



MARINE AIR GROUND TASK FORCE TRAINING COMMAND,
MARINE CORPS AIR GROUND COMBAT CENTER



65th Anniversary
1952-2017





**COMMANDING GENERAL
MARINE AIR GROUND TASK FORCE TRAINING COMMAND
MARINE CORPS AIR GROUND COMBAT CENTER
TWENTYNINE PALMS, CALIFORNIA**

Sixty-five years have passed since the Marine Corps stood up Camp Detachment Marine Corps Training Center, Twentynine Palms in the Eastern Mojave Desert. The training center's 935 square miles of remote, rugged terrain answered that era's need for expanded ranges to accommodate increasing ranks and live-fire training with use of then emerging long-range weapons.

Though its area was far-reaching, the Training Center began modestly with the first 200 Marines arriving on 20 August 1952. The first large-scale, live-fire exercise was conducted a few months later, setting the stage for the installation's legacy as the Marine Corps' premier training facility. Since then, the installation's remarkable history has been punctuated with milestones in innovative military training that have ultimately prepared hundreds of thousands of Marines and sailors for the rigors of war. Today, the installation stands above all others in its capability to support the most realistic and challenging, fully integrated live-fire combined-arms training in the world for deploying forces.



As training requirements have evolved to best prepare service members to meet the challenges of their missions, the installation has adapted in response — from the 1970s, when the expeditionary airfield was completed to bring together air and ground elements to train as one, to the 2014 acquisition of additional lands to allow for 21st century Marine Expeditionary Brigade sustained, combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training. The installation now known as the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, or the Combat Center, has remained vital to our nation's security, a place where our finest warriors can practice their warfighting skills in the challenging terrain of the Mojave Desert. The Combat Center's expansive ranges also support regional training with other installations and service branches, as well as foreign military, local law enforcement and more. Through it all, the mission has remained the same — to provide world-class training that best prepares America's crisis response force to succeed in the missions they will undertake in service to their country.

Not to be overlooked, the Combat Center is an exemplary model of installation excellence beyond its training capabilities, managing to continuously improve upon quality of life for its Marines, sailors, civilians and family members. Implementation of programs to enhance sustainability and infrastructure have led to accomplishments in natural resource conservation, waste minimization and overall environmental stewardship, all a testament to the Combat Center's commitment to maintaining and exceeding standards of excellence for military bases worldwide.

As we celebrate the Combat Center's 65th anniversary with this look back, let us especially give thanks to the exceptional men and women who serve — and have served — aboard this distinctive installation, and all who have contributed to its illustrious history.

Semper Fi.

W.F. MULLEN III
Major General, USMC

| MONTH | DAY | AIRCRAFT | | CHAR-ACTER OF FLIGHT | FLIGHT TIME AS | | | | TOTAL FLIGHT TIME |
|-----------------|-----|----------|------------|----------------------|----------------|----------|-----------|-------------|-------------------|
| | | MODEL | BUREAU NO. | | PILOT | CO-PILOT | STU- DENT | PAS- Senger | |
| MARCH | | | | | | | | | |
| | 5 | R4Q-1 | 128729 | 1R2 | 2.7 | | | | 2.7 |
| | 5 | R4Q-1 | 128729 | 1R2 | 2.6 | .8 | .8 | | 1.9 |
| | 9 | R4Q-1 | 128736 | 1R2 | 1.6 | | | | 1.6 |
| | 10 | R4Q-1 | 128723 | 1R4 | .6 | | | | .6 |
| | 11 | R4Q-1 | 128731 | 1C | .5 | | | .4 | .5 |
| | 11 | R4Q-1 | 128731 | 1C | .5 | | | | .5 |
| | 11 | R4Q-1 | 128731 | 1C | .4 | .4 | | | .8 |
| | 12 | R4Q-1 | 128726 | 1R1 | 2.5 | 1.3 | 1.2 | | 2.1 |
| | 13 | R4Q-1 | 128728 | 1R2 | 2.1 | | | | 1.5 |
| | 13 | R4Q-1 | 128728 | 1R2 | 1.5 | | | | 2.1 |
| | 13 | R4Q-1 | 128728 | 1R2 | 2.1 | | | | 2.1 |
| | 14 | R4Q-1 | 128725 | 1C | .4 | | .4 | | .5 |
| | 14 | R4Q-1 | 128725 | 1C | .5 | | | | .3 |
| | 17 | R4Q-1 | 128725 | 1R7 | .3 | | | | .7 |
| | 17 | R4Q-1 | 128725 | 1R7 | .7 | | | | .7 |
| | 17 | R4Q-1 | 128725 | 1R7 | .7 | | | | .7 |
| | 17 | R4Q-1 | 128726 | 1R2 | 2.3 | | | | 2.3 |
| | 17 | R4Q-1 | 128726 | 1R2 | 2.7 | | | | 2.7 |
| | 17 | R4Q-1 | 128726 | 1R2 | 3.7 | | | | 3.7 |
| | 21 | R4Q-1 | 128725 | 1R2 | .5 | | | | .5 |
| TOTAL—THIS PAGE | | 259 | | 2.5 | 7.4 | | | | 16.3 |
| BROUGHT FWD. | | 546 | | 3.240 | 1.894 | | | | 99.5 |
| GRAND TOTAL | | 805 | | 6.240 | 9.294 | | | | 115.8 |

MARINE TRANSPORT SQUADRON 253
MARINE AIRCRAFT GROUP 25
AIRCRAFT, FLEET MARINE FORCE, PACIFIC
MARINE CORPS AIR STATION
EL TORO (SANTA ANA), CALIFORNIA

26 March 1952

This is to certify that 2ndLt Billy D. BOULDIN, USMCR, has qualified under minimum requirements for Transport 1st Pilot in R4Q type aircraft.

[Signature]
E. J. DOYLE
LtCol., USMC
Commanding

ALAMEDA-FALLON
FALLON-ELTORO
ELTORO-PENDLETON
PENDLETON-ELTORO
ELTORO-PEND
PEND-29 PALMS
29 PALMS-ELTORO
ELTORO-FALLON
FALLON-ELTORO
ELTORO-PEND

9.7 22.9 20. 17
9.7 22.4 21. 17
APPROVED
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Front cover, from top: Marine aircraft traverse the installation in a 1964 flyover. (Courtesy of Peter Maroulis)
Cpl Paul Regotti, squad leader, Company I, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, provides security for Marines exiting an MV-22B Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft during a Marine Corps Combat Readiness Evaluation Exercise, 16 January 2015. (Cpl Julio McGraw)
This page: According to his flight log, 2ndLt Billy D. Bouldin flew 42 Marines from Camp Pendleton to Twentynine Palms on 17 March 1952 so they could begin construction of the new camp detachment. Bouldin would return to the installation in the mid-1970s as a colonel to serve as assistant base commander and oversee construction of the Expeditionary Airfield. (Courtesy of Col Billy D. Bouldin)

THE 1950s

The Marines had indeed arrived, and they were here to stay.

In 1950, it was all about space.

As tensions between North and South Korea heated up into a full-blown war and more and more Marines were called to duty, the Marine Corps base at Camp Pendleton, California, was rapidly running out of room for warriors to train.

Marine Corps leaders set out to find a place where artillery and rocket units could co-exist and conduct maneuvers without threat to base camp or surrounding civilians. Eventually, they found the perfect spot some 130 miles inland — 935 square miles of open desert at a former military base just north of Twentynine Palms.



“Sheppard proclaims Marines are coming,” read the banner headline on the front page of the 1 November 1951 issue of the community’s newspaper, *The Desert Trail*. The previous day, Congressman Harry R. Sheppard had finally laid to rest months of conjecture when he announced during a community meeting at Smith’s Ranch that \$15,915,210 had been allocated for construction at the base, and work was expected to begin in December.

A self-reliant, tight-knit community populated mostly by families of World War I veterans who moved to the desert hoping the pristine air would ease the pain of mustard-gas injuries to their lungs, Twentynine Palms was no stranger to military operations. The U.S. Army Air Corps and U.S. Navy had both used the area during World War II. The Air Corps operated a glider school on what is now Mainside, and the Navy used the land as a bombing range.

The land sat dormant after the Navy left in 1945, and desert dwellers were ecstatic that the Marine Corps was on its way. Despite a few bumps like a contractor strike that brought construction to a halt for nearly two months in mid-summer 1952, the Marines began settling in before summer’s end.

“Marines Arrive,” the 21 August 1952 edition of *The Desert Trail* trumpeted a day after Post Order 343 was issued at Camp Pendleton, creating Camp Detachment Marine Corps Training Center, Twentynine Palms.

More than 50 trucks carrying 200 Marines and equipment made their way triumphantly to the new desert detachment, the newspaper noted.

The following week’s front page featured two large photographs of Force Troops artillery convoys rolling north on Adobe Road, and a banner headline excitedly informing the public that “Marine artillery units begin training at base.”

The Marines had indeed arrived, and they were here to stay.

In 1952, there was much work to be done. Visiting artillerymen took full advantage of the fledgling center’s vast expanse, training out of a hastily erected tent city known as Camp Wilson. While they trained,



LtCol Frederick J. Scantling, the installation’s commander, and LCDR John P. Mapes, the naval resident officer in charge of construction, began growing Mainside. A mess hall for unmarried Marines, a commissary and the detachment’s headquarters occupied old Army buildings while permanent buildings were under construction.

Wells were drilled, concrete slabs were poured and sturdy concrete buildings began to rise from the desert floor by the dozens. Construction at Twentynine Palms during those first years was the largest military endeavor of its kind undertaken to date, the *Architectural Record*, a national trade magazine serving the building industry, noted in its November 1953 edition.



