

THE CONTINENTAL MARINE MAGAZINE

JAN/FEB/MAR 2009

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Armed Forces Bowl**



Mardi Gras



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Marine Forces Reserve

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It seems as though this quarter has flown by in the blink of an eye!

I hope that the first couple of months of 2009 has been as productive for you as it has for our family.

The shop here has seen a flood of people as we welcome four new writers into the folds. We look forward to seeing them do great things.

We also look forward to the return of our Devil Dogs out (hookin' and jabbin') in Iraq and Afghanistan. We follow 2/25 during their last few missions before returning home in April.

In this issue we have a review of a movie that hits close to home for many of our Marines who have been deployed.

As always, we see the good Marines are doing in their local community from helping guide children to a better and brighter future, to helping with programs to support families.

I hope you enjoy this edition of your magazine.

Semper Fi,

Lance Cpl. Michael Laycock

Editor, Continental Marine Magazine



Cover Photo:

Sgt. Juan L. Pichardo of 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 8, gives stuffed animals to students at Shahira al-Joulan Girls Primary School in Rutbah, Iraq during a visit by one of the battalion's patrols, Feb. 16, 2009.

Photo By Capt. Paul L. Greenburg

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The Marine Forces Reserve Band plays during Mardi Gras. The band participates annually in several of the parades and pageantry associated with the event.



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In Brief

Taking a look at MFR Marines' accomplishments.

Income Replacement Program Extended

The Reserve Income Replacement Program (RIRP), which monetarily compensates Reserve Marines for income lost as a result of being involuntarily recalled, has been extended through December 2009.

Reserve component Marines must fulfill one of three criteria in order to receive compensation: complete 18 consecutive months of involuntary active duty; 24 cumulative months of involuntary active duty; or, 180 days within six months of a previous period of 180 days of involuntary active duty. The service member must also verify that the difference between his or her civilian income and military income is greater than \$50 per month. Claims are paid monthly and will not exceed \$3,000.

New Orleans MEPS celebrates African American History



As America celebrates African American History month, the Military Enlistment Processing Station here held a celebration of its own in their ceremony room Feb. 12.

The ceremony included with an invocation by Lt. Cmdr. White, The Commander, Naval Reserve Forces Command Chaplain, and also Mrs. Jane Harvey Brown, a New Orleans singer performed the national anthem.

Suicide Prevention Hotline Saves Veterans' Lives

Help is only a phone call away for military veterans considering suicide.

An estimated 5,000 veterans commit suicide annually, with Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans 35 percent more likely to commit suicide than the general population. VA statistics show that between 2002 and 2006, more than 250 veterans who left the military after Sept. 11, 2001, committed suicide.

Nearly 100,000 veterans, family members or friends of veterans have reached out for help by calling the Department of Veterans Affairs suicide prevention hotline at 1-800-273-TALK. The hotline was launched July 2007.

Get ready for your new PT gear MFR

Active duty and active reserve Devil Dogs of Headquarters Battalion Marine Forces Reserve are scheduled to receive their new physical training uniforms here in the very near future. The new uniforms, authorized for wear while on leave and liberty by the Commandant of the Marine Corps, are currently being ordered by the HQ Bn. warehouse chief, Sgt. Steven Kern. According to Kern, reservists who aren't on active duty with HQ Bn., MFR, will receive theirs through their respective units.



Lifelong Learning puts Marines in college



LANCE CPL JAD A. SLEIMAN
MARINE FORGES RESERVE

NEW ORLEANS - Taking on the challenge of pursuing a college degree while fulfilling an active duty or reserve commitment can be an overwhelming task for some Marines.

Education Specialist Frank Buday of the Marine Forces Reserve Lifelong Learning program wants you to know that he can simplify the process.

“We’re here to make it easy,” said Buday. “If you want to go to school, this is where you come.”

Marines wishing to attend college or vocational school go to Buday and his associates for help applying for schools and getting tuition assistance, which pays tuition costs for active duty Marines and Reserve Marines while they perform active service.

Buday receives hundreds of phone calls, e-mails and office visits from interested Marines each month.

“We get the whole spectrum,” he explained. “From privates first class all the way up to colonels, we get all ages and ethnicities.”

The first step to earning a college degree is overcoming the fear of trying something new, said Buday. “For many Marines, college was never an option; they come in and they’re scared.”

It’s up to Buday and his colleagues to help Marines wade through the vast array of colleges and degree programs available to them.

“I can’t tell people what schools to go to, I can just give them information,” said Buday.

Buday said he’s careful to steer Marines away from schools with poor track records and weak programs by outlining schools’ histories.

“I’m a retired Marine and I don’t want to see [Marines] get ripped off,” said Buday.

Unlike civilian college students, Marines must balance their responsibility to the Corps with their desire for education.

The flexibility of the TA program can help Marines fulfill both military and educational goals, said Buday.

Master Sgt. Robert Smith, a MarForRes intelligence chief has earned about 100 college credits towards a degree in criminal justice by taking courses in between tours in Iraq and leadership training.

“Any Marine is smart enough for college,” said Smith, who has a record of straight A’s yet jokingly admits he still considers himself “a box of rocks.”

Because his commitment to his Marines always came first, Smith said he had to take his courses off and on for nearly nine years.

“The flexibility is what I really like,” Smith said. With the TA program, which allows Marines renewed funds for school every fiscal year, Smith was able to take courses when he had the time for them using the TA program.

Though Smith came into the Marine Corps with a handful of college credits, he hadn’t taken college seriously before his third year in the Marine Corps.

“You can never stop learning,” Smith said.

Marines can visit www.mfr.usmc.mil/hq/mccs/edu/edu.html or call toll free 1-866-305-9058 for more information on the tuition assistance program or the Post 9/11 Montgomery G.I. Bill. □

New opportunities for counterintelligence Marines



CAPT. NATE BRADEN
MARINE FORCES RESERVE

Two changes have taken affect in the counterintelligence community which will significantly increase the opportunity for laterally moving into the field for a greater number of Marines.

Until recently the military occupational specialty of 0211, Counterintelligence/Human Intelligence Specialist, was only available for male Marines who laterally move into the MOS from within the intelligence community. However, changes in the Intelligence MOS manual have officially made the 0211 MOS available to qualifying Marines from any occupational specialty and also to female Marines.

“The unique nature of the Reserves lends itself to this MOS because it allows former CI/HUMINT Marines who join the SMCR to maintain their proficiency while supporting the active duty forces abroad for short periods,” said Capt. Karl Nordeen, a counterintelligence officer with Marine Forces Reserve.

“I would like to emphasize that we are looking for both lat movers, and former CI/HUMINT Marines,” Nordeen

added.

The counterintelligence/HUMINT Specialist MOS combines the traditional fields of Counterintelligence Specialist and Interrogator-Translator into one occupational field. Some of the associated duties include conducting interrogations, analyzing intelligence, translating documents from foreign languages, and producing finished intelligence products on terrorism, espionage, sabotage, and subversion activity.

“Specific information on the duties of the CI/HUMINT MOS can be obtained by contacting any of your force CI/HUMINT personnel,” said Nordeen.

There are available Reserve 0211 MOS billets in Quantico, Miami, San Diego, New York, Chicago and Camp Pendleton, Calif.

“We are looking for intelligent, motivated, ambitions first-term corporals and sergeants for lateral move,” Nordeen added. “Lance corporals and staff sergeants may also qualify on a case-by-case basis.”

For additional information about the 0211 MOS, or other opportunities within the Marine Forces Reserve intelligence community, contact the MFR G-2 at (504) 678-1189. □

Fallen Marine's Journey home detailed in small screen



Photo By Lance Cpl Bryan G. Carfrey

LANCE CPL. BRYAN G. CARFREY
HEADQUARTERS MARINE CORPS

District of Columbia - Senior military officials and government dignitaries gathered to watch the premiere of "Taking Chance," the HBO made-for-TV movie, Feb. 9 at the Motion Picture Association of America.

