

## **LIEUTENANT GENERAL JAMES N. MATTIS**



Lieutenant General James N. Mattis is currently serving as the Commanding General, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Quantico, Virginia and Deputy Commandant for Combat Development, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps.

As a lieutenant, he served as a rifle and weapons platoon commander in the 3d Marine Division. As a captain, he commanded a rifle company and a weapons company in the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Brigade. As a major, he commanded RS Portland. As a lieutenant colonel, he commanded 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, one of Task Force Ripper's assault battalions in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. As a colonel, he commanded 7<sup>th</sup> Marines (Reinforced). As a brigadier general, he commanded 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Expeditionary Brigade and then Task Force 58, during Operation Enduring Freedom in southern Afghanistan.

As a major general, he commanded 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division during the initial attack and subsequent stability operations in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

He is a graduate of the Amphibious Warfare School, Marine Corps Command and Staff College, and the National War College.

## **ETHICAL CHALLENGES IN CONTEMPORARY CONFLICT: THE AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ CASES**

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Welcome, Dr. Albert C. Pierce, Director, Center for the Study of  
Professional Military Ethics

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Introduction, Travis S. Amerine,  
Brigade Commander of Midshipmen, USNA

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Lecture by Lieutenant General James N. Mattis

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Questions and Answers

This evening was supported through the generosity of  
William C. Stutt, USNA Class of 1949.

*This is an edited, abridged version of the original lecture transcript.*

## WELCOME

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**Dr. Pierce**

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I'm Al Pierce, the director of the Ethics Center, and I want to welcome you to the tenth ethics lecture in a series that we organize. The inaugural lecture was in the spring of 1999, and what we tried to do was bring distinguished theorists and practitioners both to talk with you and to share with you their insights, their experiences, and their wisdom about ethical challenges facing the military today.

In 2001, there was a major milestone in the history of this program, when Bill and Caroline Stutt—Bill is a graduate of the Naval Academy, Class of '49—made a very generous contribution to the Leaders to Serve the Nation Campaign, endowing one major ethics lecture every year. Bill Stutt is with us this evening, and Bill—I would ask you to stand up—and I ask everyone to join me in thanking Bill for his generosity.

(Applause.)

**Dr. Pierce**

In 2002, the Stutt lecture was given by Michael Walzer, whose book *Just and Unjust Wars* is the most widely used text in the field. The 2003 Stutt lecture was given by Chief Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson, one of the three heroes who stopped the My Lai massacre in Vietnam. Tonight's speaker follows in that proud tradition.

Generally, these lectures are mandatory only for those midshipmen then enrolled in NE203, the core ethics course. But the superintendent decided that this speaker and this message are so timely and so central to your chosen profession that he wanted the entire brigade to be here this evening. I predict that, as you go back to Bancroft Hall tonight, every one of you will be very glad you were here.

It's a particular pleasure to share the stage, even briefly, with Lieutenant General Jim Mattis, because 10 years ago, Lieutenant Colonel Jim Mattis and I were shipmates at the National War

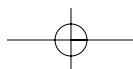
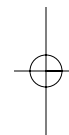
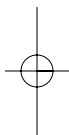
College. Before I turn the podium over to the brigade commander, there's one story that Admiral Rempt asked me to tell about General Mattis.

A couple of months ago, when I told General Krulak, the former Commandant of the Marine Corps, now the chair of the Naval Academy Board of Visitors, that we were having General Mattis speak this evening, he said, "Let me tell you a Jim Mattis story."

General Krulak said, when he was Commandant of the Marine Corps, every year, starting about a week before Christmas, he and his wife would bake hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of Christmas cookies. They would package them in small bundles. Then on Christmas day, he would load his vehicle. At about 4 a.m., General Krulak would drive himself to every Marine guard post in the Washington-Annapolis-Baltimore area and deliver a small package of Christmas cookies to whatever Marines were pulling guard duty that day. He said that one year, he had gone down to Quantico as one of his stops to deliver Christmas cookies to the Marines on guard duty. He went to the command center and gave a package to the lance corporal who was on duty. He asked, "Who's the officer of the day?" The lance corporal said, "Sir, it's Brigadier General Mattis." And General Krulak said, "No, no, no. I know who General Mattis is. I mean, who's the officer of the day today, Christmas day?" The lance corporal, feeling a little anxious, said, "Sir, it is Brigadier General Mattis."

General Krulak said that, about that time, he spotted in the back room a cot, or a daybed. He said, "No, Lance Corporal. Who slept in that bed last night?" The lance corporal said, "Sir, it was Brigadier General Mattis." About that time, General Krulak said that General Mattis came in, in a duty uniform with a sword, and General Krulak said, "Jim, what are you doing here on Christmas day? Why do you have duty?" General Mattis told him that the young officer who was scheduled to have duty on Christmas day had a family, and General Mattis decided it was better for the young officer to spend Christmas Day with his family, and so he chose to have duty on Christmas Day. General Krulak said, "That's the kind of officer that Jim Mattis is."

I'd ask you to keep that story in mind as you listen to him and his message this evening. I'll ask the brigade commander to come forward now.