Opposite page, from left: The Marine Corps Training Center, Twentynine Palms front gate was memorialized in a 1950s postcard. (Combat Center archives) LtCol Frederick J. Scantling, right, commanding officer of the fledgling training center, hands papers to MSgt Charles H. Carpenter as they prepare for the permanent occupation of the base. (Combat Center archives)

This page, clockwise from left: An aerial shot of Marine Corps Training Center, Twentynine Palms shows just how quickly installation buildings populated the vast desert landscape. (Courtesy of SgtMaj Ray Wilburn) Marines cool off in the training tank in the 1950s. (Courtesy of Lee Alton) Uniforms hang on a clothesline outside a tent used as temporary housing for Marines while permanent barracks buildings were being built in the 1950s. (Courtesy of Jack Ruttselew) Leo F. Moyer Sr. poses with his vehicle in the early 1950s. He served in the infantry and with Military Police, retiring as a gunnery sergeant after 27 years of service. (Courtesy of Lee Alton)



**It was a base of
which to be proud.**



On 6 February 1953, the installation was redesignated Marine Corps Training Center, Twentynine Palms and by the late 1950s, Mainside as we know it today had largely taken shape.

“It was a base of which to be proud,” author and retired Marine Col Verle E. Ludwig wrote in his 1989 book, “U.S. Marines at Twentynine Palms, California,” published by Headquarters Marine Corps’ History and Museums Division. The Catholic and Protestant chapels faced one another proudly across the parade field just below the new headquarters building, and six mess halls seating 1,000 men each were in operation, as were clubs for enlisted and commissioned Marines. Single Marines and sailors were housed in “modern-design” barracks instead of tents, and families filled Marine Palms housing near the main gate. There was a post office, an exchange, a bank, a theater, a bowling alley, a childcare center and two training tanks (aka swimming pools). There was even a weekly newspaper, The Observation Post, published by and for Marines. Its inaugural issue hit the stands on 21 March 1957.

The installation also was the only community in the Hi-Desert with a sewer system, its sometimes-pungent filtration ponds affectionately dubbed “Lake Bandini.”

The first half of 1957 brought major change — on 1 February the installation was promoted to Marine Corps Base, Twentynine Palms, no longer under the command of Camp Pendleton.

A few months later, the Marines Corps’ tenure here briefly was threatened when the U.S. Senate Public Lands Committee claimed the Marine Corps had taken over the land without title or permission, and had no right to be there. Congressman Sheppard, who was instrumental in bringing the Marines to the desert five years earlier, quickly ended that dust-up when he presented the 1952 bill passed by Congress and signed by the president authorizing the land acquisition and base construction.

The Marines really were here to stay.

The waning decade of the 1950s continued to bring growth as more units and Marines moved permanently to the desert. Among them were 7th Engineer Battalion’s Company D, which came aboard to keep the roads in usable condition, and the 2nd Medium Anti-Aircraft Missile Battalion with its “Honest John” rockets.

In the final two years of the decade, the main athletic field, site of numerous recreational activities until it was converted in 2011 to a new Marine Corps Exchange, was dedicated Victory Field in honor of BGen Randall M. Victory, who served as installation commander from 1957-58. The base also purchased 44 mature palm trees from a date palm grove in the Coachella Valley, planting them along Del Valle Road.

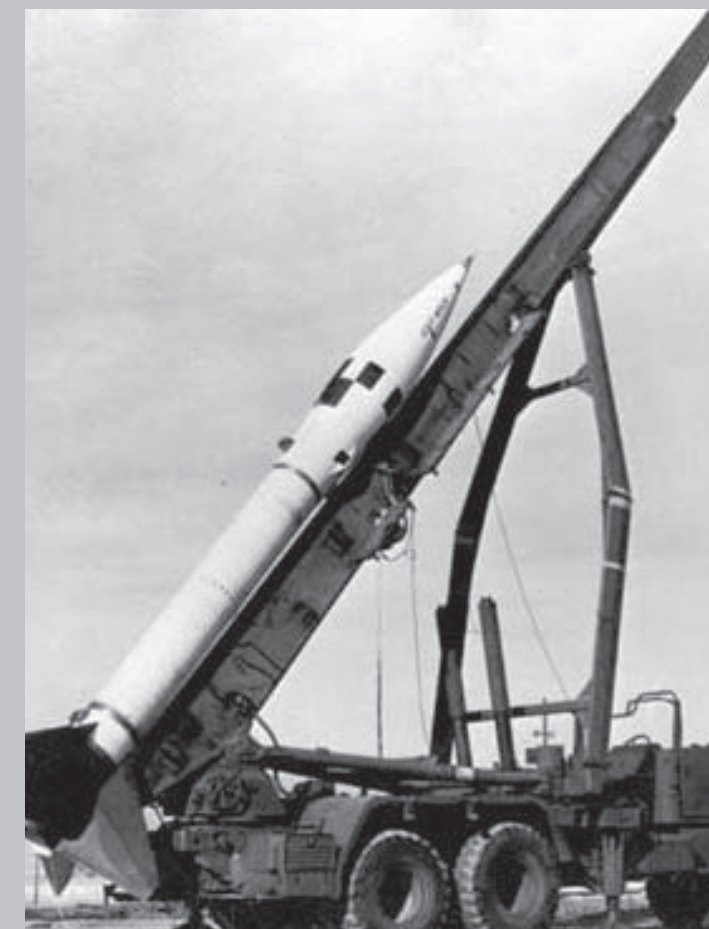
Those years also saw activation of the band, which represented the installation musically both on and off base until its deactivation in January 2012 due to restructuring within the Marine Corps.



Opposite page: Local dignitaries, including Harris Moore, Ed Kenney, Bill Hatch and Bill Ince, learn about equipment and training during a visit to the installation. (Courtesy of Twentynine Palms Historical Society)

Above: A 1954 snowstorm blankets the installation in white. (Courtesy of Twentynine Palms Historical Society)

Below: An M-289 truck holds an “Honest John” rocket. The Honest John was the U.S. military’s first tactical nuclear weapon. (Combat Center archives)





Opposite page, clockwise from top: Marines spend their off time exploring the vast expanse of the new base. (Courtesy of Jack Ruttselow)

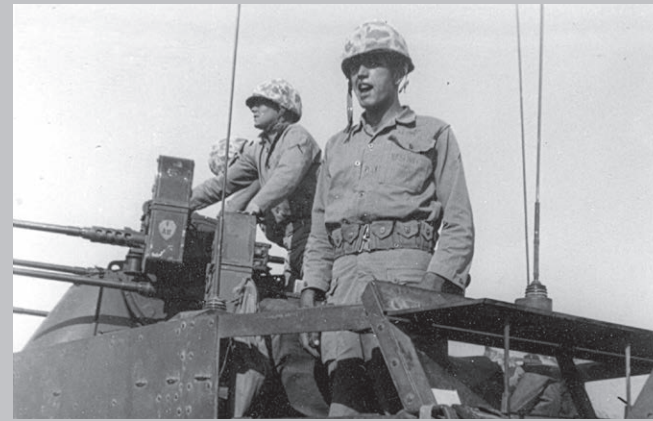
Jim Murrell (right) and Ed Drinane relax in their barracks aboard the installation in the late 1950s. (Courtesy of Jim Murrell)

Tanks and Marines line up for display during a VIP visit. (Courtesy of Twentynine Palms Historical Society)

This page, clockwise from top: Marines work on a tracked vehicle in the field. (Combat Center archives)

The makeshift headquarters of the Marine detachment at Twentynine Palms was the operations building of the former World War II-era Army Air Corps and Navy airfield. (Combat Center archives)

The 21 August 1952 edition of *The Desert Trail* heralds the Marines' arrival. (Courtesy of Hi-Desert Publishing Co.)



By the late 1950s, Mainside as we know it today had largely taken shape.

Above, from left: The skeleton of a permanent concrete building awaits completion. (Combat Center archives)

Early construction of squad bay buildings aboard the installation. (Combat Center archives)

Oscar Wallace (front), and an unidentified Marine during training, 1954. (Courtesy of LCDR Mary Kay Sherry)

Marines in the field, 1954. (Courtesy of LCDR Mary Kay Sherry)

Right: Mainside as seen from the community of Twentynine Palms in 1953. (Combat Center archives)



THE 1960s

The 1960s marked the first time units from Twentynine Palms deployed for war.

This page: High Power Illuminator Radar was used by 2nd Light Anti-Aircraft Missile Battalion to track Hawk missiles during training in 1964. (Courtesy of Peter Maroulis)

Opposite page: 2nd Light Anti-Aircraft Missile Battalion launches a Hawk missile during training in 1964. (Courtesy of Peter Maroulis)



The 1960s would bring momentous change to Marine Corps Base, Twentynine Palms on nearly all fronts. In the first half of the decade, two Light Anti-Aircraft Missile (LAAM) battalions with Hawk missiles, a rocket battery and more units came aboard. The base became the fourth place in the country where troops could fire surface-to-air missiles during training.

The 4th Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment, also reached full battalion size when more troops transferred here from Camp Pendleton.

The Marine Corps' first Redeye Missile School opened classes here mid-decade with 49 students, graduating them two months later.

In 1966, the 9th Communication Battalion was activated and assigned to Force Troops, Fleet Marine Force Pacific, the following year. It would undergo a name change (to the Communication Support Company) and a series of deactivations and reactivations until 1982 when it was moved to Camp Pendleton and redesignated as Communication Company (Reinforced), 9th Communication Battalion.

Field training ramped up as commanders continued to take full advantage of the desert's vast expanse. In October 1962, Marines from the 1st Marine Division and 3rd Marine Air Wing convoyed and flew to the desert to join local Force Troops Marines for Winter Night, a massive combined-arms exercise in which 43,000 men worked together to hone their collective fighting skills.

