

Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

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The Mattis Model of Leadership

The first person to be approved in President Trump's administration is the cabinet position of Secretary of Defense. To better understand the value and function of the Department of Defense, we need to go back to the years immediately following World War II. Up to that time, presidents were advised about the matters of war by the Secretary of War who had oversight of the War Department. It was done this way for 200 years, and it pertained to use of the Army. The Navy, the Coast Guard and the Marine Corps were not included. The Air Force was not yet established.

During WWII, the War Department was divided into three groups: the Army Ground Forces; the Army Air Forces; and the Services of Supply (later renamed the Army Service Forces). After the War, the Department of Defense was created to include all the branches of service, creating the Department of the Navy, the Department of the Air Force, causing the War Department to be abandoned and reinvented as the Department of the Army. As for the Marine Corps and Coast Guard, they are generally placed under the Department of the Navy structurally, though the Coast Guard is bounced around at times.

Retired Marine Corps General Jim Mattis is the new Secretary of Defense. General Mattis has a moniker that, no doubt, is causing some folks to squirm. The General is better known to his Marines as, "Mad Dog" Mattis. Mattis was retired early by President Obama three years ago. President Trump has chosen him to be on his cabinet, requiring an exemption from the seven-year minimum authorized by Congress once released from the military.

There are Americans who are troubled that a man like Mattis is in charge of our nation's defense simply because he is career military, is a Marine (Gasp!), and is called Mad Dog. Personally, I like him for all three of those reasons. He's a leader, and he takes care of his Marines.

In 2002, I was called up from the Reserve to serve in the Iraq War. I was the Deputy Command Chaplain for the I MEF (I Marine Expeditionary Force) at Camp Pendleton. Part of the I MEF is the 1st Marine Division, which Mattis commanded at the start of the Iraq War. Though I never met the General, there were plenty of stories about him making the rounds.

Allow me to share two stories that exemplify Jim "Mad Dog" Mattis, our new Defense Secretary.

The first story was told by General Charles Krulak (Ret), former Commandant of the Marine Corps.

"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.

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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."

The second story is a letter General Mattis just wrote to the men and women in the Defense Department.

"It's good to be back and I'm grateful to serve alongside you as Secretary of Defense.

Together with the Intelligence Community we are the sentinels and guardians of our nation. We need only look to you, the uniformed and civilian members of the Department and your families, to see the fundamental unity of our country. You represent an America committed to the common good; an America that is never complacent about defending its freedoms; and an America that remains a steady beacon of hope for all mankind.

Every action we take will be designed to ensure our military is ready to fight today and in the future. Recognizing that no nation is secure without friends, we will work with the State Department to strengthen our alliances. Further, we are devoted to gaining full value from every taxpayer dollar spent on defense, thereby earning the trust of Congress and the American people.

I am confident you will do your part. I pledge to you I'll do my best as your Secretary.

MATTIS SENDS

Folks, rest assured, the Department of Defense is in the hands of a man who is strong, capable and committed.