"Taking Chance" depicts the experiences of Lt. Col. Michael R. Strobl while escorting a fallen Marine from Dover Air force Base in Dover, Del., to Dubois, Wyo., in April 2004.

Lance Cpl. Chance Phelps was killed in action during combat operations April 9, 2004, in Ar Ramadi, Iraq, while assigned to Battery L, 3rd Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment.

"When we started filming the movie I thought the American people should be the main character," said Strobl, who retired in 2007 and co-writer of the movie. "That's why I wrote it - the reaction of the American people who witnessed the journey along the way."

Actor Kevin Bacon portrays Strobl in the movie and also made an appearance at the premiere.

"I was amazed and surprised I didn't know anything about it and had no idea about the (escorting) process,"

Bacon said. "I liked that it was a simple telling of Mike's journey with Chance. It doesn't really hit you over the head. It kind of sneaks up on you, and the accumulative effect of watching the process and the way people reacted along the trip is what I responded to as an actor."

To prepare for the role, which was his third time portraying a Marine, Bacon said he met with Strobl on several occasions.

"I try my best when playing Marines to pay attention to detail and try to humanize them as much as possible," Bacon said. "People who aren't in the military sometimes find it tough to look past the uniform."

After the movie, spectators, which included Army Chief of Staff Gen. George Casey, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Norton Schwartz and Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. James Cartwright, were given the opportunity to shake hands with and express their thanks to director Ross Katz, who co-wrote the screenplay with Strobl.

"I wanted to portray honesty in this movie," Katz said. "When you witness the remains of a young man who gave his life for civilians like me, we aren't red states or blue states, we're purple states. We're all Americans." □

MFR Band Jazzin' it up



Photos By Lance Cpl. Johnathan Lamb



All duty stations are located in communities with their own traditions and history, but here these traditions are the driving force of the community, especially during Mardi Gras.

Attending parades and celebrating with locals is a great way for Marines to learn more about the city and the hundreds of personal traditions that area families and friends share during this time.

Marine Forces Reserve takes part in various Mardi Gras parades here celebrating with the citizens throughout the Carnival season.

The MarForRes Band and color guard march and play for various krewes in uptown and Westbank parades. □

for Mardi Gras



Marines ring in 2009 at Armed Forces Bowl



Photo By Lance Cpl. Michael J. Laycock

Maj. Gen. James L. Williams, Commanding General, 4th Marine Division, participates in the administration of the oath of enlistment to Marine Corps applicants during the half-time celebration at the Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl on Dec. 31. Roughly 30 applicants from each branch of the armed forces participated in the mass ceremony which was presided over by Gen. David Petraeus, Commander U.S. Central Command.

CONTINENTAL MARINE STAFF MARINE FORCES RESERVE

NEW ORLEANS – Marine Forces Reserve leathernecks celebrated the New Year’s holiday by supporting fellow service members at the Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl at Texas Christian University’s Amon G. Carter Stadium in Fort Worth, Texas.

The event spanned a two-day period and culminated in a New Year’s Eve game that saw the University of Houston Cougars squeak past the Air Force Academy Falcons 34-28 in front of an estimated crowd of more than 40,000.

MFR support began at the Armed Forces Bowl Kickoff Luncheon at the Fort Worth Convention Center Dec. 30. The commanding general of the 4th Marine Division, Maj. Gen. James L. Williams, provided the senior Marine Corps presence at the event.

“The important thing for events like the Armed Forces Bowl,” said Williams, “is to show the country that this is something they should never forget...the service, on their behalf, provided by the men and women of our armed forces.”

The featured speaker was Lt. Col. Greg Gadson, who

lost both legs to a roadside bomb in Iraq and has been credited as an inspiration for the XLII National Football League Super Bowl champions. Gadson was also one of seven U.S. delegates in the 2008 Paralympics Games in Beijing.

The biggest MFR footprint at the event was seen at the “Armed Forces Adventure”, a joint-service collection of static weapons, vehicle displays, interactive simulators and music.

Marines and Sailors of MFR clearly enjoyed the opportunity to interact with and educate the passing spectators.

“We try to stay involved with the community as much as we can,” said Staff Sgt Joseph Bennett, a Platoon Commander assigned to Company B, 6th Motor Transport Battalion. “Our community does such a fantastic job supporting us.”

Gear from various units across MFR including AH-1W and UH-1N helicopters, an M777 Lightweight 155MM Howitzer, Medium Tactical Vehicle Replacements (7-ton trucks) with crew-served weapons and High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) provided the perfect opportunity for visitors to ask questions, or just pose for a picture.

Staff Sgt. J. B. Bennett and Petty Officer Second Class David Domingo, of the 6th Motor Transportation Battalion, B(-) Co., Lubbock, TX, demonstrate to some children how the M2, .50 Caliber Machine gun is used during combat operations, atop a 7 ton armored convoy truck. The Marines from 6th Motor T. Bn. were at the Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl adventure zone on Dec. 30, with several vehicles for display before and after the game.



Photo By Lance Cpl. Michael J. Laycock



Photo By Lance Cpl. Michael J. Laycock

Chief Warrant Officer Michael Smith plays with the Marine Forces Reserve Band after the pep rally for the Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl, Dec. 30. The Band played both the day before and day of the game. The Band played the services hymns, and participated in the half-time show.

“The Marine Corps presence out here is unbelievable;” said Sgt. Brian Kester, Marketing and Public Affairs Representative, Recruiting Station Fort Worth, “It really helps generate interest and get people over (to the recruiting booth.)”

Game day saw the Marines involved in various events, ranging from the coin toss to half-time activities.

During the half-time celebration, Army Gen. David Petraeus, Commander U.S. Central Command, was presented the Great American Patriot award on behalf of Armed Forces Insurance.

After the presentation, Petraeus presided over an on-field mass enlistment ceremony, featuring new recruits from every branch of the service, followed by the Marine Forces Reserve Band participating along with the bands from both teams in a stunning performance.

This was the sixth year for the Armed Forces Bowl.□

Saluting female service members

REGINA T. AKERS, PHD

HISTORIAN U.S. NAVAL HISTORY & HERITAGE
COMMAND

The combat exclusion law prohibits women from being assigned to submarines, Special Forces, and combat units.

However, the Global War on Terrorism and the fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan has made this restriction difficult to comply with because there is no delineated line of combat. Furthermore, there are critical shortages of personnel with certain specialties

and there are instances where a female is the most qualified or only qualified person available for the mission. Moreover, the nature of the warfare and the face of the enemy vary from one location to another.

For these reasons the uniformed women's participation in this war is redefining combat and how women

become engaged in it. Women now perform a myriad of duties including flying combat aircraft, commanding units, providing invaluable intelligence and linguistic skills, treating the sick and wounded, manning police check points, working aircraft support, and cooking meals .

About five years ago, the Marine Corps began the Lioness Program which recruits female volunteers from the various services to be attached to all-male combat units to search Iraqi women and children who may be smuggling money or weapons to support the enemy at tactical control points along the Iraqi border. They also train Iraqi women how to search other women. Since Muslim tradition

prevents a man from touching any woman not related to him, insurgents select women to carry contraband and explosives. An increasing number of Muslim women are volunteering to become suicide bombers.

The Lioness also accompanied combat units searching houses. They are required to complete training in basic Marine Corps martial arts, language skills, search techniques, IED identification, the Muslim culture, how to shoot various weapons from supported firing positions and rules of engagement. Their work with combat units

often led them into relatively safe situations that quickly dangerous. Three female Seabees attached to naval Mobile Construction Battalion 1 served in the Lioness Program in 2007.

At least three Lioness paid the ultimate cost.