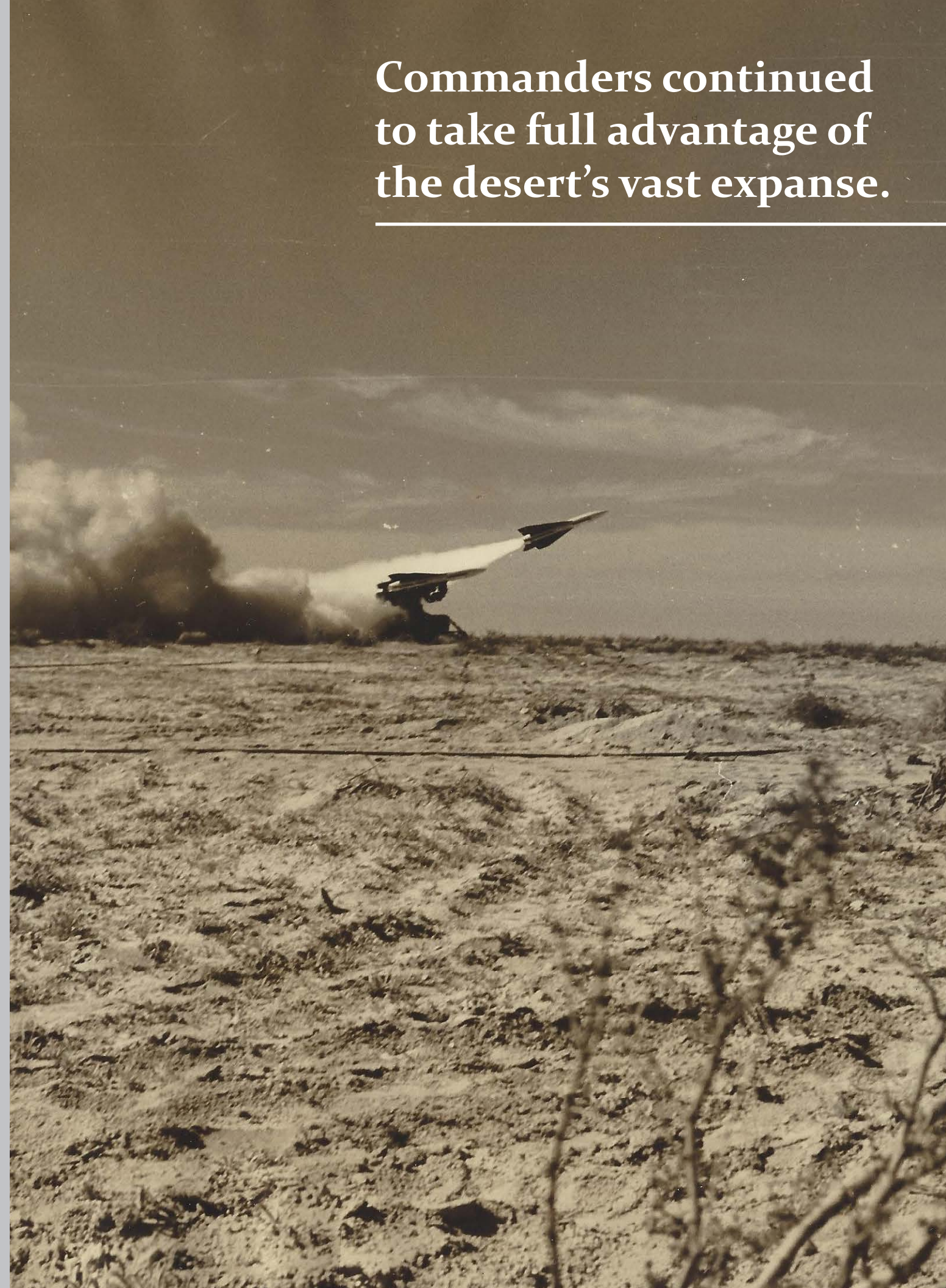
That same month, LAAM battalions from Twentynine Palms became part of an amphibious force poised to invade the island nation of Cuba, if Cuban leader Fidel Castro and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev failed to comply with the United States' demand to immediately dismantle Russian nuclear missile installations discovered in Cuba that summer. The battalions returned home without going ashore when President John F. Kennedy and his administration won the tension-filled, two-week battle of wills, and Khrushchev backed down, dismantling the missile sites and averting possible nuclear war by the narrowest of margins.

The 1960s also marked the first time units from Twentynine Palms deployed for war. In late 1964, Marines and sailors from Twentynine Palms began deploying both individually and with their desert-based units as the U.S. sent combat units to Vietnam. They would stay in the fight until the fall of Saigon in 1975. In all, 13,000 Marines would die and 88,000 would be wounded in the bloody conflict, many from Twentynine Palms.

As expected in wartime, few Marines stayed behind, and it fell to the wives who stayed here to make sure that things on the homefront ran smoothly. In addition to tending to their families, the women created LASSIE — Ladies Auxiliary Special Service Individual Endeavor — to run special services and recreation programs. Once the war ended, the LASSIEs turned over those duties to female Marines assigned to the base.

Training here also took a new direction in the '60s. On 22 November 1963, the day President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas, Headquarters Marine Corps announced plans to move its fastest-growing school — the Communications-Electronics School Battalion (C&E) — from San Diego to the desert. In addition to more space, the remote location meant less atmospheric interference and noise interruption from airport takeoffs and landings.

Commanders continued to take full advantage of the desert's vast expanse.



'Just Another Marine Reporting Aboard, Sir'

Marine Corps Base, Twentynine Palms has over 900 square miles, over 3000 Marines and Navymen and, at last, its own Woman Marine contingent — comprising one Cpl Ida Burcham, USMC.

Cpl Burcham changed the hi-desert status quo on Monday when she checked in from Camp Pendleton to begin work here in the Base G-1 office. By noon the word was spreading around Base that a Woman Marine had been seen in the area and wild speculations were being made about an impending feminine invasion. The following morning, however, Ida, seemingly oblivious to the commotion her arrival had stirred, calmly began going about her job.

A native Texan, Ida graduated from Pasadena (Tex.) High School in 1961 and in September 1962 enlisted in the Marine Corps at Houston. Following her recruit training at MCRD, Parris Island, S.C., Ida was assigned to the Depot as a unit diary/SRB clerk, where she remained until her transfer to Camp Pendleton early this year. She worked there in the Base Adjutant's office as a mail and file clerk.

Meanwhile, back on the desert,

SSgt Robert E. "Bud" Burcham had been running the Base Photo Lab as NCOIC since his transfer from Parris Island some months earlier. He and Ida had met and become engaged at Parris Island and following her West Coast transfer, were married on April 10. Her assignment to this hi-desert facility was a relatively simple matter and Ida became the first Woman Marine to be stationed here in the eight-year history of Marine Corps Base.

When asked how it felt being the only Woman Marine among 3000 of her male counterparts, the pretty brunette shrugged and said, "It's sort of like being in a fraternity, I guess."

Cpl Burcham, the former Ida Endsley, is the daughter of Mrs. Edith M. Endsley of Pasadena, Tex. She and her husband reside at the Bagdad Trailer Park in Smoke Tree.

SUGAR 'N STRIPES



WELCOME ABOARD MRS. . . . ER . . . CPL BURCHAM—Col V. W. Banning, assistant Base commander, takes a few moments out from a busy schedule to greet MCB's first Woman Marine, Cpl Ida Burcham. Cpl Burcham is married to SSgt R. E. Burcham, NCOIC, Base Photo Lab. (Photo by Sgt Phil Witte)

Moving the school would take years — C&E's first classes aboard Twentynine Palms commenced with 400 students in the fall of 1967. Three more schools would make the move inland during the decade and in 1969, construction began on the first phase of what would become a sprawling schools complex on Mainside.

The tumultuous decade also saw construction and expansion of a branch naval hospital, a nine-hole golf course and adjacent Ocotillo Heights housing. A dormitory to house active-duty women, who numbered around 50 by the end of 1969, also was built.

On the first day of 1967, the U.S. Postal Service gave Marine Corps Base, Twentynine Palms its own ZIP code — 92278. To this day, 92278 and the original 92277 are the only two codes serving Twentynine Palms, the base, and the unincorporated communities of Wonder Valley to the east and Desert Heights to the west.

The 1960s — precisely 19 July 1965 — marked the first time a female Marine was assigned to Twentynine Palms. Cpl Ida Endsley Burcham of the G-1 office was

assigned to the base with her husband, SSgt Robert E. Burcham, who worked in the photo lab. Until the end of 1967, an active-duty woman could only serve here if her husband also was assigned here or was a retired Marine who lived locally. After 1967, rules were changed to allow women to be assigned here individually.

Not only were the Marines here to stay, so were women in uniform. Today, roughly 500 active-duty female Marines are stationed aboard the installation.

This page: The front page of the 23 July 1965 edition of the *Observation Post* featured a story about Cpl Ida Burcham, the first female Marine assigned to the installation. (Combat Center archives)

