

This article by Colonel Matt Blackledge, USMC (Ret.) appeared in the Ramona Sentinel, Ramona, CA on 10 February 2005.

"America Needs Warriors Like General Mattis"

Over the past week, the radio, TV and print media have been following the comments of Marine Corps Lieutenant General James Mattis. Since 9/11, he has commanded Marines in combat in both Iraq and Afghanistan. He also commanded Marines in Desert Shield and Desert Storm. There is no greater honor or responsibility for a Marine Officer to command Marines in combat.

During the course of multiple questions about the terrorists and our actions, he made the comment: "You go into Afghanistan, you got guys who slap women around for five years because they don't wear a veil...it's a hell of a lot of fun to shoot them."

He has been criticized for his comments and some have asked that severe action be taken against the General. He has far more supporters than detractors in the press and in both the active and retired military community. I stand firmly with those that support General Mattis on this issue.

I was in attendance at Operation Iraqi Freedom Lessons Learned Panel discussion at Day 1 of the Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association at the San Diego Convention Center. I chose to attend that day because I wanted to hear General Mattis' comments. You must follow the entire thread of the 90-minute session to place his comments in perspective. You must also understand his background.

During Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, I was the Assistant Chief of Staff G-4 (Logistics) for I Marine Expeditionary Force. I had the privilege to support General Mattis' Marines in both operations. He is an experienced combat leader who has only two missions in life. One is to accomplish the mission and the other is to take care of the Marines, Sailors and anyone under his command. He is a tough commander and, if you cannot accomplish both of the aforementioned extremely well, you will run afoul of him eventually.

He and I had infrequent but focused contact during actual combat operations because, when we did, he needed something for his Marines and he wanted to ensure it had my personal attention. And, in every case, these issues received my personal attention.

I would not have phrased it exactly the way he did but he commanded the Marines in combat and not I. We all know that he is General Mattis being General Mattis; he has a unique, direct and sometimes blunt way of phrasing things. In some ways, he is a refreshing breath of honesty.

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War is a brutal, especially when you are fighting an enemy that has consistently shown no honor. Under these circumstances, there is a certain enthusiasm when you are able to kill one of them. Like it or not, it is human nature. The object of war is to make the other "dirtbag" die for his cause while ensuring the fewest number of Marines and innocent civilians are killed or wounded in the process. We face an enemy who enjoys killing civilians. Every time a Marine kills an enemy of freedom, he has a right to take pride in his work.

Those most critical of General Mattis have little or no front line combat experience. They have not had to dive for cover due to incoming RPG's, sniper fire, or the arrival of unexpected Iraqi Missiles. The critics of General Mattis need to spend less time whining about General Mattis' comments. They need to spend more time understanding that we have been dealing with and will continue to deal with an enemy that has the single-minded goal to destroy America and eliminate democracy worldwide in what will most likely be the first truly multi-generation major war for the United States.

In his current assignment as the Commanding General Marine Corps Combat and Development Command, Lieutenant General Mattis will leave his mark on the Marine Corps. He will make improvements and changes that will assist future Marines that others and even he, himself, will command. He will build upon the initiatives of his predecessors and the innovative ideas from Marines from around the Corps as well as his own. He will do this not for himself or personal glory. He will do it to ensure that our Marines have everything they need to combat an enemy who believes that suicide or death in combat is a promotion. He knows that democracy cannot afford to lose this war and that Iraq is only one part of this war. Do we?

In closing, I would serve again in combat with my friend, General Mattis, in a heartbeat.

Semper Fi

Colonel Matt "Vader" Blackledge, USMC (Ret.)