The Department of Defense's new focus on Afghanistan requires fewer personnel than the fighting in Iraq but

the dangers are just as eminent. The terrain is different and in some ways more difficult for waging war. The strong presence of Al-Qaida, the Taliban and the warlords, and the lack of infrastructure are challenging the United States' military and its coalition forces. Despite these conditions, our uniformed women continue to perform well in and out of harm's way.

Editors note: Dr. Regina T. Akers is one of the leading historians working on the Naval History and Heritage Command's Diversity Project. □



MAG-41 honors female community leaders



Photo By Sgt. Lisa Rosborough

STORY BY SGT. LISA ROSBOROUGH
4TH MARINE AIR WING

NAVAL AIR STATION JOINT RESERVE BASE FORT WORTH, TEXAS — Leathernecks with Marine Aircraft Group 41 recently teamed up with the NAS JRB Heritage Committee for a luncheon to recognize the achievements of Dallas Fort-Worth Metroplex women.

Female service members, educators and community leaders attended the luncheon at the Moreland Hall Dining Facility on base in an attempt to educate the general public and service members about the significant role of women in American history and society today.

In particular, MAG-41 paid tribute to women Marines of the past and present for their individual acts of self-sacrifice and personal heroism. Even Opha Mae Johnson, who became America's first female Marine in 1918, was among those honored.

As part of the "Living History" portion of the program, Gunnery Sgt. Joan Wright, who served in the Marine Corps from 1951 until 1963 and is a member of the Women

MAG-41 Executive Officer Lt. Col Christopher Scharf, thanks Fort Worth, Texas resident and educator, Dr. Constance Person, Ed.D, for more than 30 years of contributions and commitment in assisting with the development and improvement within the curriculum of local high schools, colleges, and universities. Person's son is a former Marine who worked as a Senate staff assistant during the campaign for President Barack Obama.

Marines Association, was among a list of area female Marines recognized for outstanding service.

Constance Person, who has served the Fort Worth area for and several other communities throughout the country as an educator and administrator for more than 30 years and is the mother of a former Marine, was presented a certificate of appreciation from Lt. Col. Christopher Scarf, MAG-41's executive officer, for her commitment in assisting with the development and improvement within local high schools, colleges and universities.

Special guests from the Fort Worth/Tarrant County Minority Leaders and Citizens Council, which promotes cooperation between groups interested in bettering community relations, were recognized for their devotion to self-determination and their work teaching the citizens of Tarrant County about issues that affect minorities. □

Marines properly honor the Marine



Photo By Gunnery Sgt. Frederick Zimmerman

Sgt. Maj. Carlton W. Kent, 16th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, salutes after laying a wreath at the gravesite of the first Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, Sgt. Maj. Wilbur Bestwick, at Skylawn Memorial Park Feb. 22. The burial site for Bestwick is incorrectly listed on his biography, and the Inspector-Instructor staff at nearby San Jose, Calif., were able to track down the correct site. Kent paid his respects during a recent visit to I&I San Jose.

GUNNERY SGT. F.B. ZIMMERMAN HEADQUARTERS MARINE CORPS

SAN JOSE, Calif. - Marines take care of their own. It's a mantra every Marine learns in recruit training, and a proud declaration of devotion passed along from generation to generation. The Inspector-Instructor staff here recently kept true to the saying, by taking care of a Marine who died 37 years ago.

As the Marine Corps' Birthday drew to a close last year, 1st Sgt. David Lee, I&I first sergeant, knew his staff was responsible for a wreath laying ceremony at the gravesite of the first Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, Sgt. Maj. Wilbur Bestwick. The Marine Corps Casualty Procedures Manual mandates that wreaths be laid at the graves of all former commandants and sergeants major of the Marine Corps on the Corps' birthday.

"We knew we had to [render honors] about a month and a half out, so we started preparing for it," Lee said. "About two weeks out we looked up the listed cemetery to confirm that's where he was buried and they didn't have any record of him. Once we realized he wasn't there, we began searching for where he was buried, and it took about

a week to find."

The cemetery listed as the burial site on Bestwick's official bio is Alta Mesa Memorial Park in Palo Alto, Calif., but they had no record of him. Lee said the cemetery staff called surrounding cemeteries, but the result was the same -- no record of Bestwick anywhere.

Lee contacted his predecessor to see if he knew where the sergeant major was buried, but he too was never able to find the grave. That Marine had even gone so far as to hire a genealogist, but had no success at locating the grave or family members, Lee said.

One Sunday, only a month prior to the Corps' birthday, Lee and his Commanding Officer, Capt. Brandon Boers, were brainstorming while watching football. Lee was a prior recruiter, and Boers asked him how he was able to locate vital records on those he was recruiting. That's when it clicked that the answer may be at the county records office.

So, the next day, Boers and Gunnery Sgt. Antonio Uriegas, made a trip to the county records office to see what they could find. When they received the certified true copy of Bestwick's death certificate, they finally had the information needed – his burial place was listed as Skylawn

first Sergeant Major of Corps



Photo By Gunnery Sgt. Frederick Zimmerman

Sgt. Maj. Carlton W. Kent, 16th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, bows his head in a moment of silence at the gravesite of the first Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, Sgt. Maj. Wilbur Bestwick, at Skylawn Memorial Park Feb. 22. The burial site for Bestwick is incorrectly listed on his biography, and the Inspector-Instructor staff at nearby San Jose, Calif., were able to track down the correct site.

Memorial Park in San Mateo, Calif. A quick call confirmed Bestwick was there.

“I knew we could find it because I knew there was a record of it somewhere,” Boers said. “We just had to figure out where to find the record. Within about 15 minutes of finding the actual burial site, we were able to find exactly where the gravesite was.”

A week prior to the birthday ceremony, Lee said a trip

was made to the cemetery to scout the location. He said the marker was weathered and overgrown with weeds. A tree root underneath Bestwick’s headstone caused the marker to slant.

While the cemetery staff told Lee he could request to have the site cleaned up, he wanted to make sure it was done by the ceremony, so a small working party was sent to take care of it. The Marines cleaned up the area, and even leveled the headstone.

“It now sits a little higher than the others,” Lee said.

On Nov. 10, 2008, Boers, Lee and their Marines from the I&I gave proper honors to Bestwick, for what Lee thinks was the first time. Since honors had never been rendered, Lee said they wanted to do something extra, so in addition to laying the wreath and playing Taps, a rifle detail gave a 21-gun salute.

Lee said it was an honor to be able to finally locate and pay respects to Bestwick, but what made it more special, is Bestwick was the first Marine to serve as the I&I San Jose first sergeant. Lee said has even jumped on board with his predecessor’s idea of naming their building after Bestwick, and is going to work to get that approved.

“It was great ... it was like solving a mystery,” said Boers of the challenge of locating Bestwick’s gravesite. “It was a huge honor. I think it’s important for us to remember where we came from and honor those who came before us.”

During a recent visit to the I&I, the 16th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, Sgt. Maj. Carlton W. Kent, made a special trip to the cemetery. Despite heavy winds and driving rain, Kent, in his Dress Blue Bravos, paused for a moment of silence before laying a wreath to pay tribute to the first sergeant major of the Marine Corps.

“It was an honor for me to be able to honor Sgt. Maj. Bestwick at his gravesite,” Kent said. “Not only is his warfighting legacy an important part of Marine Corps history, but he’s also important since he was the first sergeant major of the Marine Corps.

“I would just like to thank the Marines from I&I San Jose for being persistent in locating the gravesite of Sgt. Maj. Bestwick. What the Marines have done just echoes what Marines have been doing since the founding of our Corps in 1775, and that’s to ensure we take care of our fellow Marines.” □



Photo By Capt. Paul L. Greenberg

Sgt. Juan L. Pichardo of 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 8, gives stuffed animals to students at Shahira al-Joulán Girls Primary School in Rutbah, Iraq during a visit by one of the battalion's patrols, Feb. 16, 2009. The stuffed animals were sent to the Marines in Iraq by Beanies for Baghdad, an official military 501(c) non-profit member of the Department of Defense's America Supports You program.