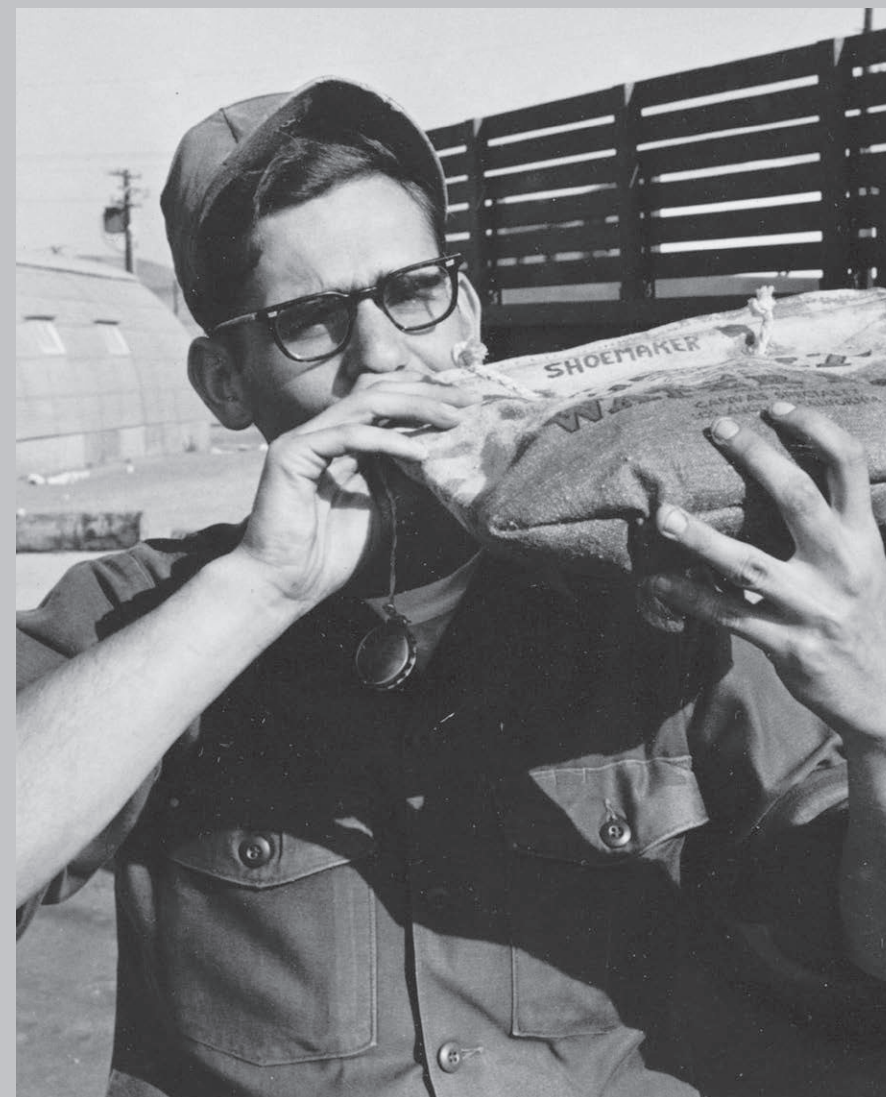
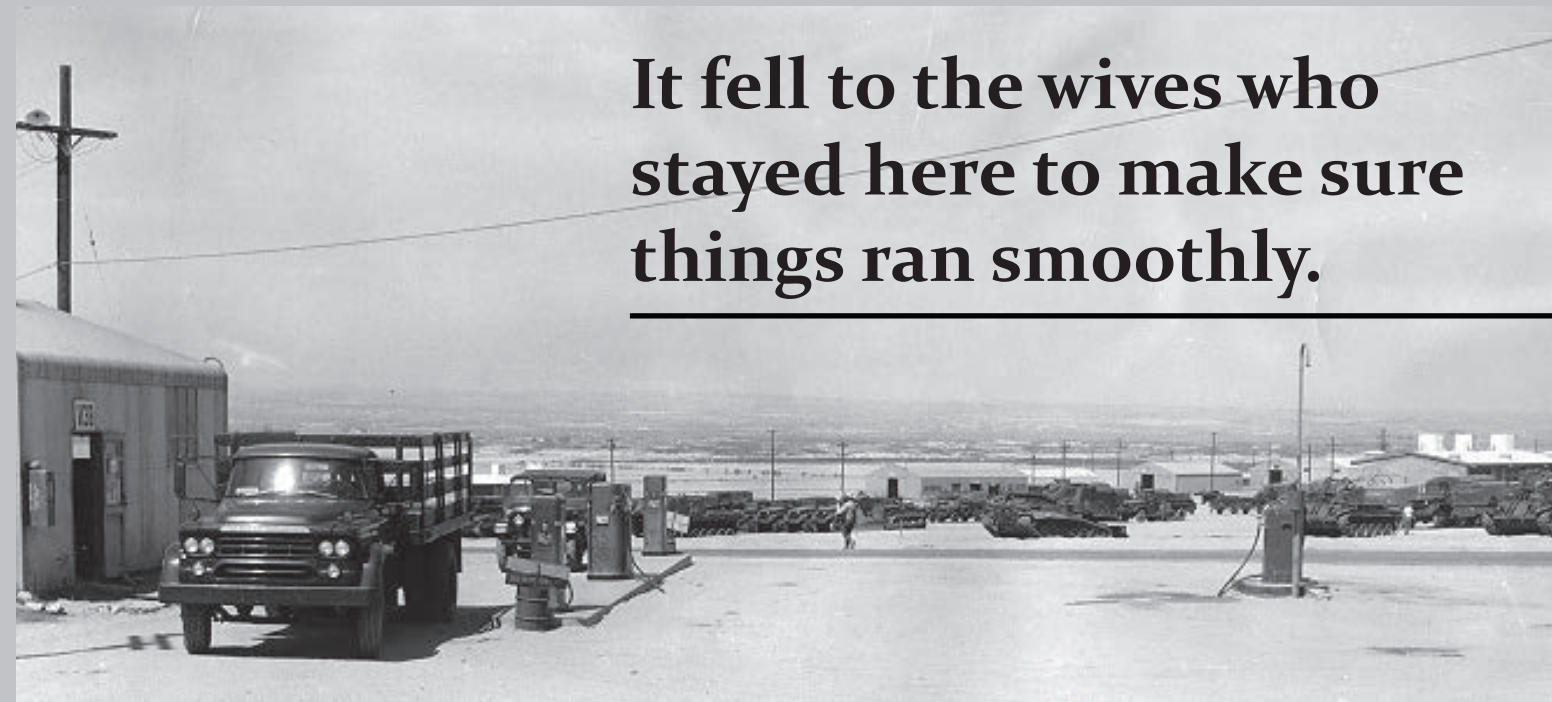
Opposite page, clockwise from top: The base gas station in 1960. (Combat Center archives)

Shirley Sitton, LASSIE of the month, poses for a picture in the 1960s. (Courtesy of Twentynine Palms Historical Society)

1stLt K.E. Sabo, seated, shows off his hot wheels to 1stLt H.K. Bishop in 1964. (Courtesy of Bobbie and Wayne Manis)

Staying hydrated has always been a priority for Marines and sailors in the field. In the 1960s, they used canvas water bags. (Courtesy of Twentynine Palms Historical Society)

It fell to the wives who stayed here to make sure things ran smoothly.





THE 1970s

With the EAF operational, Commandant Wilson's vision of an air-ground training center was complete.

As the 1970s got under way, combat units continued their Vietnam rotations and base staff focused on growth, improving the installation's water system to the tune of \$800,000, upgrading the sewage treatment plant and opening a new, permanent commissary building near the main gate. Phase II construction began at the C&E complex and the school got a new name — Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School (MCCES).

The new Shadow Mountain housing area added 100 more family homes. New Bachelor Enlisted Quarters (BEQs) that looked more like hotels than the low-rise barracks of the past added hundreds of rooms for single Marines at several sites around Mainside. A base gym was built on Sixth Street and a new Marine Corps Exchange opened on Brown Road between Fifth and Sixth Streets.

As the Vietnam War wound down mid-decade, major change was on the horizon for Marine Corps Base, Twentynine Palms. On 1 July 1975, Medal of Honor recipient Louis H. Wilson was promoted to general and sworn in as the Corps' 26th commandant. Gen Wilson immediately set about expanding the installation's mission to include training of all tactical units in the Marine Corps. He brought BGen Ernest R. Reid aboard as commanding general to handle the ground element and tapped Col Billy D. Bouldin to serve as assistant base commander to handle the air element.

Years before the term would become part of the installation's name, Wilson called Twentynine Palms "my air-ground training center," Bouldin recalled. Though it would be his first tour of duty here, the aviator was no stranger to the desert. Some 23 years earlier — on St. Patrick's Day 1952 — Bouldin had flown from El Toro to Camp Pendleton to pick up 42 Marines, bringing them to the desert to help with construction of the new camp detachment.

In 1975, it was Bouldin's job to oversee construction of an airfield near Camp Wilson that could accommodate oversized cargo planes weighing hundreds of thousands of pounds fully loaded. Construction on the Expeditionary Airfield (EAF), so-called because its 3 million square feet of aluminum matting could be picked up and moved if needed, began in January 1976. By mid-year, the 8,000-foot runway was in use. The EAF, now called SELF for Strategic Expeditionary Landing Field, officially opened in June 1976, and the first C-5A landed in August 1978.

Airfield construction funding included money to pave the soft-top road connecting Mainside to Camp Wilson to make it an all-weather blacktop route. The road project didn't come without human cost. On 10 December 1976, Phillips Road was dedicated in honor of Victor B. Phillips, a Navy Seabee from Mobile Construction Battalion 4, who was killed during its construction.

EAF project money also was allocated to improve the camp itself, with new head and shower facilities, a permanent mess hall, a small exchange, a mail facility and several shelters to house troops.

With the EAF operational, Commandant Wilson's vision of an air-ground training center was complete. On 1 October 1978, Marine Corps Base, Twentynine Palms was redesignated the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Training Center. In February 1979, the word training was dropped, changing the name to Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (Combat Center).

The '70s also saw BGen Reid and his staff draw up plans for a Tactical Exercise Control Center. The 3rd Tank Battalion also relocated to Twentynine Palms, with a permanent tank park and maintenance facilities completed in April 1976.



It also would be another momentous decade for women here. In May 1974, the Women Marine Company moved into new dormitory-style quarters. Two weeks later, the company — to which all female Marines assigned here reported though they worked in various places around the base — was deactivated and the women were assigned to the units where they worked.

While most of Twentynine Palms' 130 commissioned and enlisted women served with MCCES and Base Headquarters and Service Battalion, in August 1974 two women went to Force Troops. Pvts Victoria Bullard and Cynthia Southworth were assigned to the Provisional Maintenance Company to repair and calibrate fire control instruments for artillery units.

In 1975, Headquarters Marine Corps announced that only four occupational specialties would remain closed to women — infantry, artillery, armor and air crews in combat.

Opposite page: A C-5A Galaxy military transport aircraft prepares to touch down on the Expeditionary Airfield near Camp Wilson for the first time on 30 August 1978. (Courtesy of Col Billy D. Bouldin)

This page, from left: The 26th commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen Louis H. Wilson, left, and BGen Edward J. Megarr, base commanding general, show off the sign for the newly dedicated road to Camp Wilson in 1976. (Courtesy of Col Billy D. Bouldin)

Marines fire an M60 machine gun during training. (Courtesy of Twentynine Palms Historical Society)



1943 1974



31st ANNIVERSARY WOMEN MARINES

This page, clockwise from top left: Card announcing the Women Marines' 31st anniversary in 1974. (Courtesy of LtCol Elaine Bowden)

Marines of Headquarters Battalion's Woman Marine Company celebrate the 31st anniversary of women in the Marine Corps during a ceremony on the installation, 13 February 1974. It would be the final time women would celebrate the anniversary officially. Gen Robert E. Cushman Jr., 25th commandant of the Marine Corps, abolished the separate birthday, saying, "There is no doubt in anyone's mind now that women are full-fledged members of the Marine Team.

