

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus  
Secretary of the Navy  
Navy Reserve, Marine Forces Reserve and City of Chattanooga Memorial Service  
Saturday, August 15, 2105

As a military organization, we have experienced far too often the searing pain of combat losses, and honored the many who, in Lincoln's words, laid their lives as sacrifices on the altar of freedom. Today we honor five patriots who have made the same sacrifice in the service of their nation, this time here at home. We very rightly set aside special days and have solemn rituals to recognize, remember, revere the men and women in uniform who have paid the final price in the defense of America. These Marines, this Sailor deserve the same thing.

We are a family, the Navy and Marine Corps family. We work together. We serve together. We overcome together. As a family, we grieve. Together, we will assure that they, like those who went before, will be remembered as heroes – because that's what they are: heroes, ordinary people facing extraordinary circumstances.

An ordinary Thursday became a day of extraordinary horror, but also extraordinary heroism as shipmates, law enforcement officers, first responders ran in to danger to protect others and aid them; and as colleagues, friends and strangers helped each other away from danger, even at the risk of their own lives. Two of those wounded in this valiant effort, Police Officer Dennis Pedigo and Marine Sergeant DeMonte Cheeley – is with us – he is with us today. So we memorialize as heroes those we lost, and profoundly thank the heroes who are here today.

And the courage witnessed that Thursday did not end with the closing of that awful day. Recruiters nationwide went to work on Friday, encouraging and assisting the nation's finest young men and women in joining the Navy and Marine Corps. And on Saturday and Sunday, tens of thousands of reservists reported for their drill weekend. This pure act of evil could not keep them from their duty. That commitment is the essence of Sailors and Marines. It was demonstrated under the worst of circumstances on July 16<sup>th</sup> and it has not wavered since.

Still, we know it will take time for those with visible and invisible wounds to heal. The shock, the anger over what occurred last month will take us all time to deal with, because what happens defies comprehension, defies understanding. We know that while the pain will recede, it will never completely leave. We know that although it will shrink, the hole in our hearts will never completely close. And we know that although we will heal, our Navy and Marine Corps family will never again feel completely whole.

Five taken – five husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, workmates taken from us suddenly, violently, cruelly. But what cannot be taken is our love and our memories. As we remember these individuals that we cherished, it will not be as victims. Their lives cannot be determined by the terrible, inexplicable way they ended, but rather by how they lived.

Tom Sullivan served the Marine Corps for almost two decades, including two combat tours in Iraq, receiving two Purple Hearts. Gunney was known as a Marine among Marines, immersed in the Corps, living his life by the ethos of that Corps.

David Wyatt enlisted after 9/11; served in Iraq, Afghanistan, Japan, Korea. His love for the Marine Corps exceeded only by his love for his wife Lorri and their children, Rebecca and Heith.

Carson Holmquist, whose decision to serve his country was second nature to him. Two combat tours in Afghanistan. And was strengthened and supported by the love of his family, his wife Jasmin, their son Wyatt, and on the anticipation of their child to come.

Randall Smith, grandson of a Navy veteran, had just reenlisted in the Navy after three years with Marines aboard the amphibious ship USS Wasp. He lived a life of service, and loved his wife Angie and their three girls, Lyla, Eila, Kyla.

Skip Wells, in the Marine Corps for only a year, but even in that time stood out as someone who cared more about his fellow Marines and the mission than he did about himself.

These are each unique individuals, but as I've spoken to their families and friends, common threads emerge: a love of family and country; the value and pride placed in serving America; and the value that others placed on their lives. Today we remember them and we mourn. Tomorrow they join so many other Navy and Marine Corps heroes whose lives and deeds shine forever bright.

And in the days, months and years that follow, together we will remain, as they did, Semper Fortis, Always Courageous, Semper Fidelis, Always Faithful.