## INTRODUCTION

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### ***Midshipman First Class Amerine***

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my honor tonight to introduce to you a soldier who in every way embodies the ethical dimension of our chosen profession of arms, a combat-seasoned leader who has earned numerous personal decorations, including the Bronze Star with Combat V. He is a leader who has faced the tough ethical decisions that all of us, as future military officers, will someday face. He has inspired his men and women, in the midst of intense combat, to engage the brain before the weapon and, above all else, to demonstrate chivalry, decency, and soldierly compassion for both friend and foe.

Tonight, it is my pleasure to introduce Lieutenant General Mattis.

## LECTURE

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### ***Lieutenant General Mattis***

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, Admiral Rempt, and Admiral Haskins for inviting me here tonight. I'll tell you honestly, young folks, you look magnificent. You ought to be in the movies, you look so good. I realize you have had a long day. I know you've got a lot of things left to do tonight, and I'll try to talk to you in a way that perhaps you get a nugget or two of information that you might be able to use. I'll talk to you for a few minutes, and then we'll throw it open to questions, and whatever questions you have, I will answer to the best of my ability.

You are going to have a challenge when you leave here because, my fine young men and women, this country is at war, as alien as that may seem as you while away your leisurely days here on the banks of the Severn. I know you have so much time left to your own discretion that you probably don't realize that there is a big Navy out there, a big Marine Corps waiting for you. But the fact is, for some of you who will be graduating very, very soon—sooner than you can imagine—you will be going in harm's way. It's important that, for a few minutes here tonight, we close the gap that always exists between a senior flag officer in the naval service and midshipmen, and we try to understand some things.

First of all, while we are separated by many years and the rank and the hierarchy of the military, you and I have more in common than we have that separates us. I say this because, whether you have 30 years in the naval service or more (like your Admiral and I) or you have three months, what we are really looking for, if we are to keep this great big experiment called America alive—and that's all it is, an experiment—we need cocky, macho, unselfish, and morally very straight young men and women to lead our forces against the enemy.

Three years ago this month, a vice admiral leaned across the table to me, and he said, "You know what's going to happen in Afghanistan. The enemy cannot hold Mazar-e Sharif, and they will fall back through Kabul, and they will reinforce Kandahar. One of these times, one of our bombs is going to go astray and hit

a hospital or something, and then we're going to have to back off." He said, "Can you get Marines from the Pacific Fleet and the Mediterranean fleet together, land in southern Afghanistan, and raise hell?" I said, "Yes, I can do that," and then I walked out, scratching my head, trying to figure out how I was going to do it. As I walked out the door, I saw an old shipmate from Coronado, a SEAL, the commodore of the SEALs, and I walked up to him and said, "What are you doing in Bahrain?" He said, "Well, I'm trying to get into the war, and right now, I've got a few problems." So two shipmates shook hands on a hot night in Bahrain, and we went off to fight the war together.

But what was interesting was I never received another order from Admiral Moore other than to go into southern Afghanistan, and that's the way it will come to you. It's not like [you will have] three months to get ready. Now, it's for real. It's just going to come with an admiral you have never met before who says, "I'm going to give you six ships and 10,000 sailors and Marines. Go do it."

But he did not have to ask me or tell me or caution me to keep our country's honor clean. It was something that he and I understood from our years of service. It started when we were 18 years old, and he and I had never shaken hands before in our lives, and yet right there was an unspoken agreement between the two of us that he had just told me to go in and slaughter as many of the enemy as I could find. Together with our SEAL comrades in arms, we set out to do that. Every innocent person in Afghanistan learned they had nothing to fear from us, and what a difference that was.

Now, we did not realize that that enemy would collapse so easily, but you know, if you and I had some time to think about it, we probably would have figured it out, and I'll tell you why. Anybody [the Taliban] who spent the last five years slapping women around for not wearing veils doesn't have a lot of manhood left in him, you know what I mean? When you got sailors and Marines in close to these guys who had sacrificed their honor, who had sacrificed their manhood, when [we] got in close, the ferocity of our sailors and Marines was more than sufficient to kill the enemy.



I would like to come here tonight and talk in more erudite terms about conflict and conflict resolution. Your job, my fine young men and women, is to find the enemy that wants to end this experiment and kill every one of them until they're so sick of the killing that they leave us and our freedoms intact. You all understand where I'm coming from?

(Applause.)

**Lieutenant General Mattis**

I say that with a certain degree of sadness. The first time you take another human being's life is not an insignificant moment in your life, but this country [needs] cocky young men and women like you, willing to sacrifice your easy college years, willing to commit yourself to this program here. We need every one of you. If we can't find people like you, I assure you this enemy will take everything we hold dear. If this enemy wins, I can tell you—having been up very close and very personal with them—that not one of our ladies will ever hold a job or go to school again or drive a car. Every one of you will pray a certain way every day. When they say they want to come to America and kill all the Jews who are here, they mean every word they say. I have been around them long enough that I strongly recommend that you do not patronize them. Do not think we're going to sit down over a barbecue in the backyard and settle things.