New York teacher challenges Iraqi children to dream

CAPT. PAUL L. GREENBERG
MARINE FORCES RESERVE

RUTBAH, IRAQ - Dreams were difficult to imagine for more than 300 girls at Shahira al-Joulán Girls Primary School in western Iraq, who have grown up in a world plagued with poverty, a dearth of basic essential services, violent insurgent battles, and constant U.S. military presence in the city.

But things have changed drastically in Rutbah over the past year. Since the Reserve Marines of 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 8, arrived in the area in October, there has been very little violence.

Not one Marine has fired a shot in the city for more than six months, and Coalition forces are working arduously with the U.S. State Department and local Iraqi government officials to provide reliable electric and water services to local citizens, and spearhead a host of initiatives to improve the city's infrastructure and quality of life.

Since the security situation in Rutbah has improved,

the Marines' focus of effort has shifted from fighting insurgents to establishing constructive "lines of operation" which include initiatives in governance, communications, essential services and economic development.

On Feb. 16, 2009, the Marines of the 2nd Bn. conducted their sixth Rutbah-area school visit at Shahira al-Joulán. The event included an interview with the principal, an inspection of the school's infrastructure, and the distribution of more than 400 stuffed animals.

The city mayor and director of engineering projects also accompanied the Marines and spoke to the students about the successful elections held Jan. 31.

More important than just bringing toys, the Marines came with an abundance of smiles and a message of hope.

"It's the possibility of having a dream come true that makes life interesting," said Chief Warrant Officer 3 Kevin Bedard to a class of sixth grade students.

"Before a dream is realized, the soul of the world tests everything that was learned along the way," continued Bedard, quoting author Paulo Coelho through the help of an

Arabic interpreter. “[The world] does this not because it is evil, but so that we can, in addition to realizing our dreams, master the lessons we have learned as we have moved toward that dream.”

“It is an exciting time to be a young lady in Iraq,” continued Bedard now using his own words. “I challenge you to set goals and have dreams for your future. Don’t be afraid and don’t let anyone tell you your dreams can’t come true. You must not quit, as there will be setbacks along the way. As you get closer, the difficulty will increase. Like when you walk into the wind, right before you get to your destination, the wind will always be the strongest. Don’t give up, because you never know what the next day will bring.”

When speaking with the school principal, Wajda Zaiek Habib, the Marine leaders on the patrol realized this serendipitous event provided them the opportunity to not only get to know the students, but also rebuild bridges with the school staff.

Habib explained that prior to this visit, her only impression of Coalition forces was from the U.S. military unit which came into the school while it was closed during heavy fighting in 2003 and 2004 to search for insurgents.

With the assistance of the U.S. State Department provincial reconstruction team, they are facilitating the construction of two new classrooms at al-Joulan to repair damages sustained by the school earlier in the war.



Photo By Capt. Paul L. Greenberg

Qasim Marai Awwad, the mayor of Rutbah, Iraq, and Sgt. Juan L. Pichardo of 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 8, distribute stuffed animals to children at Shahira al-Joulan Girls Primary School in western Iraq, Feb. 16, 2009.

The Rutbah citizens’ collective view of Coalition forces began to change dramatically in mid-2007, explained Qasim Marai Awwad, the mayor of Rutbah, with the assistance of an interpreter.

Awwad, who served in the Iraqi Army for 20 years and fought against the Americans in 2003, said that because of the Coalition’s work alongside Iraqi Security Forces “to separate the terrorists from the citizens” during the height of the insurgency, the city is now a safer place.

“The building projects, the school visits, these have helped to change perceptions in the minds of the Iraqi people,” said Awwad, who metaphorically described the relationship between the Americans and the Iraqis as two soldiers on a battlefield.

“If a soldier sees an enemy he has injured in battle, he can leave him to die, or he can go and help him,” stated Awwad. “The Americans have chosen to help.”

As the Coalition draws down their forces in the Al Anbar region and hands over many security responsibilities to Iraqi security forces, Awwad added a caveat that some Coalition security assistance is still vital to the success of the fledgling democracy here, which he described as a baby struggling for life.

“We can not make any development or progress without your help,” said Awwad. “Things are better than before. The people, they have freedom now.... But we need time to grow.”□



Photo By Capt. Paul L. Greenberg

Qasim Marai Awwad, the mayor of Rutbah, Iraq, and Chief Warrant Officer 3 Kevin Bedard of 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 8, speak to a classroom of students at Shahira al-Joulan Girls Primary School in western Iraq, Feb. 16, 2009. Qasim talked to the girls about the recent provincial elections which were conducted in Al Anbar province with virtually no violence. Bedard, a retired Marine who volunteered to come back onto active duty for this deployment, is a full-time high school teacher in Westbury, N.Y.

Marines embark

SGT. ELSA PORTILLO

MARINE FORCES AFRICA

ABOARD USS NASHVILLE (LPD-13) — Marines with Marine Corps Training and Advisory Group (MCTAG) left aboard the USS Nashville (LPD-13) Thursday to begin their deployment to the West Coast of Africa in support of Africa Partnership Station 2009 (APS-09).

This initiative creates an opportunity for the United States to partner with the host nation security forces and foster regional maritime safety and security.

The host nations will receive a variety of training from Marines who came from a variety of units across the U.S. but mainly from 1st Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment. This diverse group of 28 Marines and two Corpsmen will teach combat lifesaver skills, patrolling, Marine Corps Martial Arts, radio operations, and many other areas of expertise. This training is an opportunity for both the host nation and the MCTAG trainer advisors.

“I think myself along with the Marines bring a variety of experience,” said Lance Cpl. John M. Allen, advisor, MCTAG. “We all have different seniority levels, jobs and ability groups but it all groups together and brings a collaborative effort to the team. The different levels of experience can help us with our weaknesses and give us strength to accomplish our mission.”

This mission is not just the training of a few countries but it is an effort to strengthen partnerships and prevent future conflicts. The Marines understand the effect they may have and are excited to be a part of the unique experience.

“I think it’s a way for us to build camaraderie with different services other than the U.S. services,” said Sgt. Alvin F. McLean, advisor, MCTAG. “I think it’s more like a handshake between the countries. I’ve been in the Marine Corps 14 years and to have this opportunity where I can be in the fight, go on ship for the first time, and go across the ocean and help people is great.”

This deployment is a win-win situation for the Marines because they have the chance to help others and also see the world.

