Around the Corps in Brief

Café connects deployed Marines to home

CAMP AL ASAD, Iraq — A new Internet café and phone bank opened April 1, giving Marines here a chance to call and e-mail home.

The camp, where the improvements to the Morale, Welfare and Recreation facilities were completed, is home to Regimental Combat Team 7.

The Internet café Marines inherited from the Army was closed for about two weeks to be moved to a new location on the sprawling base shared with 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing. The only option the Marines had was to travel to other end of the base to use the MAW's facilities.

The difference in the upgrades from what was available when Marines first arrived until now is staggering, according to Sgt. Christopher R. Blosser, the tactical data network chief who helped set up the new café.

"With the ... new satellite system you only have to pay 4.7 cents a minute," said Blosser. "The (old) phones are 35 cents a minute, plus the walk."

Corporal Nicholas Dunn, a computer technician for the regiment's Headquarters Company, praised the new facility. He said the new system is fast and easy to use.

Dunn explained that the first part of getting the new café was installing the new hardware. The second part was tougher: finding the personnel to run the café. Most of the Marines are strapped with daily duties that offer little spare time.

"The café has been running for a while now," Dunn said. "It's just taken sometime to get people to man it."

Reservist re-enlists 9,000 feet above land

MCB HAWAII, Kaneohe Bay – When Marines re-enlist, that day should be just as memorable — or more so — as the first day they signed up. Sergeant Richard T. Therriault, a communicator with 4th Force Reconnaissance Company, decided there couldn't be a better way than by free falling from 9,000 feet above the earth.

Therriault, who has been a Marine for eight years, said he originally joined the Corps for similarly memorable and adventurous challenges.

"I came to visit my brother who was with the Hawaii Navy, and I absolutely loved it [in Hawaii]," he said. "I moved out here, and now it will be ten years in September."

Therriault said his father was in the Marine Corps and completed a tour in Vietnam. Therriault realized he didn't want to join any other branch and joined the Marine Corps Reserve in Hawaii.

His job area of choice was reconnaissance.

"All through high school, I thought really highly of reconnaissance," Therriault explained. "I wanted to go to college, and the more I thought about it, the better option [recon] seemed to be."

The re-enlistment jump for Therriault marked the 31st free fall in his career. Piggy-backing on periodic training, he went up with six others who were more than happy to share the moment.

Karate instructor shares knowledge with Iwakuni students

MCAS IWAKUNI, Japan — Station residents and members of the Iwakuni community received world-class karate instruction and participated in the first Japanese/American Friendship Martial Arts tournament at the IronWorks Gym March 26-27.

Martial Arts Hall of Fame member and former Marine, Howard Jackson led a seminar on "closing the gap" with opponents, which is when a fighter moves toward an opponent before attempting to strike and score a point in semi-contact competition karate.

Step by step, Jackson showed participants keys to success in competition karate. He said winning tournaments is not about fancy kicks but rather about perfecting the basics.

On the second day, Benton's students along with Station residents and Japanese locals participated in the first ever Friendship Martial Arts Tournament.

Jackson attended the event as a special guest and took time to help judge the event.

Fighters scored two points by landing a kick to the opponent's head and one point for hitting the midsection. Fighters were allowed to use punches, however only kicks were scored and participants wore padded sparring gear to prevent injuries.

Jackson, who served in the Corps from 1970-1973, is a world champion fighter in karate and kickboxing and currently works as a personal protection officer of karate champion and actor Chuck Norris, star of the hit television show, "Walker: Texas Ranger."

Exercise Rolling Thunder rolls through

MCAS IWAKUNI, Japan — Station residents heard the alert message, "Exercise! Exercise! Exercise!" periodically March 25-26. The message reminded all personnel here that Exercise Rolling Thunder was in full-effect.

The exercise was comprised of simulations of security breaches, bomb threats, hostage situations, suspicious packages and coordination with agencies outside of the gates. The drills conducted were a success, according exercises coordinators.

Some of the highlights included a drill that included a security breach at the main gate of the station. A supposed terrorist tried to enter the station with a fake identification card.

Another drill took place in front of Building One when a suspicious looking truck was parked in front. Somebody noticed the truck and then called the Provost Marshal's Office. The truck was stocked with barrels full of explosives in its camper.

At the home of Col. Dave Darrah, station commanding officer, a hostage situation erupted. The hostage was Darrah's wife, Kristi. A terrorist broke into the commanding officer's home and held Kristi at gunpoint.

The second day of the exercise was to prepare the station for a natural disaster.

A 6.0 earthquake rendered the Freedom Bridge unusable and caused one of the mid-rises on Monzen to collapse. There were simulation of casualties and deaths.

Emergency personnel were tested on how fast and less problematic the natural disaster could be handled. Emergency personnel included the station fire department, PMO, and personnel from the Branch Medical Clinic.

A horse of a different color guard ...

Sgt. Ryan Smith

MCLB BARSTOW, Calif. -- The Marine Corps Mounted Color Guard from Marine Corps Logistics Base Barstow, Calif., presents the colors at the Headquarters and Service Battalion sergeants major relief and appointment ceremony. During the ceremony, Sgt. Maj. Armando Escobedo took over as H&S Bn.'s senior enlisted Marine, relieving Sgt. Maj. Annanias Rose, who retired from the Marine Corps during the same ceremony after 30 years of service to the Corps. Barstow's color guard is the only mounted color guard in the Marine Corps.