I had a POW camp I was required to open in Kandahar, Afghanistan, and I used to bring everybody through, show them what we were doing. I didn't worry about it one bit. I knew I was doing the right thing, so I had no worries about what was going on in my POW camp. I brought the *Imam* of the Kandahar Blue Mosque in, and there the prophet's shroud is kept, one of the most holy relics of the Islamic religion. These men in these little cages used to look at me each day with hatred, and the ones who could speak English would talk about coming to America and raping all our wives and daughters, this sort of thing. They saw this guy come through, and he is about 6'5", so at first, I looked at him real close. I thought, "Hey, this is the right size for Osama Bin Laden. Maybe I'll get him." But [the *Imam*] was a very kind man, a very compassionate man. He

came through, and he would stop, and he would look in each of the prisoner cages at the dozen or so folks in there, and he went through the entire camp. [We] had over 300 prisoners, and when he got done, he looked at me, and he said, "You know, General, these are lost souls. They will never be recovered." Now, here is a kind, compassionate, wonderful man, commenting and saying something that you and I as Americans, we don't like to hear. Nothing is ever hopeless. We can always find a way to get together.

The reason I come to you with a rather sobering message tonight is I don't believe there is any reconciliation with the hard core of this enemy. None whatsoever. Your job is to serve as the guardians now, and if your job is not well done, as Plato put it many, many years ago, if you cannot hold as a windbreak against what is coming against this country, [then] we are going to be in grave trouble.

I am certain, after having dealt with these people and talked with them, that had they had a nuclear weapon, we would not have 3,000 dead in New York City on 9/11. We would have had 300,000. It is a merciless enemy, and it is up to you to stop them as far from our shores as you can.

It's going to be tough. It's easy to lead when things are going well. It's easy to lead on a nice night in a warm auditorium. It's easy to lead when things are going well, but what do you do when you are ordered into Fallujah before you are ready to go, because you're still turning over with the 82<sup>d</sup> Airborne Division? And once in the city, what do you do when you are ordered to halt with your Marines and sailors literally 30 feet from the enemy, and then ordered to fall back, and you try to keep the heart and mind and the spirits of your young troops high and keep them together? The first thing, my fine young men and women, you must make certain that your troops know where you are coming from and what you stand for and, more importantly, what you will not tolerate.

In Rome, on a tombstone for a dictator are the words "No better friend, no worse enemy." That is the bottom line.

If they were friends, if they were neutrals, if they were innocents, we would never cross the line. We would be the best friend they ever had. However, if you screw with us, we're going to kill you. It's that simple, and that clear dividing line kept us on the moral high ground. It kept us there, and I can give you a story to illustrate what I mean.

When we went into Iraq, one of our Navy corpsmen held this little girl. There was blood on her right arm from where one of her parents was unfortunately killed, and the corpsman was taking care of her. This is straight out of a physician's oath, by the way: first, do no harm. If, in order to kill an enemy, you had to hit somebody innocent, don't take the shot. Wait another day. Don't create more enemies than you take out by some immoral act.

Now, let me tell you how it played out. This has always stayed with me, what happened with a French or Spanish journalist. I'm not certain [which]—she had an accent. She drove down to see me in Babylon, at my headquarters in August, a little over a year ago. She asked to see me, and to tell you the truth, I don't like talking to journalists, because I always get in trouble.

One thing: let me tell you something never to say as an officer. Don't ever say you own a piece of Afghanistan, okay? We went in, and we grabbed a piece of Afghanistan, and a journalist asked me what that meant. I said, "Well, it kind of means we own it. We're going to give it back to the Afghan people." When the word came out, they left the last part off: [it was just] I owned a piece of Afghanistan. Well, I don't have to initiate a salute with many people, but I think every one of them lined up to tell me that I would never make it to the top of your class intellectually, and [they] had other comments about my capabilities. So you've got to be a little careful about what you say to the press.

So I reluctantly went out to the front gate and listened to this lady, and she didn't ask me any questions. She said, "I just want to tell you something. I don't like America, and I especially don't like your Marines. We're up in Baghdad, and I had heard about this 'no better friend, no worse enemy.'" So she said, "I'll tell you right up front, I came down to write a story how you were just a

bunch of Rambos.” Her word, a bunch of Rambos. And she said, “We got down to a town called Mamadia, and we pulled in. We saw Marines jumping off vehicles and running down the street. We got out. We were watching, and very close to us was a young Marine, down on one knee, watching an alley. There was shouting and shooting down one street, and we stayed back from that. By the way, I eventually talked to this young man, and he was 19 years old and an infantryman.”

All of a sudden, she looks over and plastered up against the wall is a big, old, fat lady in a *burqa*—a gown and veil—holding the hand of a little boy about knee high to a duck. All this shooting is going on, and they’re both obviously very scared. The Marine waved at the little kid, who didn’t wave back, and then there was more shooting. A guy came running down the alley, and she said that he turned to shoot back down the alley. As he got down to shoot, the Marine shot him, hit him once in the shoulder, once in the head, dropping him right there not 15 feet away.