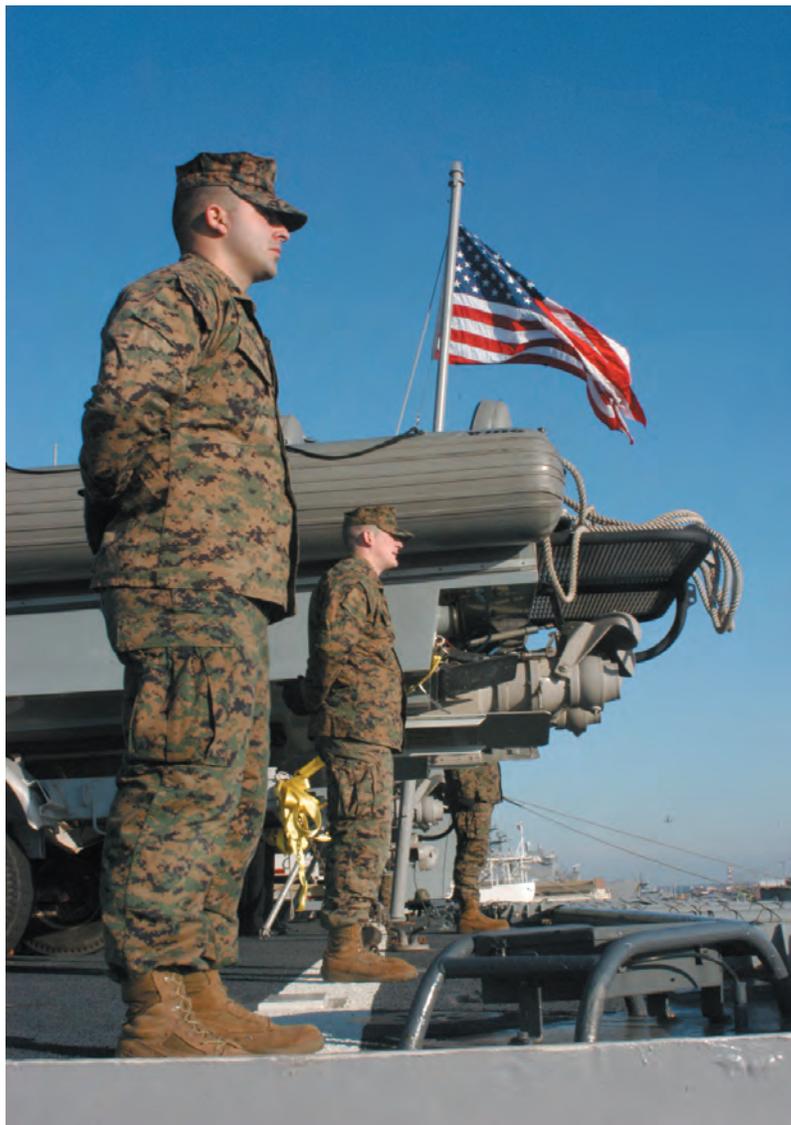


Photo By Sgt. Elsa Portillo

Cpls. Thomas L. Sahagun and Enrico Romoli participate in manning the rails alongside the Navy during the USS Nashville’s departure. Marines onboard are deploying in support of Africa Partnership Station 2009 which is a security cooperation initiative between U.S. forces and various nations in the Gulf of Guinea.

to foster partnerships



Photo By Sgt. Elsa Portillo

Cpl. Thomas Sahagun participates in manning the rails during the USS Nashville's departure. The intent of this partnership is to provide support in order to help participating nations build maritime safety and security.

"I think a lot of these countries are places that I would never go to on my own, and one of the reasons that people join the Marine Corps is to see different areas of the world," said Maj. Timothy J. Hiel, officer-in-charge of the team. "I feel it's a good opportunity to do that, and I think that being at sea and getting back to our maritime roots is a good aspect of it as well."

The training the host nations receive from the NGOs paired with the military-to-military training will give these African nations a holistic approach to building a safe and prosperous region. That is the end goal and one that everyone is happy to be participating in.

"Every time I've done this in the past I've always come out with new relationships, new friends," said Hiel. "I've always enjoyed it. I think the big thing is that you can learn things from these guys as well as teach things. I expect to come back a better rounded Marine. I think all these Marines will." □

I think a lot of these countries are places that I would never go to on my own, and one of the reasons that people join the Marine Corps is to see different areas of the world...

Maj. Timothy J. Hiel,
officer-in-charge of APS 2009

Marines train next generation

CAPT. PAUL L. GREENBERG
MARINE FORCES RESERVE

CAMP KOREAN VILLAGE, Iraq - The Marines of Company E, 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 8, based in Harrisburg, Pa., conducted the last mission of their 7-month tour in Iraq Feb. 23, 2009.

The Reserve Marines spent the day teaching actions on enemy contact and fire and movement techniques to a company of young Iraqi soldiers at H3 airfield, which is home to the 3rd Battalion, 29th Brigade, 7th Iraqi Army Division.

The Iraqi soldiers watched as the Marines modeled the movement techniques, shouting verbal commands, and rushing across the terrain with classic Marine Corps enthusiasm.

When it was the Iraqis' turn, they executed with equal motivation and skill.

"They're going to be one-hundred percent good," said Capt. Salem Mahmud Ahmed, the Iraqi company commander, brimming with pride as his soldiers practiced bounding forward across the lunar-like surface, advancing toward a notional enemy.

The soldiers, mostly ranging in age from 17-23, recently completed a two-month boot camp and are still learning the fundamentals of infantry tactics, said Ahmed.

Most of their daily routine consists of physical training, patrolling, land navigation and weapons function and maintenance.

Ahmed, who has spent 16 of his 40 years in the Iraqi Army, explained that even though their AK-47 rifles are older than many of the troops who carry them, this new generation of soldiers has both the training and resolve to maintain security in this remote region of western Al Anbar province.

"It's amazing. The squad leaders are doing their jobs and the soldiers are responding to their leadership. It shows we've accomplished a lot here," said Sgt. Gerson Duran, the Company E police sergeant.

Duran, who is on his third tour in Iraq, explained that the training was also excellent experience for the junior Marines in his company



Photo By Capt. Paul L. Greenberg

On a sunny Sunday morning at H3 Airfield in Iraq's western Al Anbar province, Staff Sgt. Timothy Wenrich, the 3rd Platoon sergeant for Company E, 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, teaches Iraqi soldiers from the 3rd Battalion, 29th Brigade, 7th Iraqi Army Division infantry fire and movement techniques, Feb. 23, 2009.

who are not only learning how to teach, but are also forming friendships with their Iraqi counterparts.

"The courage and commitment I've seen in these guys over the past months, it's amazing," said Duran. "They deserve a lot of credit."

Overseeing all the training was Staff Sgt. James Gray, an active duty Marine artilleryman with Military Transition Team 3-29. Gray and his team have lived and worked with the Iraqis for the past three months. They invited the troops from Company E to come out to H3 to provide the Iraqi troops with a different perspective on training.

"They [Company E Marines] are an outside source," explained Gray. "They are infantrymen. This is their job, their area of expertise. Also, it's another angle of influence; a different methodology. This way, the Iraqis can choose what works best for them." □

Marines maintain morale through competition



Photo By Capt. Paul L. Greenberg

Lance Cpl. Eric Rondeau, a rifleman with Company G, 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, participates in a company shooting competition at Combat Outpost Akashat in western al-Anbar province Jan. 4. The company uses a variety of athletic and skill competitions to maintain readiness and morale.

CAPT. PAUL L. GREENBERG
MARINE FORCES RESERVE

COMBAT OUTPOST AKASHAT, IRAQ — The train rarely comes to Akashat anymore, but Marines from Company G, 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 5, are inhabiting the once-bustling terminal. Company G’s mission is to maintain the security and stability of Akashat and the surrounding area, and to guide the Iraqis along the path to self-government, according to Maj. John Fitzsimmons, commanding officer, Co. G.

Whenever they aren’t conducting security patrols, scouring the desert for weapons caches, performing maintenance on vehicles or attending key leader engagements with the local city council, the Marines at this outpost keep busy with competitions.

A rifle competition was held Dec. 25, 2008 – Jan. 7, organized in part by Staff Sgt. John Tacopino, the platoon sergeant for 1st Platoon. As the platoon sergeant, Tacopino is in charge of the morale, discipline and patrol schedules for his young team of Marines and sailors.

In spite of his heavy workload, Tacopino said that facilitating the shooting competition was a labor of love for him. Tacopino’s experience with marksmanship, as a graduate of the Marine Corps’ Combat Marksmanship Program Instructor Course, made him the ideal organizer for the event.

Contest participants fired their M-4 or M-16 service rifles from both stationary and moving positions, from distances of five to 50 meters. The targets were small

circles, squares, diamonds and triangles taped to a standard silhouette target. Water bottle caps also demanded precise aim and marksmanship from the five-yard line.

The “rifle range” was designed by the battalion gunner to create a venue for sustainment training to keep the Marines’ combat skills honed.

