They are our *raison d'être*.

The unmistakable presence of naval vessels loaded with Marines off the coast of a brewing crisis brings a sense of assurance. The mere presence of Arlington will buy time and decision space for our national leaders. It will build trust among our allies and our partners. In today's very dangerous world, you have to be present to make a difference. Virtual presence is actual absence.

The Navy and Marine Corps are essential elements in the security of our nation's maritime interests. It has always been that way and with this mighty warship in our nation's quiver, it will continue so. This San Antonio-class amphibious warship and others like her are our key to our Navy and Marine Corps sea-based transformation efforts.

Arlington's increased capabilities provide enhanced command and control, flight decks for the MV-22 Osprey and perhaps even the F-35B joint strike fighter. It doubles the well deck size of all of its predecessors. As commandant, I would particularly love to see this replace all of our 40-year-old LSD variants in our amphibious ships.

For all here from Huntington Ingalls Industries and Shipbuilding, know that your Navy and Marine Corps team will put Arlington to good use. As we celebrate this moment, rest assured that this ship will play an important role in keeping our nation and its interest secure for decades to come.

Commander Nelson, all of us on this dais envy your assignment more than you know and wish you great fortune and happy hunting. We know that you, your crew and our nation's sons and daughters will proudly serve as living reminders of the greatness of the United States of America. Never forget this ship's rich heritage and never forget the meaning behind its commission.

Thank you. God bless the Navy and Marine Corps and *Semper Fidelis*.

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