She said the Marine kept watching. Some people came running up, and an NCO [Noncommissioned Officer] kicked the rifle away and said “Good shooting.” The young lance corporal said, “There’s two people on top of that house across the street. I think they’re children, but I don’t know.” And the NCO said, “Got it,” and took off with his men to go over there. Once they’re up on top, she said that the Marine edged over to the little kid and handed him a piece of candy that he dug out of his pocket. And kids have got something in them all around the world: they all know what candy is. [The little boy] unwrapped it and stuck it in his mouth, and now he waved to the Marine, who went back on his knee watching over his buddies.

A little while later, the Marine motioned to the lady that she could move on, and she moved off. The correspondent told me, that as far as she could see that kid walking, he would turn around to wave at the Marine, who had just done the worst thing you could ever do in front of a child, and no matter what that little kid is ever told, he is going to remember the Marine who gave him that piece of candy and waved. Now, think what that says about a 19-year-old who could discriminate. He is not in any

way reluctant to shoot somebody [who deserves it]. There is always some jerk in the world, my fine young folks, who needs to be shot. Just the way it is.

(Applause.)

**Lieutenant General Mattis**

And that's your job, and the only thing I used to get mad at them for, was if they left them lying in the street. I would say, "At least you could move them out of the street." They would say, "No, we like to leave them there as a reminder to their buddies."

But that Marine didn't suddenly have any kind of post-traumatic stress syndrome. He understood some guy needed to be shot. He didn't suddenly start hating all Iraqis. The little kid was innocent. The old lady was innocent. This [journalist] said, "You know, to see this happening in front of me, I thought right then, 'I am going to go find whoever is in charge of these Marines.'"

Now, I'll tell you, I get a lot of credit these days for things I never did, and that's an example, because I am not sure all the time that I have been as good as that lance corporal. I'll tell you that right up front. Your moral crisis will come to you, not when you're rested, not after a good day of athletics out on the field. You are going to have the flu, be dead-tired, and surprised when your moral crisis comes.

In my case, a couple years before I met Dr. Pierce, I came this close to murdering two people—this close. I had not slept for three days. I had wandered off as my Marines were cleaning over a battlefield we had just taken over, knocked out an artillery unit [editor's note: This incident occurred in the 1991 Gulf War], and I noticed a Marine down on all fours vomiting and two other Marines digging with their e-tools. I walked over, and a young Marine was puking his guts out. There was a lady in pieces, nude, chopped into pieces, and they were trying to bury her. And my point to you is, at that moment, I felt so murderous about what I was seeing, I could hardly see straight.

I grabbed an e-tool, helped them bury the poor girl, the innocent lady, and then got them on their way. I went over, and I sat down on the edge of a trench line where there is a ready bunker. Out of the ready bunker probably 10 minutes after I sat down, just cooling it, came two officers wearing their epaulets, obviously from that battery position. Neither one had a weapon on them, but I could have shot them easily. My Marines probably would have been quite impressed that their battalion commander had shot a couple people, and for a moment, I thought, "That girl was murdered and chopped into pieces in their battery position. I am going to kill them," and I came this close to doing it. The only thing that stopped me was I don't like living life with any regrets, and somehow my training kicked in, and they right away threw their hands up when they saw me, and so I took them prisoner. I came that close to doing it.

So whether you are ordered to do things with your 25,000-man division going into Fallujah as a major general or as a lieutenant colonel or as a lance corporal, I promise you the day will come when you are put into that situation, and it's best you go through the mental gyrations now. Know what you are going to do and, more importantly, what you are not going to do so that you never end up in a situation where you regret what you have done, because it's very hard to live with yourself for what you have done if you don't stick with your moral code. By the way, it turns out later these two officers had fled into that battery position ahead of the Marines. They had nothing to do with this girl's death. So you have got to think your way through these sorts of things, my fine young folks, because at the time you actually get there, you had better have the process in place to keep yourself morally strong. If you don't, it will probably be too late.

One other thing that I would tell you is that we expect you to come out of here at the top of your game. Now, physically, you know what that means. We want you in good shape. You know how to do it. Just get on with it, put in the miles, put in the time in the weight room, that sort of thing. Mentally, you are going through a very rigorous program. We are very happy with what we get out of the Academy, and intellectually, we are not in the least bit concerned. But your spiritual path is much more of your

own choosing. Just make real sure that you don't dismiss this as something of idle interest or not that important, because with the physical and the mental, you can aspire and kick ass. You can sometimes put things on the spiritual level behind you, and the problem is then that we endanger our very country.

I'll give you an example. I was the senior U.S. negotiator when I was ordered to pull out of Fallujah and start negotiations. I was negotiating with people I'd rather have been shooting, to put it bluntly, because they were the enemy. I was reminded each morning there about this Abu Ghraib prison scandal, where we had some people who—some toy soldiers, who brought disgrace on the U.S. Army and the U.S. armed forces. They did not represent the U.S. military, but because of today's media focus, the story was constantly in the papers. Every day, I was confronted with this by their negotiators. Now, believe me, when you come out as a Navy or Marine officer, you have plenty of toughness to handle some punk who tries that. In the negotiations, we would go right back after them. But it shows the damage that can be done to our country if one small unit, one NCO or petty officer, incorrectly guided by his coach, by his junior officer, is allowed to run rampant.