Lance Cpl. Eric Rondeau, a Co. G rifleman, won the rifle competition for the company.

“It’s a boost for the morale, big time,” said Rondeau. “Being reservists, we don’t get this kind of training that often back home. When you’re out here practicing, you just keep getting better.”

In addition to the shooting match, Tacopino has organized an ongoing fast-pitch wiffle ball tournament with 12 teams from the company. The Marines used 1st Platoon’s staging area, which had served as a train station courtyard in earlier times, for the wiffle ball playing field. Games are held as the operational schedule allows, with one or two games a week in the afternoons, after the Marines finish their daily work routine.

“These events were originally designed specifically to be done during the holiday season to keep the morale at a constant level and take the Marines minds away from missing their families at that time of year,” said Fitzsimmons. “As operational tempo allows, we do this as much as possible.

“Competition builds camaraderie and battles complacency,” Fitzsimmons added. “Even with strategic overwatch of Iraqi forces as Coalition Forces cease unilateral operations, we are still in a combat environment, and we have to remain vigilant.” □

APS pairs Senegalese



Photo By Sgt Elsa Portillo

Senegalese forces wrap up their last day of seminars with some practical application on Military Operations in Urban Terrain. This was just one topic the U.S. Marines addressed while at Thies Military Reserve Thies, Senegal. The initiative is intended to create good international relations and promote maritime safety and stability for the West coast of Africa.

SGT. ELSA PORTILLO

MARINE FORCES AFRICA

THEIS MILITARY RESERVE, Senegal - Gunfire, hip throws, and Military Operations in Urban Terrain were on the agenda for the last few days of seminars at the Thies Military Reserve in Thies, Senegal. Marine Advisor Team partnered with Senegalese Special Forces in an initiative allowing the exchange of techniques in order to promote an environment where host nations can build upon their maritime safety and security measures.

This is the second year for APS, and both the Senegalese and U.S. forces intend to continue this partnership in the hopes of building a continuous learning environment and to foster good international relations.

“It was a good experience for us,” said Maj. Souleymane Kande, coordinator, Senegalese Special Forces. “They took this opportunity to improve their experience by practicing the knowledge that they had before this exercise.”

All the courses were greatly appreciated by the Senegalese soldiers, and though there may have been favorites, all the classes gave host nation forces something for the future.

One course that made an immediate impression was the marksmanship course. It gave the soldiers an understanding of proper form, and the range portion of the course gave them hands-on experience.

Many of these soldiers have already seen combat in the Southern region of their country, in the Congo or the Ivory Coast, according to Lt. Dame Ka, platoon leader, Senegalese Special Forces. The proper implementation of a technique is very important since the host nation forces may not have many chances to practice before they are once again in a combat situation.

“All the things we are doing as military are so we can knock out the enemy,” said Sgt. Abdoulaye Cisse, Senegalese Special Forces. “So, we need to be perfect in shooting.”

According to Sgt. Alvin F. McLean, advisor, MAT, the language barrier was a challenge, but one that could be overcome. He learned that through

Special Forces and Marines



Photo By Sgt Elsa Portillo

The Senegalese Special Forces listen as Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Richardson, advisor, Marine Advisor Team, Africa Partnership Station 2009, Marine Forces Africa, explains non-lethal weapons tactics. This is just one of many seminars conducted by U.S. Marines at Thies Military Reserve Thies, Senegal. Senegal is the first of six countries the U.S. Marines will visit in support of APS-09, an initiative to partner with host nation security forces and foster regional maritime safety and security

practical application students effectively learned the techniques. The translators also played a big role in helping out and were essential to the learning environment.

The level of interaction needed to successfully accomplish this mission was high. Because of that, both forces walked away with new friends, memories and a cultural understanding.

“If you have seen the reaction of the Senegalese soldier towards their American peers, they have a kind of cohesion that has formed from the relationship they have developed.” said Lt. Col. Cheikh A. Thioune, military region commander.

The culmination for both sides came February 9 during

the graduation ceremony. Approximately 150 soldiers received certificates of completion. The U.S. Marines and the Senegalese Special Forces came together with sodas and snacks before parting ways. This may have been the last day these particular service members may see one another but it will not be the last time these two services interact. □

Snipers keep a watchful eye on Rutbah

CAPT. PAUL L. GREENBERG
MARINE FORCES RESERVE

RUTHBAH, IRAQ -- From a rooftop in Rutbah, Iraq, Lance Cpl. Peter Palma (left) and Sgt. Timothy Ledwith, Reserve Marine scout-snipers with Headquarters and Service Company 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, provide overwatch of a compound where senior Coalition and Iraqi leaders conduct a regional security meeting in Rutbah, Iraq Jan. 18 in preparation for the Iraqi provincial elections Jan. 31. Palma, is a 28-year-old plumber from Valley Forge, Pa. Ledwith, 35, is a firefighter from of Lynbrook, N.Y.

The city of Rutbah, with a population of about 20,000, is the largest population center in Rutbah district, covering about 4,000 square miles of desert, interspersed with towns and Bedouin camps along the Jordanian and Syrian borders. This is the third regional security meeting facilitated by the leadership of 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment over the past two months.

Second Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment is a Marine Forces Reserve unit headquartered in Garden City, N.Y. The battalion mobilized in May 2008 for pre-deployment training at Twentynine Palms, Calif. The Marines and sailors of 2/25 arrived in Iraq in September for a scheduled 7-month tour of duty. This is the battalion's third mobilization since 2002 and the second deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. □



Photo By Sgt. Timothy Ledwith

Reserve Marine scout-snipers with Headquarters and Service Company 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment provide "guardian angel" security for key Coalition and Iraqi leaders during a regional security meeting in Rutbah, Iraq Jan. 18.



Photo By Lance Cpl. Gregory Seufert

Reserve Marine scout-snipers with Headquarters and Service Company 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment provide "guardian angel" security for key Coalition and Iraqi leaders during a regional security meeting in Rutbah, Iraq Jan. 18.

Marines change perceptions in Al-Anbar

CAPT. PAUL L. GREENBERG
MARINE FORCES RESERVE

COMBAT OUTPOST AKASHAT, Iraq— Marines and sailors from Company G, 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 8 teamed up with Iraqi Police Jan. 14 to give students something to look forward to after finishing their annual standardized tests at Akashat Primary School Jan. 14.

Sgt. Joseph Zuza, the operations chief for Company G's police transition team, took the lead on gathering up and transporting about 20 boxes of children's winter clothing, stuffed animals, soccer balls, candy and other snacks sent to the Marines of 2/25 by family, friends and patriotic organizations back home in the States.

Zuza has been working almost daily with the officers from the Akashat Police Station to help them become a more professional security force that is also an integral part of the local community.

To this end, Zuza and his team went to the school with the Iraqi police officers to give the police the opportunity to distribute the supplies to the students.

"This was great," said Zuza. "I think it gave them a new face in the community. In many parts of rural Iraq, all the people know of police authority is the brutality they saw under the Saddam Hussein regime. These guys are fresh and have a progressive attitude. This gave them a chance to show their human side and let the people know that they're here to help; not to be an oppressive authority figure."

Working with U.S. government-contracted international police advisors here, the Marines also urged the police to venture into other nearby towns and desert settlements to meet the citizens and let them know that the new mission of the Iraqi police is to protect and serve.

"We focused them on community policing, getting to know the people on the streets to see if they have problems," said Zuza. "They have now developed a rapport.... Overall, it's been a great success. The IPs (Iraqi Police) have a long road ahead, but they've made leaps and bounds in their ability to do their job well. Hopefully after we leave, they will continue on that track."

1st Lt. Khamis Jamal Hamid, the Akashat deputy police chief, coordinated with the school principal to visit the

local primary school.