It is time, therefore to stop recognizing Women Marines as a separate entity within the Marine Corps." (Sgt D.L. Osantowski photo courtesy of LtCol Elaine Bowden)

The main gate as it appeared in the 1970s. The area is now the site of the Condor gate; the main gate was moved to Adobe Road in 1990. (Combat Center archives)



This page, clockwise from top: Marines march along the highway in Twentynine Palms during a 1970s Pioneer Days Parade. (Courtesy of John Bechtold)

The Officers' Wives' Club float took second place in a 1970s Pioneer Days Parade in Twentynine Palms. (Courtesy of Twentynine Palms Historical Society)

BGen Carl W. Hoffman, center, gets into the swing of things 19 March 1971 while rehearsing the musical arrangements for a "Flirty Thirties" party performance with Pat Fischer on piano and R.C. Haick on drums. (Courtesy of Officers' Spouses' Club)

A mounted color guard participates in a 1970s Pioneer Days Parade in Twentynine Palms. (Courtesy of John Bechtold)





Clockwise from top left: Planes line up at the new Expeditionary Airfield shortly after construction was completed in the 1970s. (Courtesy of Col Billy D. Bouldin)

A Marine fires a "Red Eye" missile during training aboard the installation. (Courtesy of Twentynine Palms Historical Society)

Cpl Bernard Lee, a graduate of the Redeye Missile School, demonstrates the missile's operation for Marine Corps Commandant, Gen Robert E. Cushman Jr., 1972. (Combat Center archives)

A Marine receives a communication via radio during a training exercise. (Courtesy of Twentynine Palms Historical Society)



From top: Long before the days of role players, Marines themselves dressed up as the enemy during training. (Courtesy of Twentynine Palms Historical Society)

An 8-inch Howitzer fires during training in 1979. (Courtesy of Kenneth Jones)



THE 1980s

Growth would be the order of the decade.

As the 1980s got under way, Force Troops, on Commandant Wilson's order, transitioned into the Combined Arms Command. Later in the decade its name would change to 7th Marine Amphibious Brigade (MAB), then to 7th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB). The mission remained the same — continue to expand and improve training. New range regulations focused on safety while providing the most realistic scenarios possible and the training formerly called Desert Palm Tree was now known as CAX, for Combined Arms Exercise. CAX training was conducted under the direction of the Tactical Exercise and Evaluation Control Group (TEECG).

Three years into the CAX program, the 1983 Command Chronology narrative described the Combat Center's mission of developing, conducting and evaluating the Marine Corps' Combined Arms Training Program as "a formidable one," noting, "The 935-square-mile training area, once considered to offer unlimited training opportunity is now in such high demand that not all training and test and evaluation requirements can be accommodated."

August 1988 marked the first expanded CAX, when 28,000 Marines, soldiers, sailors, airmen and Coast Guardsmen all trained together during Gallant Eagle/Gallant Knight, an exercise that included a force-on-force phase employing Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System (MILES) gear that recorded whether an individual was hit by enemy or friendly fire.

Growth would be the order of the decade and by the end of the '80s, some 2,000 additional Marines would call the Combat Center home as units like the Light Assault Vehicle Battalion; 3rd and 4th Battalions, 11th Marines; and 5th Battalion, 12th Marines, relocated from Camp Pendleton and Okinawa. In July 1983, A Company, 1st Light Armored Vehicle Battalion, stood up, becoming the first unit in the Marine Corps to utilize light-armored vehicles in a combat setting.

The decade also brought new administration buildings including a new headquarters for MCCES and the 7th MEB, new water wells, a new armory, training and maintenance facilities, a new fitness center, and new mess halls on Mainside and at Camp Wilson. New family housing units and three-story BEQs also were built. As single Marines moved into their new homes, their old single-story barracks were converted into offices.

During the '80s, a Combined Arms Staff Trainer, a simulator designed to teach staff officers how to effectively employ combined arms, came online. Range Maintenance made significant progress on construction of a Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT) range to simulate urban warfare, and completed the Tire City Range 108C. It also completed the firing line and lateral limits of the MK 19 grenade launcher range (Range 112). The Weapons Impact Scoring System, a computerized target training system for aircraft ordnance deliveries, scored its first impact.

Technological advances weren't limited to training — in October 1983, the first computer-generated training schedule of all MCCES courses and classes was published.

Base-wide improvements were made throughout the decade. The airfield and the base telephone and electrical systems were updated, and I.D. cards began being issued at a centralized location.



The Catholic and Protestant chapels were renovated and dining facilities were modernized. The main exchange was expanded to the tune of \$3.8 million and two new convenience stores were built. The Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) Directorate (now called Marine Corps Community Services or MCCS) also renovated gym/fitness centers, the auto hobby shop, food outlets and the youth center.

In 1985, the Navy's branch hospital on Fifth Street just south of the Headquarters Building opened a new emergency room and medical repair building, and its lab was renovated. Three years later, it was granted full naval hospital status in preparation for construction of a brand new facility. The project was delayed when a previously unknown earthquake fault was discovered at the hospital's intended location, requiring planners to find a new site and develop a new design.

The installation also turned a serious eye toward the environment in the 1980s, creating an Environmental Review Board and an Encroachment Management

Committee. A Water Conservation and Wastewater Reuse study was undertaken and the base located and registered 73 underground hazardous storage tanks with the California Water Resources Control Board.

On a lighter note, the installation's first fast-food place — a burger joint called The Last Oasis — opened on Sixth Street in a building that now houses Game Stop.

In the decade's final year, the Marine Corps purchased 10 acres of land near Condor Road on the Combat Center's south boundary, setting aside a portion for Condor Elementary School, which opened in 1990.

Opposite page: Steve Woods, instructor/fiscal coordinator at the Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School from 1981-86, competes in the Pioneer Days Rodeo in 1983. Woods was captain of the 29 Palms Rodeo Team. (Courtesy of Steve Woods)

This page, from top: Marines in the field, 1980s. (Combat Center archives)





Clockwise from top left: Marines participate in a 1980s training exercise. (Combat Center archives)

Marines practice a ground assault at one of the installation's ranges. (Combat Center archives)

A Tube-launched Optically-tracked Wire-guided (TOW) missile is launched during a 1980s exercise. (Combat Center archives)

The Marine Corps Communication-Electronics Schools complex in the mid-1980s. (Courtesy of LtCol Elaine Bowden)

Marines train with the Tube-launched Optically-tracked Wire-guided (TOW) Anti-Tank Missile System in 1981. (Combat Center archives)

Coyotes conduct range reconnaissance prior to training. (Combat Center archives)



THE 1990s

Deployment was so rapid that Marines and sailors barely had time to pack the gear they took with them.

From the start, the last decade of the 20th century would provide Combat Center Marines and sailors numerous opportunities to put their training to use. On 1 June 1990, the 7th Marine Regiment — the “Magnificent Seventh” — completed its move here from Camp Pendleton, but there was little time to get settled. On 2 August, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein ordered his troops to invade Kuwait. Caught off guard, the country quickly fell to Iraq’s army and it was feared that oil-rich Saudi Arabia was next in Hussein’s sights.

Within days, combat units would rumble out of Twentynine Palms en route to the Persian Gulf, where the U.S. would lead a 34-nation coalition circling the wagons around Saudi Arabia and poised to oust the Iraqi invaders from Kuwait. Their deployment to Operation Desert Shield was so rapid that Marines and sailors here barely had time to pack the gear they took with them, leaving behind barracks rooms filled with personal effects. Staff non-commissioned officers from non-deploying units like MCCES stepped up, conducting inventory and packing the deployed service members’ belongings for safekeeping. It was anyone’s guess when those deployed would return.

The regiment’s arrival here and its almost immediate deployment to Desert Shield put a heavy strain on organizations like the Family Services Center, American Red Cross and Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society, but each rose to the challenge, implementing support groups and classes for family members left behind.

Desert Shield temporarily shifted the installation’s mission from CAX training to preparing units for duty in the Gulf. When there wasn’t enough time for the regiment to undergo mechanized combined-arms training before it left, TEECG took training to the regiment, sending 15 infantry trainers known as Coyotes to Saudi Arabia as part of the Marine Corps Combat Development Command In-Country Training Team.

the chow hall was upgraded and A-frame desert huts that housed troops during training were replaced with K-Spans.

In November 1990, the new main gate opened. Instead of navigating that notoriously dangerous stretch of roadway known as the Condor Curves, those entering the installation now came straight in on Adobe Road.

As the old year faded into 1991, those wondering what would happen in the Gulf wouldn’t have to wait long. On 17 January, viewers around the world were glued to their TV sets as Cable News Network (CNN) broadcast live when Operation Desert Storm got under way with a coordinated attack that included Tomahawk land attack missiles launched from cruisers, destroyers and battleships.

They were watching still when Marines and soldiers crossed into Kuwait at 0400 on 24 February 1991, and they breathed a huge sigh of relief when Saddam Hussein’s promised “Mother of All Battles” fizzled and footage of thousands of Iraqis waving the white flags of surrender flashed across TV screens. One hundred hours later, it was over as President George H.W. Bush announced, “Kuwait is liberated. Iraq’s army is defeated. Our military objectives are met.”

The Marine Corps would lose 23 men in Desert Storm, including LCpl Eliseo C. Felix of Sierra Battery, 5th Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment, who died 2 February 1991 when his M109 howitzer was hit by a laser-guided bomb near the Kuwait border. In 1998, the Combat Center dedicated Felix Field, a sports complex at Adobe and Del Valle roads, in honor of the 19-year-old Avondale, Arizona, native.

As the Marines and sailors of Desert Storm wrapped up their deployment, the community prepared for their return. Yellow ribbons were everywhere, and nearly every Marine Corps bus that rolled east on the highway toward the Combat Center was met by cheering, flag-waving crowds.

On 28 March, First Lady Barbara Bush came aboard to meet with Marines and their families.