De Tocqueville, a Frenchman who wandered around America in the 1830s, wrote a very telling story about our country. In there, he said that America is going to become a great country, because America is a good country, and if America ever ceases to be good, she will cease to be great.

There is no one harsher about what those soldiers did in Abu Ghraib than your fellow sailors, Marines, and soldiers on the ground in Iraq right now. No one. There was no call for it. It was a bunch of punks is all it was, but a lack of moral fortitude cost our country greatly.

If you read what happened to the French army in Algeria, the 10<sup>th</sup> Parachute Division breaks the back of the terrorists there, but does so in a way that the government falls, and France is held up to scorn and ridicule around the world. You must make certain that you never do something that brings that sort of scorn or

ridicule on our own country. That does not in any way inhibit you from going after the enemy.

I remember talking to my Marines as they were getting ready to go into a town called Tikrit, which was Saddam's hometown. I said, "You guys ready to go?" They said, "Oh, yeah, no sweat, General. You go on, go back to sleep, whatever you generals do. We'll take care of it." I said, "Okay," and they said, "We've got this all taken care of." I said, "Okay. Why are you so confident?" They said, "Oh, this is going to be a perfect war, General, because we just heard that the officers are up there talking to them about surrendering. They didn't want to surrender. They said they wanted to die, so it is going to be a perfect war. They want to die. We want to kill them. Let's have at it. It will be a good fight." I thought, "Hey, that's a good way to look at it, you know." So they were on their way, and they're going to go nail them. That was the bottom line.

There are units to me as a general, as I look across my division, where I have got a platoon that is worth a company. Now why is one lieutenant so different that his platoon of 40 Marines and sailors is worth 160 to me? What happened there? I looked across the division and saw one company that could lose its beloved company commander, Captain Rich Gannon—some of you may know who I am talking about—could lose him in the middle of a fight as he goes down swinging, trying to save a corporal's life, and both of them are machine-gunned. How could that company eventually lose over 65 men killed and wounded and still continue to fight as if they were undismayed by it? A company losing 65 men out of 160. How could they do that?

It comes down to the social energy of the lieutenants who are in that company. That's what it comes down to, the social energy that they infused in that company, and let me tell you what happened. Let me tell you how Rich Gannon started his way home after he was killed. That night, the company that had been knocked back fought their way back in, collected up what prisoners they had, and loaded them up in a vehicle with their hands tied. Since they couldn't afford to send many guards, there was one Marine in the back of the truck, a lance corporal.



Remember, this was a company commander who, when I went down to see them, I would say, "How are you guys doing?" They would say, "Oh, great, sir. We have the best company commander in the division." And one of these lance corporals on a dark night now gets in the back of that Humvee with three guys with their hands tied and the dead company commander lying on the floor of the vehicle. When that vehicle showed up at the battalion command post, there were still three live prisoners. Now that's a Marine who understands that when it's time to kill, I can kill them, and when it's time not to kill, I don't kill them. Had the officers not set that tone properly, you can end up with a tragedy.

And I'll tell you, I'll define a tragedy in very stark terms for you. A tragedy is when one of your beloved young sailors or Marines, who will literally die to carry out your orders, does something, and now you have to court martial him. That is the last thing you ever want to do, because you failed to talk your people through it, to [illustrate for] them what it's going to be like. If you do it right, if you have high expectations, if you can win the affection of your young sailors or Marines, they will win all the battles for you. You will never win one. They will win them for you, but they will not win them for someone who is not morally strong. And the reason is, when the grim reaper comes after you, any little chink in your armor starts working against you. Everything gets in there, and that fatal flaw will cut you down.

And I know it is hard for you to believe. You are young. You still think that, at the right time, you will make the right call, even if you kind of wander on the way there. It's not like that. Either you lead a disciplined life where you are young men and women of character now, or when you get into a situation that's even tougher, when you have the flu, and you have been three days without sleep, when you have lost some of your beloved young folks, then things can really go wrong for you. So take the time now, think about it, study it, enjoy yourself, but talk about it, and enjoy yourself. You can enjoy this.

You are very, very privileged to [be going] where you are going to go. Now why would I say, as I look out over here, that you are

privileged if you are going to go into a fight? The reason is something that Admiral Stockdale, a great Navy leader from the Hanoi Hilton days, said, because he learned things about himself that no one else gets the privilege of learning if they don't serve wearing those uniforms you wear.

Why is it such an honor for me to be here tonight? There are a lot of other places I could be. There is only one other place I would rather be. You know where that is, right? Fallujah. Tonight, Fallujah, exactly the same place every one of you would prefer to be, because that's what we're made of. That's what you're made of. That's what I'm made of, and that's the commitment that links us. That's why it means nothing to you or me at times what rank we [are]. It means absolutely nothing.

I have absolute respect for you, for the commitment you are making, but that commitment is not simply raising your hand or putting on a camouflage uniform. It has got to go deeper than that. It has got to go so deep that your fighting faith can hold when everything in you tells you that you are really not all that eager to do what you are being told to do. You have got to do it, because when the word comes, and you have got to go, you stick together, okay?