"There is great value to what we did on this operation today," said Hamid through interpretation. "It was a community melt. Before, the kids would think, 'Yeah, there goes the IPs.' Now, we have developed a more positive relationship."

Hamid explained that although he and his officers handed out most of the items to the students, the children realized that Coalition Forces brought these presents to help alleviate the suffering in this impoverished region.

More than 200 stuffed animals which the Marines distributed Jan. 14 were sent to Iraq by private citizens from all over America who made their donations through Beanies for Baghdad.

The event was also a morale boost for the Marines and sailors who accompanied the police to the school, according to Petty Officer 2nd Class Jonathan Hancock, a U.S. Navy Reservist.

"Years down the road, when these guys look back on their time in Iraq, this is the kind of thing they'll remember, and think, 'I really did something positive there,'" said Hancock. □



Photo By Capt. Paul L. Greenberg

1st Lt. Khamis Jamal Hamid, deputy police chief of the Akashat, Iraq police station, gives a fleece scarf and gloves to a student at the town's primary school Jan. 14. Along with the Marines and sailors of 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, Hamid and his officers distributed about 20 boxes of clothing, toys and other items to more than 300 students.

Renaissance Marine artist

CAPT. PAUL L. GREENBERG

MARINE FORCES RESERVE

COMBAT OUTPOST AKASHAT, Iraq— Before the sun rises over the al-Anbar desert, Lance Cpl. Roberto Reid is up and moving in the chow hall at Combat Outpost Akashat, an austere base of operations for a detachment of Marines from 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 5.

“When the Marines know I’m on the grill making omelets for breakfast, the line is out the door and into the parking lot,” said Reid, 30, a food service specialist with the battalion’s Headquarters and Service Company.

As a sous chef at a fine dining establishment in New York City’s Upper East Side and graphic artist in his civilian life, Reid joined the Marine Forces Reserve at the age of 27 to add an element of diversity to his already dynamic career in one of the world’s most metropolitan cities.

“The best thing about being in the Marine Corps is meeting people from so many different walks of life, and sharing the bond of Marine brotherhood,” said Reid. “A lot of people in my family were in the Army, but I wanted to be different. I wanted to be a Marine.”

Reid’s gourmet breakfasts and dinners are greatly appreciated by the troops at this Spartan outpost, set in a lunar-like vista about 30 kilometers from the country’s border with Syria.

“Considering the resources he has been given, Reid has definitely made the best of it,” said Petty Officer 1st Class Robert Persaud, 36, a corpsman with Scout-Sniper Platoon, H&S Co., from New York City. “He’s always upbeat about everything he does and a real self-starter. He’s performing the duties of a staff (non-commissioned officer), and he’s doing an awesome job.”

Persaud, on his third deployment serving the Marines medical needs, explained that Reid’s cooking is the best he has seen in more than 18 months at forwarding operating bases in Iraq since 2005. Persaud, a paramedic with the Fire Department of New York in his civilian career, said that his favorite meal at COP Akashat is the steak that Reid steams and then grills medium rare.

Despite his junior rank, Reid is the only food service specialist at the chow hall, supervising more senior Marines who are on temporary mess hall duty. Using innovative recipes and cooking techniques, he has does his best with the limited diversity of staple foods sent in on convoys

from larger bases many miles away.

Some of Reid’s specialties include shrimp scampi, roast chicken and oriental stir fry. He also spiced up the cold cut lunches at the COP by firing up the grill to make ham and cheese melts and pita sandwiches, like you might find in a New York City deli.



Lance Cpl. Roberto Reid, right, a Reserve Marine and food service specialist with 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment at Combat Outpost Akashat in Iraq’s western al-Anbar Province, serves grilled sandwiches to his fellow Marines at the chow hall Jan. 7. In spite of limited resources at this remote outpost, Reid, who works as a chef in New York City in his civilian career, has striven to create a healthy, quality daily menu for the troops based here.

“My attitude about life here is ‘adapt and overcome.’ This is a place where you’re constantly presented with new challenges,” Reid said. “If the burners go down, it doesn’t matter — there are still Marines to be fed. The last time the burners in the kitchen were down, we chopped palettes of wood and cooked with a skillet over an open fire.”

Not only has Reid enhanced the quality of life for the Marines at COP Akashat, he has also, on his own personal initiative, facilitated the shipment of food staples to even more remote Coalition outposts, such as the Marine contingent at Border Fort 9 on Iraq’s border with Syria.

“He’s truly a great Marine,” said Gunnery Sgt. Maximillian Vernon, 38, of Lemoore, Calif., the training chief for Border Transition Team 4222. “As a junior guy, he figured out a way to work with supply headquarters from

in kitchen and at easel

larger bases to get the troops out here good quality chow. We are directly benefiting from his knowledge, experience and his commitment to his fellow Marines.”

The ironic part of Reid’s success as a cook in Iraq is that from the time he graduated from the U.S. Army Food Service School in Ft. Lee, Va., in 2005, to when he arrived

for graphic arts and drawing have always been at the forefront of his life.

“My mom told me that with most kids, if you give them a toy, it keeps them quiet,” Reid said. “Whenever she gave me some paper and a pen, that was what kept me quiet.”

A 2002 graduate of the Hyogo School of Design in Japan, Reid works out of his home as a free-lance graphic artist, creating promotional products for large clothing and sporting goods companies. The companies sometimes fly him around the country for assignments at expositions and other events.

In the evenings, and on his one day off work each week, he spends most of his time splashing his brush into watercolors and cleaning it off in a container made from a water bottle which he cut off at the top. He has produced more than 20 pieces over the past three months, and is currently finishing a watercolor landscape of the sun setting over the Akashat Train Station.

“To the outsider, my life is like a contradictory canvas as an artist and a Marine,” said Reid. “My friends back home can’t see me out here, like a fish out of water. That was how I felt when I first got here to Iraq—I was frustrated not having any art supplies around.”

After another Marine saw some of Reid’s sketches in early October, he was so impressed that the friend contacted family back home. Several weeks later, Reid received a shipment of watercolor paint, brushes and canvas. Later, he received additional supplies from USMC Angels, a non-profit organization which sends comfort items to Marines deployed overseas in support of the Global War on Terror.

Using the supplies sent by the people back home, Reid has set up a make-shift studio in the room he shares with several other Marines. He mounts the canvas to the wall next to his bed, and covers the mattress with a poncho as a drop cloth.

“As soon as I got my art supplies, I got to working,” said Reid. “This is a great landscape here. Most people just see open desert, but we have the best sunrises and sunsets.

“Fresh air, the stars, the moon, the array of colors, the sunrise here gives me a moment of peace,” Reid continued. “I’m always up for sunrise, and that’s why I don’t mind being in the kitchen early.” □



Photos By Paul L. Greenberg

Lance Cpl. Roberto Reid, a linguist, chef, graphic artist and painter from New York City, paints a watercolor landscape of the Akashat Train Station at sunrise during his day off from working in the kitchen at Combat Outpost Akashat Jan. 8. Reid, a food service specialist with 2nd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 5, joined Marine Forces Reserve in 2005 at the age of 27. This is his first tour in Iraq.

at Akashat in late September 2008, he had not cooked one time in the Marine Corps.

“When I checked into H&S Company in Garden City (N.Y.), they found that I knew Spanish, Japanese, French and Arabic, so they moved me into the (intelligence section),” said Reid.

When not mobilized, Reserve Marines typically attend drills one weekend a month and extended annual summer training. The remainder of the time, they have normal civilian lives and careers. Reid worked as an intelligence analyst during his weekend drills. While on deployment during annual training in Senegal in 2007, he served as a translator, speaking French and Wolof with his Senegalese counterparts.

