

Transcript. CMC Gen David H. Berger. Camp Blaz reactivation ceremony remarks. 24 Jan, 2023 at Camp Blaz, Guam

Gen Berger:

:00

Good morning. First of all, thank you so much for inviting me and Donna and Sergeant Major and Mrs. Black here to be with you all this morning. We are so happy to join you here, Madam Governor, thank you to you. Thank you to your legislature, all the leadership here, to Representative Moylan, members of the legislature, and certainly the delegation from Japan that flew here for this event. Thank you for joining us this morning. I couldn't say it any better than the governor. The respect that we all have for the Blaz family. Thank you for being here in the front row. Where you belong this morning. We have rescheduled this event a number of times over the past two years. Thank you for your supreme patience as we work to ensure a really a proper and appropriate ceremony for the late Brigadier General Blaz and this camp. Thank you also for everyone who played a role in the ceremony. There's a few who stand out and I'll ask you just to hold your recognition with me till I run through the quick list but beginning with General--and all the team really from installation and logistics--General Banta and his team from Marine Corps installations command. For Marine Corps installations in the Pacific out of Okinawa, the government of Guam, the Government of Japan, as the governor said. Without all of you all's dedication we would not be standing here this morning. A special thanks to Colonel Chris Bopp to [inaudible] when the rest of the Marines who are stationed here, I gotta tell you, it's not very often that a colonel gets a louder ovation than the Commandant of the Marine Corps but today, Colonel Bopp, I think you and your team you earned it. Master Gunny [inaudible] the band leader and the band just add so much to a ceremony this morning and events. A ceremony just doesn't happen overnight. There were rehearsals and planning that took place. So if you can join me in thanking the Marines in the band, the protocol Marines, the color guard, all the Marines that you see in front of you and all the Marines that you don't see behind you that made today possible let's thank them.

Gen Berger

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If you're familiar with the story of Brigadier General Ben Blaz, then you will already know, as the governor spoke of, perseverance, of resilience, of selflessness, but it's also one, I will tell you, of empathy, and diplomacy. Ben Blaz did not just build bridges. He was happy to walk across them. And I think the lessons that he taught us, during and after his service in uniform, they echo so loudly here today. His story, his past inspired our [inaudible]. And that story begins right here.

Gen Berger

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As you heard from the governor, he was just a boy, 13 years old, overlooking Apra Harbor, saw the ships filled with the Marines that would land right here on Asan beach, and it wouldn't be long before he himself would earn the title United States Marine, one day even commanding the very unit that landed here. It's an amazing story. But most of you already know that part of the story. What you may not know is that before the Marines landed on this beach. He then, and his father, became very close with a young Japanese soldier named Ohara. They met regularly, and

he and his dad taught Ohara English and Ohara taught them Japanese. It's almost like they were preparing for for a post war world. After the war, Ben tried to locate Ohara, relentlessly, in Japan. This became, this was the friendship that he tried to rekindle. He never found him. But I would like to think that that friendship gave him something that, frankly, we would all be better off if we had more of ourselves. It gave him perspective. And that perspective was something that he never stopped building on. Because later on Ben was stationed in Japan. He immersed himself in the culture. He already knew the basics of the language. He mastered the language and later, using his experiences and his expertise, he became heavily involved in the reversion of Okinawa back to Japan. This is Ben Blaz we're talking about. He advised the US and Japanese governments on a new posture in the Pacific and years later, he would help the Japanese military and their efforts to repatriate remains of Japanese soldiers here back to Japan. He served as a Marine for 29 years and afterwards Ben also returned home. As you all know, he became a representative of Guam. He served here in the US House of Representatives. He bridged both sides of Congress. He found, somehow, bipartisan support for a whole bunch of issues that were really relevant to the Pacific and our partnerships in the Pacific. And I don't think there's words that can describe the impact of the actions that he took on where we are today, that they teach us. And I would offer, that it's those lessons, really, that have earned his name here this morning. Because he isn't just the first Chamorro to become a general. He isn't just the highest-ranking Guamanian in the history of the United States Marine Corps. He is the man who showed us how to remember our past without letting it stifle our future. You see, Ben Blaz, he may have built these bridges, but it's our job to ensure that they remain strong--that they endure. And that's precisely what this base is all about. It's about a partnership with a community. It's about a partnership with our fellow Pacific nations. It's about the future we are building here now, together. Together we have built this bridge--Camp Blaz--and together we will ensure a secure a free and open Pacific. Some may see this reactivation as the result of problem, of challenges in the world. I disagree. I think that the activation of, the reactivation of Camp Blaz, is a symbol of increasing opportunity. It's a sign of commitment. It's a sign of friendship, it's a sign of community and of strength. Ben Blaz embodied all of those ideas during his lifetime. And I am thankful that we can honor his legacy through our actions today. And in the years to come. So Madam Governor, distinguished guests, on behalf of all Marines, thank you. Thank you all for your continued friendship. Thank you for your steadfast dedication. Thank you for your focus on security. Semper Fidelis.