You cannot allow any of your people to avoid the brutal facts. If they start living in a dream world, it's going to be bad. Now, let me tell you what it was like for the 1<sup>st</sup> Division. We finally came out of Iraq. We had lost many, many young men. In October, we got home, and in November, with our ships still at sea bringing our gear, I got word we were going back in. If you ever get into a position where what you are being asked to do or ordered to do is so tough that you don't think you can do it and fight with a happy heart, then what is going to happen is you will sell your troops short. So you are in *totos porkus* when you come out of here. That's Latin for whole hog, okay? Didn't realize Marines knew Latin, did you? Okay. That's about as high as my intellectual pretensions can take me.

[editor's note: Lieutenant General Mattis showed a slide here.]

Now, there is what men look like going into a fight with a happy heart. Those young men are going into Fallujah back in April, and they could not be happier. Now, the reason they are that way is they are well trained, they are well led, and they have leaders above them whose honor is such that they are not going to let them down. So they no longer have any concerns whatsoever about what is going on in front. Look at them. Can you believe those guys are going into a fight within a few minutes? Literally within a few minutes, in this case.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, one of the most articulate associate justices that our Supreme Court has ever had, could not articulate war. Yet he had been an infantry officer in the Civil War, and he would say to his fellow veterans, "You and I have shared the incommunicable experience of war." My fine young midshipmen, I cannot tell you in all sorts of detail what you are going to go into, but I can assure you of this. If you have the strong character that you can develop through study, through time on the athletic field, at times by going out, once you are over 21, and having a good toot with your buddies—Admiral, I won't glamorize alcohol any further. But if you can enjoy the challenges that are coming your way, if you can make certain that you know, no matter what comes your way in an uncertain world, you are sure of yourself and your moral standards, then bring it on.

You know, there is nothing better, my fine young folks, than getting shot at and missed. It's really great. It's more fun than you can imagine. You know, it really feels good. So don't let the grimness of this world get you down. Okay, it's not a perfect world, but America is worth fighting for on its worst day. So if you have got the guts to step across that line, as each of you have, then just go out and enjoy the brawl. Just have a damn good time. Train your men well. Go beat the crap out of people who deserve it, and when they throw down their gun, then you have won. Don't apologize to anybody for it, because your moral standards are so high, and you will have been places that maybe Oliver Wendell Holmes cannot define, and maybe I cannot

discuss. Maybe you won't be able to discuss it very well either, but the bottom line is you will have gone there and come back with your honor intact, and this experiment will move on one more generation, thanks to you.

Admiral Moore told me something when Task Force 58 came out of Afghanistan before I was moved over to command the 1st Division for the attack into Iraq. He said, "You know, 30 years from now, this country is going to look back and thank all the people who are 18 to 25 right now for what they did for it, because then they will realize just how close we came to losing it."

We're not going to lose so long as we have you. I don't lose any sleep at night over the potential for failure. I cannot even spell the word. Right now, you do not know how much you embolden the rest of us to see that we have young folks like you.

I mean, I have led them for a while. I have had the honor of associating with them. Now I have been gone for most of the last three years fighting. Think where you have been the last three years, and I'll tell you, there is no enemy that can stand up to you right now. None whatsoever. Between your training and your spiritual determination, there is nobody who can bring any more initiative and aggressiveness. Those are the two qualities we want from you and your young men and women: initiative and aggressiveness. So long as we have them, then we are going to do great.

Now I'm not going to do a whole lot of learning myself here tonight, and you're going to fall asleep after a long day if we don't turn it around now, and you start asking me questions. So we'll see who has the initiative and the aggressiveness to ask me the first question, and I'll tell you that if you don't ask me questions, we are just going to sit here, and it's going to make a long night. So you might as well get the pain over with quickly. So start asking some questions, one of you intellectuals.

Going to let me off that easy?

Okay, go ahead. There we go.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### **Question**

Good evening, General. Thank you for coming, sir. Earlier, you mentioned that if America ceases to be good, then we will cease to be great, and that losing the moral fortitude will cause us to lose the conflict altogether. However, in the case of Army Lieutenant Colonel Allen West, no one was killed, and he saved lives by using illegal interrogation methods. Is this an instance where there is a lack of moral fortitude, or should Colonel West be exonerated from court martial, because he saved lives without actually killing anyone?

### **Lieutenant General Mattis**

Again, I have been gone for three years. I haven't seen the news. He was the one who fired a pistol, I think, next to the head of a man he was interrogating? Is that correct?

### **Questioner**

Yes, sir.

### **Lieutenant General Mattis**

Ladies and gentlemen, the best response I can give to that is there are always going to be 100 reasons why you want to violate the rules. There are always 100 reasons to violate them. There's only one reason really to stick with them, and that is because you were told to. This is the naval service. This is the varsity. This isn't the junior varsity. This is the naval service, all right?

(Applause.)

### **Lieutenant General Mattis**

Colonel West may have had the best of intentions, but remember each of you is a role model as you go in front of your platoons and your divisions and departments. I wonder what he would have done if one of his men was doing the same thing? And by the way, [what happens] if that man, instead of firing the pistol next to the guy, decided to fire it into the ground right next to him or decided to slap him with the pistol? Once you start down that slope, once you start negotiating with the devil, as I call it, then you are going to have trouble.

