General James F. Amos, USMC

Commandant of the Marine Corps

Remarks at the 69th Annual Iwo Jima Reunion of Honor

(As prepared)

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Gen Amos' Remarks at the 69th Annual Iwo Jima Reunion of Honor

Distinguished representatives of the Japanese government and Self-Defense Forces, Mr. Kishi, Mr. Tong, Mr. O'Connor, fellow Marines, other esteemed guests and family, and most importantly, veterans of the battle for Iwo Jima …it is my deep honor to join you today on this important commemoration.

As we gather together on this small island in the Pacific, we pause to remember the warriors who battled here 69 years ago. We pay tribute to the thousands of Marines and fellow American servicemen that came from the sea that cold, February day, and the thousands of Japanese soldiers that defended their homeland. The battle on these black sands was neither the beginning nor the end. It was neither the longest, nor the costliest battle for either side. It was however, 36 days of epic hell that would change the destiny of our two countries and those that fought here, forever.

Whether you came here today from America or from Japan, we find similarities in the warriors that met on this battlefield 69 years ago. The same virtues of Honor, Discipline and Devotion were embodied by all. Their iconic "Uncommon Valor" became legendary in the history books, and created an ethos that has transcended generations. We only need to look around us today, to walk in the steps of those who fought so valiantly, and to talk with those veterans of Iwo Jima who, to this day, still vividly recall the fateful days and nights in 1945, to fully understand the meaning of valor.

As we remember and commemorate the ninety-three thousand men that carried the fates of their countries onto this island, I think of those shared traits that defined their individual spirit.

Japan's long history in Bushidō instilled the unchanging ideal of martial spirit. It harnessed the physical and military skills of elite warriors, and inspired fearlessness toward the enemy in battle. Lieutenant General Kuribayashi perhaps summed up the honor displayed near the battle's end when he said, "Since the enemy's landing, even the gods would weep at the bravery of the officers and men under my command."[1]

To grasp the pride and selfless sacrifice of America's sons, one must look no further than the citation of any one of the 27 Medals of Honor awarded for actions on Iwo Jima. The indomitable spirit that lived in the soul of each Marine who fought drove him forward and sustained him during the 36 days of brutal combat. Admiral Nimitz perhaps spoke for all of us here today when he reflected on those who fought on Iwo Jima…"Uncommon valor was a common virtue."

The gruesome realty of battle was beyond comprehension. Those that bared witness would liken it to no other scene in the Pacific. The warrior ethos of both nations was tested beyond measure. An English author once wrote, "A true soldier fights not because he hates

[1] Robert S. Burrell, *The Ghosts of Iwo Jima*

what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him."[2] We can all agree that the men that met on these hallowed grounds 69 years ago, fought for something more. Both sides carried with them a devotion to their fellow soldiers, a devotion to their families that sat unknowing so far away, and a devotion to a county that would never forget their sacrifice.

When the United States neared the end of its Civil War and had spilled its own blood between its neighbors for the price of freedom and unity eighty years prior to this battle, President Abraham Lincoln addressed all Americans with a heavy heart. He took the first step toward healing and a prosperous future by proclaiming, "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan--to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations."[3]

Today we stand in veneration of the courage and commitment that defined this holy ground. Let us continue to grow stronger together, not as enemies, but as partners. We will continue to share the legacy of Iwo To's epic battle so that we may teach our young ones the meaning and value of Honor, Discipline and Devotion. We will never forget! Thank you, and Semper Fidelis.

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[2] G.K. Chesterton, Untitled Essay, *Illustrated London News*, 14 January 1911.
[3] Abraham Lincoln, 2nd Inaugural Address, March 4, 1865.