Opposite page: Marines of Desert Storm march on Adobe Road in Twentynine Palms during the “Mother of All Victory Parades” held after their return from the Persian Gulf. (Combat Center archives)

This page, from top: Well-wishers greet a Marine returning from Operation Desert Storm in 1991. (Combat Center archives)

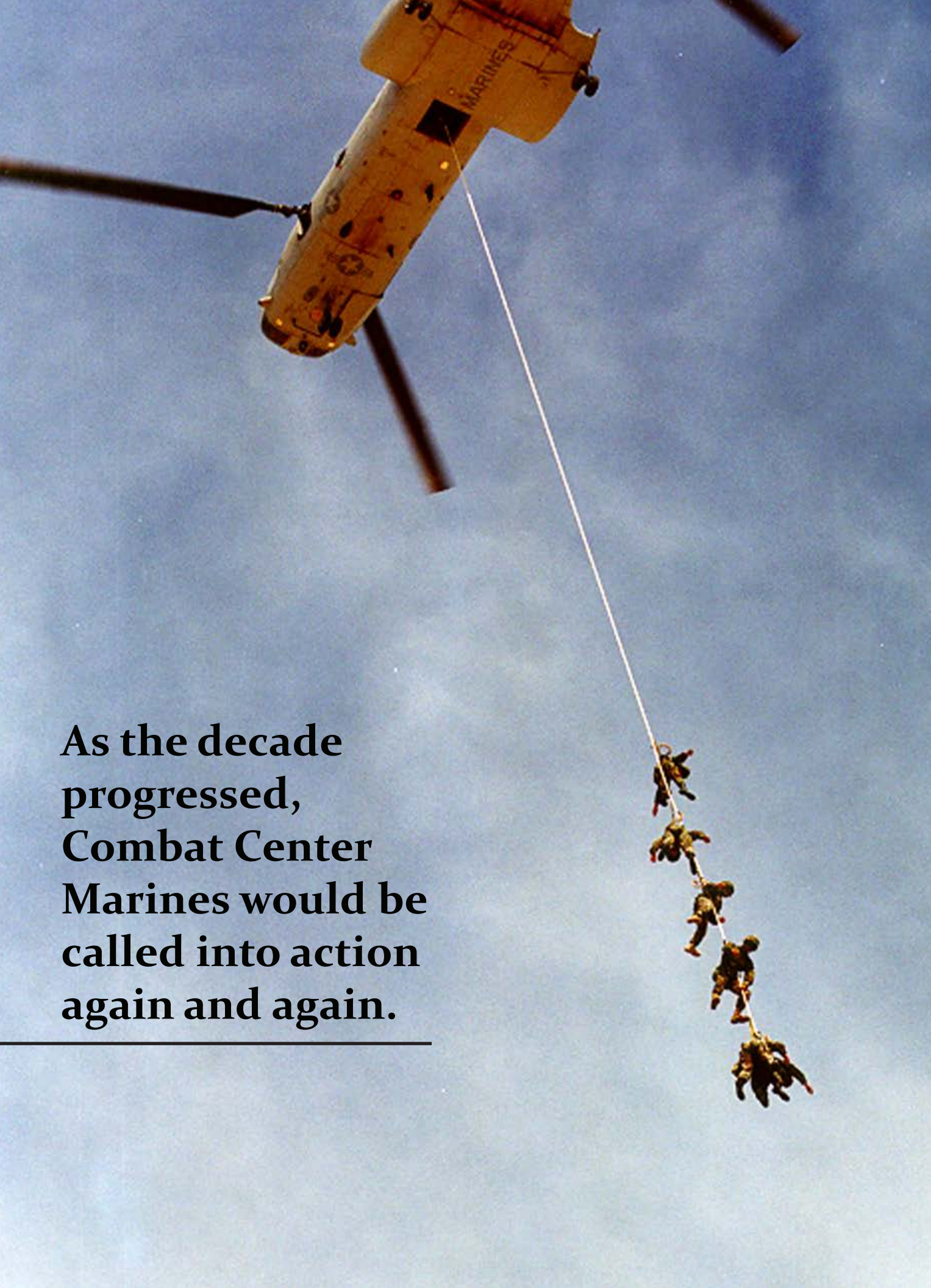
Well-wishers line Twentynine Palms Highway to greet Marines and sailors returning from Operation Desert Storm in 1991. (Combat Center archives)

It may not have been business as usual at the Combat Center with their commanding general, BGen John I. Hopkins Sr., and his warriors all deployed, but those who stayed behind made great strides in their absence. A construction moratorium delayed work on the new naval hospital, a childcare center and the maintenance facility for the new M1A1 main battle tank, but construction of a new Marksmanship Training Unit operations building went forward. In October 1990, the first M1A1 tanks arrived at the Combat Center and the 2nd Tank Battalion out of Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, came aboard to train before deploying to the Gulf with 76 of the new main battle tanks.

A new building to store the Training and Audiovisual Support Center’s MILES equipment and other training devices was completed. The Wargaming Center, a classroom environment with the ability to simulate different training missions through TACWAR, Steelthrust, and other mechanical and computer games, went operational on 20 August 1990.

MWR wrapped up a busy first year of consolidated operations, opening the Marine Palms and Ocotillo exchanges as well as a Burger King. The Commander’s Room at the Officers’ Club opened and a project to convert the mini-golf area into a family park got under way. At Camp Wilson, the Warrior Club opened,

As the decade progressed, Combat Center Marines would be called into action again and again.



On 27 April, after three weeks of intense planning that involved hundreds of community members and 5,000 Marines, “The Mother of All Victory Parades” drew 50,000 well-wishers to the city. They lined the streets to pay their respects as 2,000 Marines and sailors, along with their weapons, equipment and tactical vehicles, made their way north on Adobe Road.

With that, life in Twentynine Palms began returning to normal. In May 1991, construction began on the new hospital and dental clinic. That May and June, 46 M60A1 tanks were shipped to Marine Corps Logistics Base, Barstow as the Marine Corps began phasing them out for the new M1A1 main battle tank.

That August, the regiment was renamed Regimental Combat Team-7 after the 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, 3rd Tank Battalion, and Delta Company, 3rd Assault Amphibian Battalion, came under its umbrella. It would change names again, to 7th Marine Regiment (Reinforced) two years later. In August 1996, (Reinforced) was dropped when both battalions and Delta Company separated from the regiment. All three continued to provide direct support to 7th Marines.

In August 1991, Congress authorized funding for 600 off-base housing units to be built on Two Mile Road and Joe Davis Drive. A private contractor would build the “801 Project” to house enlisted families. Formally named Vista del Sol, it opened in 1993.

In September 1991, MCCES was the first organization in the Marine Corps to receive the new AN/TYQ-23 Tactical Air Operations Modules used to control the skies of a combat zone with combat surveillance, air traffic and surface-to-air missile control. That month also marked the opening of a climate-controlled, 24-hour phone connection facility on Sixth Street. It had 24 individual sit-down booths with pay-per-call telephones and Marines no longer had to stand in long lines outside to call home.

In October 1991, the commissary was one of 400 integrated into the new Defense Commissary Agency, becoming part of the third-largest food store chain in the world.

Throughout the 1990s, the number of Marines stationed here continued to rise. In June 1992, 1st Tank Battalion relocated to the desert from Camp Pendleton, replacing the deactivating 3rd Tanks. In 1998, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines, transferred here from Camp Pendleton.

As the decade progressed, Combat Center Marines would be called into action again and again — to Somalia for Operation Restore Hope in 1992-93, and to the Persian Gulf for Vigilant Warrior in 1994 and Vigilant Sentinel in 1995 when Saddam Hussein sent troops



to the Kuwaiti border. They went back to Somalia in 1995 for Operation United Shield, assisting in the final withdrawal of peacekeeping troops from that country. In 1996, Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 1 (VMU-1) deployed to Bosnia-Herzegovina in support of the NATO peacekeeping Operation Joint Endeavor.

Training continued to evolve as TEECG fine-tuned its programs after each CAX, and new gear and new technology came online. In the mid-1990s, the name changed to Tactical Training Exercise Control Group (TTECG) to better describe the control group’s mission. In May 1999, TTECG’s headquarters building was named in memory of the late former commanding general and Silver Star recipient MajGen John I. Hopkins Sr.

In 1993, the Marine Air-Ground Task Force Expeditionary Training Center was established, bringing the Mountain Warfare Training Center at Bridgeport, California, and Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron-1 from Quantico, Virginia, under its umbrella.

Over the years, new ranges were added and hundreds of unserviceable vehicles ranging from M60 tanks and howitzers to tank retrievers were stripped down and placed for use as targets.

When the expense of shipping tactical equipment to the desert for training became too much of a financial burden for most non-tenant units to bear, the ever-resourceful Corps reacted quickly. The Exercise Support Division (ESD) spent much of 1994 building an inventory

Opposite page: Marines conduct Special Patrol Insertion/Extraction (SPIE) rigging training during a 1990s exercise. (Combat Center archives)

This page: Naval Hospital Twentynine Palms in 1991. The building now houses the Village Center. (Courtesy of LCDR Mary Kay Sherry)

that would allow the Combat Center to equip thousands of Marines with everything they needed to train, from Humvees to howitzers to tanks. ESD's Enhanced Equipment Allowance Pool issued its first set of CAX gear to a visiting unit in 1995.

MCCES also was busy, completing a new wing for its Air School. In August 1997, the Computer Science School began classes here after relocating from Quantico.

Environmental issues took on increased significance in the '90s, with the Combat Center building a solid reputation both within the Corps and the community as a good steward of the environment. In 1992, Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs (NREA) became its own directorate, studying plants and animals of the Combat Center, logging historical and cultural sites and helping the Marines carrying out their mission with as little impact on the environment as possible. A digital database of training areas was created to allow detailed evaluations of training's effect on the terrain and desert flora and fauna, and programs were implemented to educate people about the importance of protecting the environment, cultural sites and native species.

Recycling programs shifted to NREA, which would oversee a massive program to keep everything from aluminum cans and furniture to heavy equipment out of the landfill. The range residue program, tasked with safely processing and selling as scrap such ordnance-related items as pieces of bombs, mortars and other projectiles expended during live-fire training, became a major revenue generator. Proceeds were used to improve the recycling program and fund projects aboard the installation.