Now, don't get me wrong. I am not talking about being nice to people. But once that weapon is on the ground, once it is somebody who is innocent, once it is somebody who has no way to fight back anymore, than you cannot do that. You cannot cross that line.

Now, if you were to tell me that his unit was going to get overrun if he hadn't done this, that they were in *extremis*, surrounded, and he could only defend from two sides, and he had to know which two to defend because he didn't have enough [people, then] you could create a situation where you might be able to say, "Well, what do you do now, General?" My fine young men and women, that's why we put you through this school, and you are going to have to figure it out.

But I would warn you that there are always some people who are ready to find the excuse for why they have to violate the rule. There is always someone who decides that's a better way to go. How long would we have the tradition of the U.S. Navy if that's in fact what John Paul Jones did? He wasn't some mythical person. He had every doubt, every concern, every personal consideration that you have. What if he decided, "Hey, you know, the ship is sinking. People are laying here dead. Let me just stop the carnage." I could make a strong argument for it, right? Once you start down that path that that colonel did, John Paul Jones could have gone down that path too. Once you start rationalizing, then I'm afraid what you're doing is you're following the devil.

Now, don't get me wrong. There are some things that are not moral dilemmas. Let me tell you why I was standing watch on Christmas Day. I had had a hell of a good toot with a friend of mine. I had a hangover. I thought I would go down and take care of the lieutenant who had duty, you know? It wasn't anything big. In other words, you don't have to make this whole world a heavy burden that you are carrying on your shoulders. You know, if I don't think deep all the time, you don't have to think deep either. When you have to start thinking deep to find a way around things, then your mental gyrations have gone too far.

What did he [Lieutenant Colonel West] really find out that saved anybody's life? I'm not sure. Let me put it this way. A leader who starts writing his own rules for himself should be very careful about going after one of his subordinates who decided to rewrite the colonel's rules. Do you see what I'm driving at? Because if you take his moral example, why should we not allow other people to decide for good reason to violate the law? And it's our law. He is not violating the enemy's law. He is violating our law. So I am not big on this sort of thing. I think it's baloney.

The biggest danger to our troops in the field is not the enemy. It's the supposed leader who would destroy the spirits of our young men and women. That's the biggest danger. And how do you destroy it? How about "do as I say, not as I do"?

So if you can tell me that colonel would have been accepting of his own men disobeying his orders, then I'll reconsider whether or not he did what was right in his mind. I think he knew what he was doing was wrong. [Does] that answer your question?

**Questioner**

Yes, sir. Thank you, General.

**Lieutenant General Mattis**

You're welcome. That's a good question. Thank you.

**Question**

Sir, you mentioned journalism a few times and gave us your opinions on the reporters that you have come in contact with. The media is playing a new and probably permanent role in day-to-day combat operations in Iraq. Just this morning, within an hour of the invasion of Fallujah, it was on CNN.com. How do you see embedded reporters and live war coverage changing ethical war fighting for the next couple of days, for the next year, and for the years to come, sir?

**Lieutenant General Mattis**

When it came to the media, I said [to my sailors and Marines], "My only guidance to you is: do not speculate about upcoming ops, in other words, [preserve operational security]. Secondly,

share your courage with the American people, because what you say, my fine young lance corporals, is going to go all around the world, and you are going to be speaking to the world. So if you are getting all nervous in the service, let one of your tougher buddies do it.” Of course, you say that to a Marine, and they all get macho and say, “I won’t act like a wimp on there.” So if you taught your troops well, they can stand up and represent you. I’ll give you an example. When we were pulling the division out of Fallujah, my Marines were madder than hornets. I’ll tell you, they were not happy campers, and a newsman from CNN shoved a microphone like this in front of a young man and basically led the Marine right down the primrose path. He said, “The enemy is going to dig in. They’re going to have a chance to resupply. They’re going to get ready for you. They will be tougher. Are you worried about that?” And the Marine, a slow-talking young man from down South somewhere, thought about it for a minute. He looked around. He said, referring to the enemy, “It doesn’t matter. They’re all going to die anyway.”

(Applause.)

**Lieutenant General Mattis**

My point to you is, my fine young men and women, the media is here. You just have to say it’s going to be different than it was in my granddaddy’s war and take the media as an eminently winnable constituency. Don’t have any naiveté about it.

Has one midshipman ever done anything wrong that [was in] the *Baltimore Sun*? You know what I’m driving at here? One person does something wrong, and the 4,000 who did something right that day, it’s not in there. So life is not fair, but what defines the brigade of midshipmen, that one person or the 4,000? The American people know what defines it, and they will stick with you.

Now, there are some people in the media that I won’t talk with. There is one I threatened to kick his ass if I ever saw him again. In this case, he had written a lie. All the other media people knew he had written a lie, and we treated the media wide open. I didn’t have handlers. If they wanted to go in the unit, I said, “Go ahead. Nobody is going to watch you. Go down and talk to the



Marines, but you better treat my men right.” This guy turned around and talked about us bulldozing houses, which was a complete lie, and linked us with Israeli tactics in the Gaza. So I went out and offered to sweep the floor with him I was so doggone angry at him. He came back and apologized. He has written nice stories ever since.

