

Introductory Remarks for General James Mattis, Hon. Paul McHale
-Excerpted Remarks-
2009 Edmund S. Muskie Distinguished Public Service Awards

Jim and I served together as Second Lieutenants quite a long time ago, and we in fact were roommates on a float, on a deployment, in Southeast Asia a long time ago... I'm going to take the next five minutes to give a heartfelt introduction to my good friend.

About three years ago, the Secretary of Defense turned to me and he said "What do you think about General Mattis?" And I tried to be honest. I said, "Sir, Jim and I have been friends for three decades. We served together as Second Lieutenants. We've been close to one another; I can't give you an objective assessment." And Secretary Rumsfeld said "Ok, fine, but what do you think of General Mattis?" And then in language that I can't quote in the room, I said, "He's the toughest man I've ever met."

Now that description, while accurate, is wholly inadequate. General Mattis certainly has the qualities we would expect of a warrior: personal courage, tenacity, and endurance. But by virtue of temperament and experience, he is far more than that. I won't give you the details of his biography, but I know those details pretty well, and we overlap through more than a few of those experiences.

Jim was the platoon leader of 1st Platoon, Echo Company, 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines back in 1973. He got to Okinawa about six months before I did. I rolled into town and I become the platoon commander of 2nd Platoon, Echo Company, 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines, and we served together for the next year, and became good friends and professional colleagues.

Jim went on to become a rifle company commander, a weapons company commander, he commanded 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, which was our lead battalion in the Gulf War back in 1990-1991. I had the privilege of serving with Jim in 1/7 and the 7th Marines. Jim went on to become the commanding officer of 7th Marine Regiment, one of the premier regiments in the United States Marine Corp. He went on to become the commanding general of the 1st Marine Division and I MEF, so he has commanded Marine units from roughly 42 Marines and sailors to up to more than 20,000 Marines and sailors in a range, an incredible range, of combat environments.

I just want to read to you a portion of a letter that General Mattis wrote just before his Marines went into combat in Iraq. These were his words, and the letter that he wrote were quoted verbatim and in its entirety as an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal*, and subsequently published in many other media outlets. These were Jim's words:

"When I give you the word, together we will cross the line of departure, close with those forces that choose to fight, and we will destroy them. Our fight is not with the Iraqi people, nor is it with the members of the Iraqi army who choose to surrender. While we will move swiftly and aggressively against those who resist, we will treat all others with decency, demonstrating chivalry and soldierly

compassion for a people who have endured a lifetime under Saddam's oppression. For the mission's sake and our country's sake and the sake of the men who carried this division's colors in past battles, who fought for life and never lost their nerve, carry out your mission and keep your honor clean. Demonstrate to the world there is no better friend, no worse enemy, than a United States Marine."

I can't think of any clearer expression of an honorable warrior's ethos, and I certainly have never read any expression of that ideal that stated it more clearly.

About fifteen years ago, Jim asked me for the title of a good book on Oliver Wendell Holmes. He knew that Holmes was one of my heroes: a great jurist, a great soldier in the Civil War, three times wounded. Jim and I had spoken about Holmes on a number of occasions, and so I said, "Jim, the best book I've ever read on Holmes is *The Mind and Faith of Justice Holmes*, Max Lerner's edition of that work printed in hardback in 1943." I said "But you can't find it anywhere. You've got to go to a used bookstore, and if you are lucky you will come across it."

And I recommended a couple of other books, but about a year later I was in his home, and I was looking at his bookshelf, and there was that book, in hard copy, 1943. He had gone out and found it, and about twelve, thirteen years after that, he quoted from that book in resolving allegations of serious misconduct that had been raised in the course of combat. He had the wisdom and the historic insight to reach back to the era of Oliver Wendell Holmes in order to apply the wisdom of that great jurist in resolving a contemporary problem.

And finally, a conversation that Jim and I had just about a year and half, maybe two years ago. We were talking about a certain Afghan warlord—a thug, a very brutal, a very violent man who took sadistic pleasure in inflicting disfigurement upon Afghan women who had the courage and the independence to choose not to wear a burka. And as Jim spoke, there was no anger in his voice, but there was sobriety and intensity.

And it occurred to me at that point, having known this gentleman for three and a half decades that Jim Mattis exists for the very reason that the United States military exists. And that is to protect the life and liberty of those who lack the physical power to defend themselves. It is a profoundly noble calling. Ladies and gentlemen, it is my honor, my privilege, to introduce a warrior, a scholar, a moral teacher, and an inspirational leader, a man who would give his life in defense of your freedom. No better friend, no worse enemy, General James Mattis.