Quality of life on base continued to improve throughout the decade. In January 1993, sailors with the 23rd Dental Company moved into a new

building and that July, the new hospital opened. In 1994, its Maternal Infant Ward opened. The Marine Corps' only quick-service chow hall opened that year, serving 2,700 meals a day. The Family Readiness Support Program kicked off, Camp Wilson got a new gym and a natural gas filling station, and a car wash opened on Mainside.

In November 1997, a one-stop-shop called the Village Center opened in the old base hospital, streamlining the process for new Marines coming aboard the installation by bringing several organizations and offices on their check-in sheets under one roof.

In February 1998, the MCCES chow hall opened. Nine months later, it was dedicated Littleton Hall in memory of posthumous Medal of Honor recipient PFC Herbert A. Littleton, a field radio operator who threw himself on an enemy hand grenade to save his fellow Marines during the Korean War.

The Provost Marshal's Office established a Special Reaction Team of six Marines with four in reserve, all trained in hostage removal, home entry and room clearing.

The final years of the 1990s saw a Combat Center website come online to share information about the installation, and Internet access became available on much of the base. The Single Marine Program was implemented, and the new Bright Beginnings building opened at the Child Development Center, providing space for 214 children.

This page: Marines of 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, at Camp Wilson for CAX, summer 1995. (Courtesy of Jeff Goodman)



This page, from top: HM3 Jeff Goodman takes a break during CAX, summer 1995. (Courtesy of Jeff Goodman)

Combat Center Marines prepare for deployment to Somalia for Operation Restore Hope in December 1992. (Courtesy of MGySgt Dennis Stieber)

A 1999 aerial shot of the installation shows new barracks built for single Marines. (LCpl Shane S. Buckley)



THE 2000s

Operation Iraqi Freedom I kicked off when “Shock and Awe” lit up the night skies over Baghdad.

When the predicted Y2K computer system meltdown proved to be a non-event, the Combat Center kicked off a busy, and peaceful, year on 1 January 2000. Lima Company, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines, tested the new 7.1-ton Medium Tactical Vehicle Replacement, evaluating its ride and practicing tactical dismounts and rapid extractions, and Weapons Company tested the new Javelin weapons system set to replace the retiring Vietnam-era Dragon anti-tank system. Marine infantrymen also tested the new M16A2 service rifle.

After 10 years of research, Marines at Camp Wilson began testing the Rapid Deployment Kitchen, a self-contained unit that could serve hot chow to Marines in the field before being broken down and folded up for tactical transport or maritime shipping.

New housing for families and individuals came online or got under way in 2000, including a new Navy barracks housing 128 sailors in two-man rooms. A new Community Recreation Center opened, offering youth sports, education and self-improvement classes, a TV room, four multipurpose rooms, a basketball court, weight room, and men's and women's locker rooms. Improvement projects included a major project at the airfield, with Marines moving 526,000 square feet of runway to even out the soil under the metal matting.

During a ceremony in May 2000 attended by its namesake, the hospital was renamed Robert E. Bush Naval Hospital in honor of the World War II Medal of Honor recipient. That wasn't the year's only big name change. On 1 October, the installation's command was tasked with an additional mission and Marine Air Ground Task Force Training Command was added to its name. The installation was now Marine Air Ground Task Force Training Command, Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center — MAGTFTC, MCAGCC for short.

The year 2001 looked like it would be more of the same, with a focus on training, new programs, and new and upgraded facilities and services coming online. Nine months into the year, however, everything changed in a way few could ever have imagined. On 11 September, as the year's eighth CAX was wrapping up and units were turning in their tactical gear, Osama bin Laden and his jihadist group, al-Qaeda, mounted an unprecedented terrorist attack on the U.S., hijacking commercial jets and deliberately flying them into the North and South towers of the World Trade Center complex and the Pentagon. Brave action by passengers on a fourth hijacked plane prevented the terrorists from achieving their devastating goal with that plane by forcing it to crash in a field in Pennsylvania. In all, nearly 3,000 people



were killed in the attacks. Security on the Combat Center was immediately tightened to ensure that only those who had legitimate business on base were allowed aboard, and Headquarters Battalion quickly assembled a guard force of 34 Marines, placing them in strategic locations around the installation for quick response.

Less than a month after the attacks, America would launch its Global War on Terror. On 7 October 2001, Operation Enduring Freedom kicked off when troops from the U.S., Great Britain, Australia, Canada, Germany, other coalition nations and the Afghan United Front (Northern Alliance) began pursuing their objectives of dismantling al-Qaeda, driving the Taliban from power and hunting bin Laden.

On 8 October, the Marines of 7th Marine Regiment were among more than 70,000 U.S. and allied troops participating in Exercise Bright Star in Egypt. Planned well before the terror attacks, Bright Star included live-fire exercises, capabilities demonstrations and force-on-force war games. It helped U.S. troops form meaningful bonds with their allied counterparts in the region, and showed U.S. military capabilities to deploy widely.

Despite Afghanistan, the Combat Center focused on enhancing training rather than on combat deployments during 2002. That January, the Anti-Personnel Obstacle Breaching System was used for the first time in a live-fire training environment

during an exercise at Range 400, and NREA began implementing the Total Waste Management concept into the CAX program. A new Tactical Vehicle Maintenance Facility opened, and tank, artillery and Motor T medium sections began moving in.

The hospital began building a Labor Delivery Recovery and Postpartum suite and opened a Clinical Nutrition Division that August, seeing more than 1,600 patients. Families began moving into 114 new homes in Ocotillo Heights and ground was broken for 143 additional homes in Adobe Flats. Bowling alley renovations got under way. NREA began a base-wide air emission inventory to justify to the Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District and the state that increased emissions were due to the installation's growth.

Opposite page, from left: SSgt Christopher Malloy, landing support chief, Combat Logistics Battalion 46, observes as an MV-22 Osprey aircraft hovers above an M777 howitzer during an airlift operation, 10 July 2009. (LCpl Kelsey J. Green)

A statue of Navy Corpsman Robert E. Bush depicting the Medal of Honor recipient in action at age 18 during World War II's Battle of Okinawa stands in front of Robert E. Bush Naval Hospital. (LCpl Monica C. Erickson)

This page: Thor, a military working dog with 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, with his handler during pre-deployment training at Range 220, 2 February 2010. (LCpl M.C. Nerl)



As 2003 dawned, events that would set the stage for the rest of the decade were on the horizon. Marines from the Combat Center, including BGen Christian B. Cowdrey, commanding general, began deploying to the Middle East for a possible war in Iraq. More than 7,500 local troops were in the region on 17 March 2003 when President George W. Bush ordered Saddam Hussein to leave his country or face invasion. Two days later, at 1830 Pacific Time, Operation Iraqi Freedom I kicked off when the spectacular aerial bombardment, “Shock and Awe” lit up the night skies over Baghdad.

On 21 March 2003, Marines from the I Marine Expeditionary Force crossed the Kuwait border into Southern Iraq in the first push toward Baghdad. There would be no U.S. presidential order to halt this time. With Hussein in hiding, the Iraqi resistance in Baghdad quickly collapsed and by 9 April, U.S. Forces occupied the remainder of the capital. People around the world were again glued to their TV sets as Twentynine Palms Marines assisted Iraqi civilians in toppling a large statue of the Iraqi dictator in downtown Firdaus Square.

Five days later, a Pentagon spokesman announced that although some fighting continued in Iraq, major military operations had ended and the mission was now one of security, humanitarian assistance and reconstruction. In late April 2003, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld announced that major combat activity had come to an end in Afghanistan and the focus in that country would shift to stabilization and reconstruction.

On 1 May 2003, President Bush declared victory in Iraq, and Combat Center Marines and sailors began coming home. Through September, the base coordinated 62 homecoming celebrations for returning units. In October, CAX training that had been suspended due to unit deployments resumed.

Saddam Hussein would remain in hiding until his capture in December 2003. He would be tried and executed three years later. While both wars technically ended in 2003, it would be no replay of what happened after Desert Storm. Operation Enduring Freedom continued in Afghanistan, and Operation Iraqi Freedom II got under way in early 2004, with 7th Marine Regiment battalions beginning regular rotations.

It was dangerous duty. The Observation Post carried weekly tributes to fallen Combat Center Marines and sailors alongside stories of heroism, humanitarian efforts and the progress being made in both countries nearly 7,500 miles from home.

On 9 April 2004, PFC Chance Phelps of Lima Battery, 3rd Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment, was killed in a furious firefight in Al Anbar province. Two years later, the 7th Marine Regiment’s mess hall was renamed in the fallen 19-year-old Riverton, Wyoming, native’s honor, and in 2009, the story of the posthumously promoted lance corporal’s final homecoming was told in “Taking Chance,” a movie starring Kevin Bacon based on an essay written by the Marine lieutenant colonel who escorted Phelps home.

Five days after Phelps was killed in action, another Combat Center Marine — Cpl Jason L. Dunham of 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines — was gravely injured after throwing himself on a grenade to protect his men during hand-to-hand combat at a checkpoint near the Syrian border. Evacuated back to the States, he died eight days later at the National

Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, his family at his side. Dunham’s selfless actions would earn the 22-year-old Scio, New York, native the nation’s highest award for valor in combat. The Medal of Honor — the first awarded to a Marine since 1970 — was presented to Dunham’s parents at the White House in 2007. His story was told in “A Gift of Valor,” written by Michael M. Phillips, a reporter embedded with 3/7 in spring 2004.

Despite a seemingly endless ability to train on an installation roughly the size of Rhode Island, the Marines had known since the 1980s that both their land and airspace here were finite, and that meeting the mandate to “train as we would fight” would become more difficult as the mobility and speed of combat capabilities continued to advance.

After the 9/11 attacks and subsequent combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, military planners continued to focus on the Marine Expeditionary Brigade’s (MEB) role as the Marine Corps’ primary unit to fulfill the nation’s warfighting responsibilities. Since 2000, the Marine Corps had identified the MEB, an intermediate-sized Marine Air Ground Task Force

(MAGTF) consisting of 10,000 to 15,000 troops, as the premier response force for crises around the globe, representing a doctrinal shift in training. Their challenge: To find a place with training lands and airspace large enough to accommodate a sustained training exercise utilizing the full range of MEB surface-to-surface, air-to-air and air-to-ground weapons systems in combined-arms, live-fire and maneuver training.