So what you have to do is get their respect and make certain you are telling the truth. Yes, there is a challenge of keeping op sec, but the embeds actually have more at stake, because if they are embedded, guess what happens if they start talking? My embeds never let me down. I’ll tell you that.

There are always some jerks around, and you have to deal with that, and you will know what to do. Put them on the next helicopter out of the area. If they have really screwed a plan up, then use it to your advantage. If they have spilled the beans on an attack, continue with all the preparations. Meanwhile, use that to lure the enemy in, go off and do something else, and slaughter them that way. That’s what your job is. So just figure out how to use it.

You know, it’s kind of like if you can’t ride two horses in a circus, you’ve got to get out. You know what I mean? At times, it just infuriates you, because it’s free speech, but you’ve got to try and keep the freedom of speech going.

**Quesiton**

Sir, do you think it is allowable or maybe even necessary to demonize the enemy?

**Lieutenant General Mattis**

I don’t believe in demonizing the enemy, and I don’t think I have done that here tonight. I don’t patronize them either. When they say something, that they are going to do something, I take them at their word. When I was negotiating with some people in Fallujah, I told them, “I’m going to warn you about something here. You are going to find we are a patient country. We’ve backed off in good faith to try and give you a chance to straighten this problem out. But I’m going to beg with you for a minute,

I'm going to plead with you: do not cross us, because if you do, the survivors will write about what we do here for 10,000 years."

It's not demonizing them, and you have a very good point. I think when you demonize people, you do cross the line, because you have now lowered them as human beings. Man to man, I'm willing to enter into this brawl and fight it out. That's just accepting them for what they are, facing the brutal facts that these people say they hate us because you go to a synagogue, and you go to a mosque, but not the right mosque, and you go to a church, and you go to a saloon on Sunday and that somehow freedom is a reason to hate people.

So I accept them for what they are. I recognize it, and I disagree strongly with demonizing the enemy. I have killed people I do not feel any hatred for whatsoever. None whatsoever. That's a very good question too, because there are some people who think you have to hate them in order to shoot them. I don't think you do. It's just business.

**Question**

You mentioned the Abu Ghraib scandal. The NCOs and junior enlisted have been court martialed or are facing court martial, yet it appears there are superiors who have been let off the hook. Why is that, sir?

**Lieutenant General Mattis**

I don't know the specifics about the case, and what I have always found is if you look at the specifics, it's different than what you read in the newspapers. I think that we are held responsible, but at some point, you have got to cut the responsibility. Where is the right place? I don't know. I don't know.

I have personally been investigated twice in the last six months. How many of you remember a wedding party that got bombed? Remember that? You all remember that? That was a very good hit, by the way. Wasn't no wedding party. Was a real good hit. All right.

(Applause.)

**Lieutenant General Mattis**

People bring it up, and they investigate you. Trust me, I was a two-star general. I have a lot of investigations on me, okay, because our country takes very seriously any idea that we would violate the law of war or endanger innocent people without very, very high regard for their lives, and I have no problem with that. I slept quite well during the investigation. I knew what I had done.

Matter of fact, let me tell you one of the questions they asked, just so you can start thinking now. One of the investigators had found that when the Army Special Forces officer, the Marine Intelligence officer, and the assault unit leader came in and said, "Okay, we've got the intel," I made the decision in about 30 seconds.

Now, I'm responsible for that decision. Matter of fact, in my statement, I wrote, "I am fully and singularly responsible." When asked how long I spent considering that decision though, you know what my answer was? About 30 years. I spent 30 years getting ready for that decision that took 30 seconds.

Now, if someone on the ground in that raid had seen a lady there and had decided to shoot her, am I responsible for his action there, because I authorized the raid? Do you see what I'm driving at? The CO of the prison or the commanding general of the prison, I don't know what their role was.

I will tell you I am personally embarrassed as a flag officer that a flag officer would try to avoid any kind of culpability in the manner which she has, but that does not equate to criminal liability by her. I don't know what she knew, and if she didn't know, then that's tough to hold someone accountable for something that they should have known and didn't. I don't know how you go there.

But it's a good question. At what point do you cut it off? In the naval service, we have it pretty easy, you know. The CO of the ship. You run the ship aground, you know who's responsible. That's it, right? It's not as cut and dried, I think, in some of the other services outside the naval service, which holds accountability as one of its strongest hallmarks.

Does that answer your question, or am I kind of dancing around it?

**Questioner**

Thank you, sir.

**Lieutenant General Mattis**

Thank you. Okay, any other questions, folks? I know you have got some studying to do, and you need to get some sleep.

Thank you for this evening here with you. I hope you got some nuggets out of this. I will tell you that I look forward to serving with you. I hope that we have an opportunity to do so. I think that right now I can just tell you hang in there. I know it's a tough program. I know it's tough in a number of ways. We need every single one of you, and we need you at the top of your game when you come out, and this war is still going to be going on. So God bless you, and thanks for your commitment.