Deployed Marines rake in extra dollars

CAMP TAQADDUM, Iraq — Marines deployed to Iraq who are blue from desert life can find consolation in knowing there is some tax-free green accumulating in their bank accounts.

With the recent deployment of the I Marine Expeditionary Force to Iraq, Marines and sailors are raking in more dough than they would in the states, due to various entitlements added onto their basic pay.

The icing on the cake is the fact that pay earned here is not taxed because Iraq is a combat zone.

While in Iraq, Marines are entitled to imminent danger pay, an extra $225 per month for being dispatched to a designated combat zone. Also, troops rate extra pay for serving in a hardship duty station. The bonus varies location to location; those in Iraq are receiving $100 a month.

Marines with dependents receive even more entitlements. Family separations pay puts an extra $250 a month into their wallets. The entitlements for imminent danger, family separations and hardship duty were increased April 2003.

Those who chose to live off base in the states also continue to receive their basic allowance for housing while deployed.

The Savings Deposit Program allows deployed Marines to pool up to $10,000 into an account that gains ten percent interest per year.

Those who choose to take advantage of the program can leave money in the account to accumulate interest for up to three months after a deployment. Interest earned is taxable, however.

Exhibit opens at San Diego museum

MCRD SAN DIEGO — Officials at the Depot's command museum, James L. Day Hall and the MCRD San Diego Historical Society celebrated the opening of the Iraqi Freedom exhibit here March 19.

The exhibit displays uniforms, weaponry, enemy equipment and maps of some of the areas where Marines fought battles.

It features a giant-sized photo album that chronicles the war from deployment stages to the capture of Saddam Hussein. The exhibit also includes combat artwork from Sgt. Jack Carrillo, a combat illustrator here.

The new exhibit is significant for two reasons, according to Barbara S. McCurtis, museum director. The first is that it is an on-going exhibit, meaning more artifacts from Operation Iraqi Freedom are constantly being offered to the museum. The second thing is, unlike other exhibits, the artifacts are coming in straight from the battlefield.

Some of the Marines and sailors who brought back artifacts from Iraq are currently stationed aboard the Depot.

"I thought it was important to share and help others learn," said Chief Petty Officer Robert E. Franzwa, independent duty corpsman, Branch Medical Clinic, about his part in bringing artifacts to the museum.

With recruits passing through the halls of the museum on training day 20, the exhibit will show them the Corps' present is as important and celebrated as its past.

Group liaison between military, locals

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq — Marines from the 1st Marine Division aren't the only ones getting their boots dirty these days in Iraq. Marines from the 3rd Civil Affairs Group are engaged throughout the I Marine Expeditionary Force's area of operations here conducting humanitarian operations in the area known for its resistance to the coalition.

The activated reserve unit, headquartered at Camp Pendleton, Calif., acts as the liaison between the U.S.'s military presence and the local Iraqi government. This enables them to assist in the stabilization and reconstruction of Iraq.

"CAG is human relations," said Sgt. Adrian Ambe, a 3rd CAG operations assistant. "You have to go out and be with the (local Iraqis) to feel their challenges and to understand their world. Then we know how best to restore their communities."

I MEF recently assumed authority of the western area of operation from the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division. To complete their mission, six-man tactical teams are positioned with Marine infantry units throughout the area.

According to Lt. Col. Frank Ricapito, the CAG deputy commander, by coordinating with local officials, the tactical teams have first-hand knowledge of the deficiencies that need to be resolved in Iraqi communities.

The end results, according to Ricapito, are better school systems, businesses to employ Iraqis and medical supplies for the Iraqi populace. The bulk of the approximately 180-member unit is in Iraq, but liaisons are also in Kuwait and Jordan.

Marines pay millions for contracts with companies

CAMP TAQADDUM, Iraq — Marines in Iraq recently signed almost $10 million in contracts helping to employ local workers while reducing their own footprint in a country they hope to one day return to its feet.

The contracts, including the more than 30 valued at $2 million picked up by the 1st Force Service Support Group here, pay for Iraqis and third-country nationals to perform various jobs such as construction, trucking, food service, fuel and water delivery and even filling sandbags.

The agreements, which were passed on to the Marines from the Army on March 1, 2004, are set up to alleviate the workload of troops here, said Maj. Kenneth L. Crabtree, 33, the 1st FSSG's comptroller.

The Marines did away with the Army's practice of signing agreements that required renegotiation at the end of every month. Instead, the Marine Corps is signing contracts lasting up to six months, said Crabtree.

The guaranteed work helps foster a good relationship between the local workers and the military, he said. Additionally, several vendors have lowered their prices due to the lengthy deals.

In an effort to ensure money and work brought to the Iraqi economy are distributed evenly, the Marine Corps is also attempting to use a contractor only once.

Spreading the work between multiple companies allows more Iraqi people the opportunity for employment and discourages one company from dominating the market, said Crabtree.

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'We're here to help' ...

Staff Sgt. Timothy S. Edwards

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- Lance Cpl. Derek C. Schwartz, a forward observer with Weapons Company, 3rd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, provides security for more than 6,000 demonstrators March 7. According to Cpl. Jeremy S. Lewis, a squad leader with Weapons Company, the Haitian people would help as they saw the Marines trying to direct the people from between the vehicles. 'As we give signals for them to move away from the vehicles, a lot of the time the Haitian people would help,' he explained. 'They would pull others back or block them from going between vehicles. They really did more than we did. A lot of these people understand we are here to help.'