In addition to being a linguist and a chef, Reid’s passion

U.S. Service Members soldiers,



Photo By Sgt. Elsa Portillo

Privates Julius Sanmah, Mark Wahn, Momo Kaifak and Swaray Kafumba, soldiers with the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) and U.S. Marine Cpls. Michael Tormos and Sean Castaneda, advisors with Marine Advisor Team, Africa Partnership Station (APS) Nashville, unload boxes of school supplies for the United Methodist School System. This donation will reach roughly, 1,000 - 2,000 school children in need. Nashville is focused on supporting the APS strategy in West and Central Africa.

“They are very motivated and the citizens and soldiers are very receptive to what we are doing...”

SSgt. Gary L. Morris,
Liberian Security Sector Reform
(SSR) advisor

SGT. ELSA PORTILLO
MARINE FORCES AFRICA

MONROVIA, Liberia - Marines with the Marine Advisor Team (MAT) in support of Africa Partnership Station (APS) Nashville arrived in Liberia Feb. 16 to begin a nearly month-long partnership with the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) at Edward Binyah Kesselly Base (EBK).

These Marines will be working in a unique environment which brings together a mixture of expertise and services. Currently, there are service members from the U.S. Army, Marine Corps and Navy, along with contractors from DynCorp International and Pacific Architects and Engineers (PAE) joining members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in assisting Liberia in rebuilding its army.

The army was demobilized in 1999, creating the need for recruitment and training of a new fighting force. The new army

join with Liberian for rebuilding

would come from all regions of Liberia, ensuring a fair representation of all its residents.

Currently, the AFL is 2,000 strong and includes approximately 70 women. The soldiers begin their recruit training at Barclay Training Center (BTC) in Monrovia, Liberia. DynCorp International is responsible for their basic training at BTC and additional entry-level training at Camp Ware. Once the recruits graduate, they move on to their military occupational specialty (MOS) schools, taught by PAE and located at EBK.

In conjunction with their MOS training, U.S. Africa Command sent a Military Mentor Team (MMT), consisting of U.S. Marine Corps, Army and Navy personnel, to mentor and advise the AFL under the Liberian Security Sector Reform (SSR) program.

Africa Partnership Station Nashville is also involved in the advising process, focusing on sharing leadership traditions, non-lethal tactics, logistics, combat lifesaver's skills, and Marine Corps Martial Arts Program. The non-commissioned officer corps is one that needs to be developed in a young and new army, and this is the mission for the Marines here with APS.

According to SSgt. Jeffrey Richardson, advisor, MAT, the

main focus of the exchange of ideas will focus on leadership skills. In turn, the intent is to create an environment where this new fighting force will continue to train itself and any new service members.

The Liberian soldiers are excited to be part of their nation's new beginning and also to learn new skills from all these counterparts.

"I'm very happy, and I think this training will make us more efficient in military life," said Pvt. Thomas Kruahmie, AFL. "I am very happy for the Marines coming. Personally, I'm learning something that will benefit me tomorrow."

This enthusiasm can be seen all around the base from the soldiers, said SSgt. Gary L. Morris, SSR advisor.

"I think this far outweighs my previous deployments overseas," said SSgt. Gary L. Morris, SSR advisor. "I think it's a great thing we're doing. They want us here. They are very motivated and the citizens and soldiers are very receptive to what we are doing. I've been mentoring them and they pick my brain 24/7. It's been fun. We're having a good time and I think it's a positive impact."

To learn more about Africa Partnership Station and its mission, visit the APS website at http://www.c6f.navy.mil/aps_web/index.htm. □

U.S. Marine Sgt. Jeremy Grieb, advisor with Marine Advisor Team (MAT), leads a classroom discussion concerning leadership traits. The U.S. Marines are in Liberia partnering with the soldiers of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) as part of Africa Partnership Station (APS) Nashville. APS is an international initiative which aims to work cooperatively with U. S. and international partners to improve maritime safety and security on the African continent.



Photo By Sgt. Elsa Portillo

Avoid problems before they happen: a “how-to” for Guard and Reserve members

By: MAJ Elaine M. Gullotta

A Cpl from Marine Forces Reserve remembered hearing a briefing about Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) but he wasn't thinking about mobilizing just then. Besides, he thought the law only applied to large businesses, not the small family run bread bakery that he worked for. When his unit was alerted, he knew his employer wouldn't be happy about it; so he didn't tell him until two weeks before he left for his deployment. His employer was mad, not only because he was leaving, but because there was no time to hire a replacement. When Johnson returned from mobilization he didn't even try to go back to the bread bakery and was out of work for a long time.

A Sailor saw the layoffs happening in his construction company and figured it was just a matter of time before it happened to him too. To avoid a layoff, he volunteered to deploy with a unit that was going to Iraq thinking he would be safe for a year and that his company would have to rehire him once he got back. Upon return he learned that the law was not on his side; he felt betrayed and confused and blamed ESGR for not helping him.

Both of these scenarios are typical of the cases reported to ESGR. “If we could eliminate just one of these misunderstandings the number of cases reported to ESGR would be significantly reduced,” said Curtis Bell, Director Ombudsman, National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (NCESGR). Members of the Reserve Components

must understand the law and how it applies to them. Only then can they protect themselves from potential problems.

Reserve personnel must provide notice to their employers in advance of their deployment. ESGR recommends that the notice be provided “in writing” and if at all possible at least 30 days in advance of the deployment. To assist service members with this task, ESGR posted a sample Deployment Notification Letter and Military Leave of Absence Form on www.ESGR.mil under the resources section. Service members complete the blanks and provide the completed documents to their employer. These documents provide the employers with need to know information, to include ESGR contact information. The Notification Letter also functions as a tool to start the sometimes difficult communication process between the military employees and their employers. Typically, it is a lack of open communication especially in the initial stages that leads to late notifications and increased friction between military member and employer. “The employer may be angry that the member is leaving; but waiting to tell the employer only makes things worse,” Bell says. “By starting the process early and by providing timely written notification, the military member can reduce the chances for problems later on.” Both documents also provide employers a resource should they have USERRA related questions. It's important that the service member and the employer sign and retain a copy of these documents should the need arise to substantiate facts at a later date.

Despite the recent economic situation, service members must know that they are not protected against economic problems and resulting effects. If a company conducts lay-offs, closes a branch, or goes bankrupt, service members may lose their job as a result. USERRA does not protect service members from this type of job loss. Conversely, employers must ensure that their decision to lay-off the employee is not solely based the employee's association with the military.

Equally, service members must consider the impact on their employer when volunteering for military duty. Unit commanders should monitor for repeated or frequent requests to volunteer for military duty. Eventually the service member will return to their civilian employment and should therefore strive to maintain a positive relationship with their employer. Commanders may consider requiring their troops to provide their employers with timely notification documents. As such, military members would comply with the advanced notification rule and the military unit would have the added benefit of conducting positive employer outreach.

A Department of Defense (DoD) organization based in Washington, D.C., NCESGR encourages military members to create "win-win situations." Service members should consider their employers as a strategic partner who supports their efforts to serve our nation. One effective way to bring employers into the partnership is to encourage them to sign an ESGR "Statement of Support." Another way would be to link the company or business website to the ESGR site. This link would then provide company management

and supervisors with easy access to the employer resources offered and to ensure their company is in compliance with the law. These two very easy steps let the employer know they are doing their part in support of the nation by supporting their military employees. .

The mission of Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve is to develop and promote a culture in which all American employers support and value the military service of their employees. ESGR does so by recognizing outstanding employer support, increasing awareness of USERRA and by resolving conflict through mediation.

One of the objectives to support the ESGR mission is through employer recognition programs such as the Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award. This annual award is the U.S. Government's highest recognition given to employers who provide outstanding support to their employees who serve in the National Guard and Reserve Forces.

For additional assistance with employer-related questions relating to ESGR or USERRA, visit Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) at www.esgr.mil, or call 1-800-336-4590.

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All names and locations referenced in this story are based solely on data collected from the ESGR call center. No real individual names or scenarios were used.



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