Opposite page, from top: PFC Christopher Dion Scott, a rifleman with Company K, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, rushes while another Marine lays down cover fire for him at Range 1A, 28 July 2009. (LCpl M.C. Nerl)

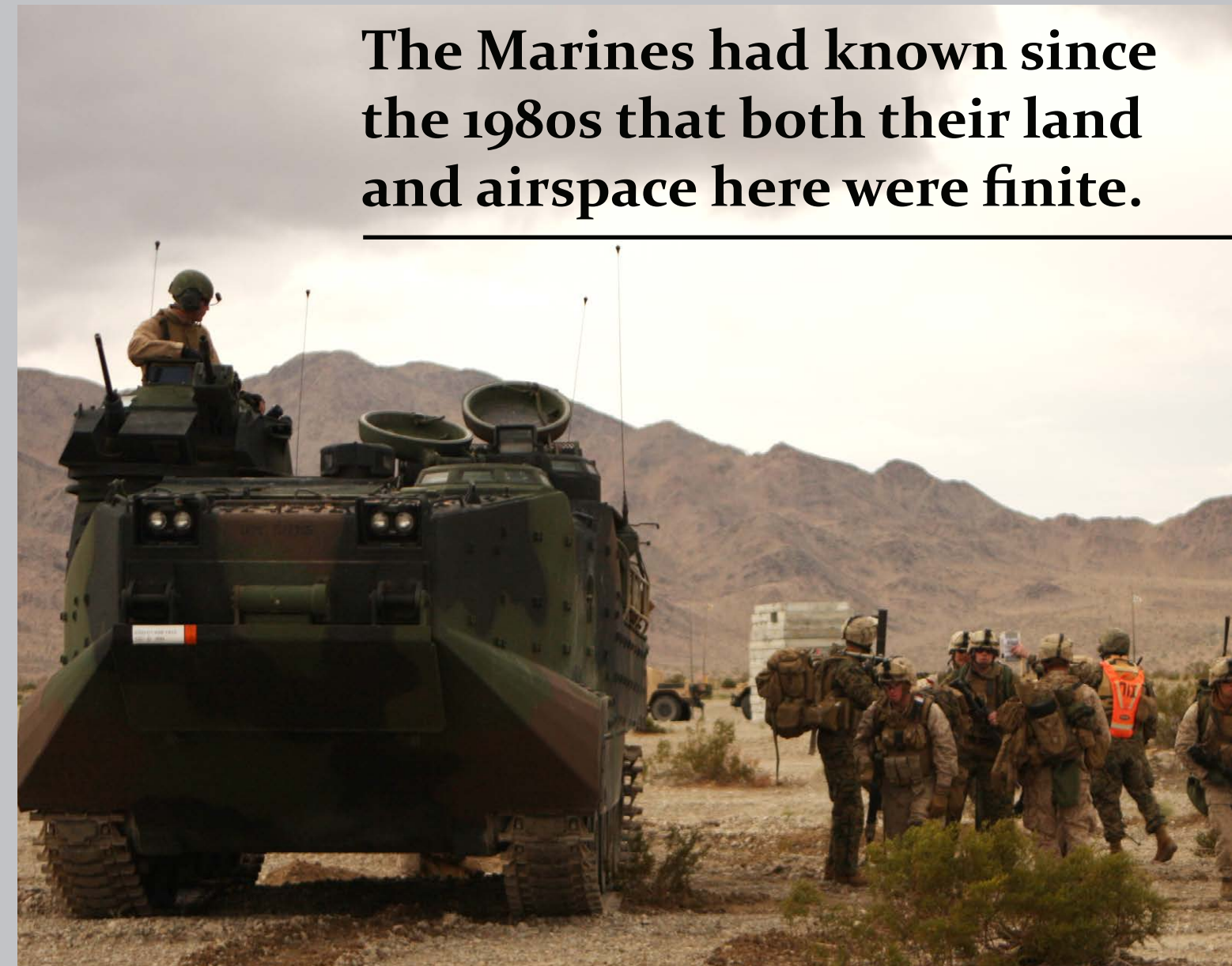
Marines of 3rd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment, and local police role players control an agitated crowd during Enhanced Mojave Viper training at Range 220, 26 June 2009. (Cpl Nicole Lavine)

Sgt Brad Jansen, Weapons Company, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines, kneels at the memorial to LCpl Cody Stanley, 11 June 2010 at LCpl Torrey L. Gray Field. Stanley was killed in Helmand province, Afghanistan. Jansen was his section leader. (PFC Sarah Anderson)

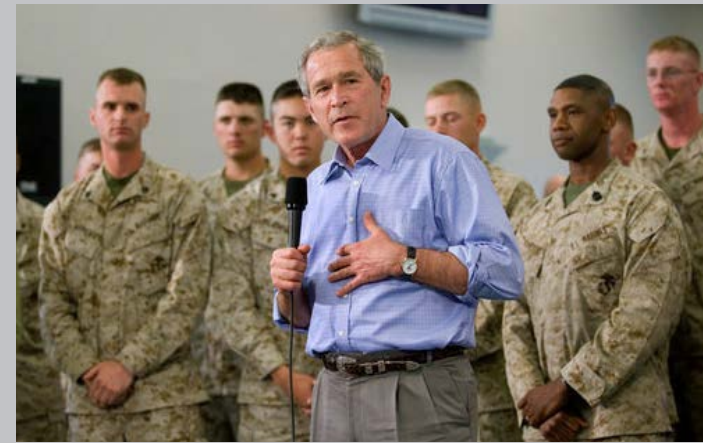
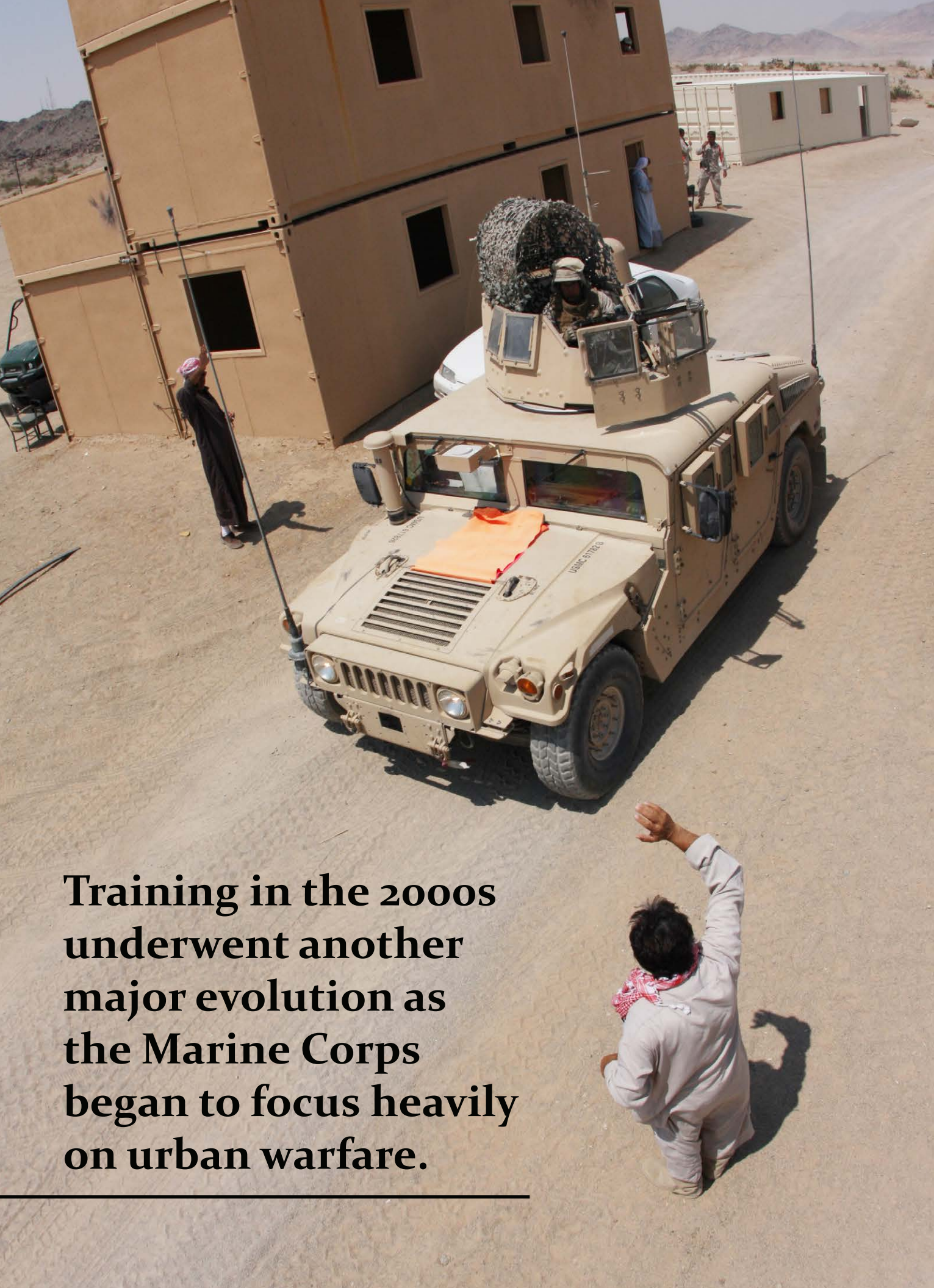
This page: Marines and sailors with Company C, 1st Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, unload from amphibious assault vehicles 20 January 2010 before storming Range 210. (Pvt Michael Gams)



The Marines had known since the 1980s that both their land and airspace here were finite.



Training in the 2000s underwent another major evolution as the Marine Corps began to focus heavily on urban warfare.



In 2004, a Center for Naval Analyses study determined that the Combat Center was the installation best suited to allow a MEB's three battalions to simultaneously maneuver for 48 to 72 hours in a live-fire, combined-arms exercise scenario, but only if the training lands could be expanded. Mainside comprised only 7 square miles of the installation's land mass, but of the remaining land, less than half was suitable for MEB training purposes. Munitions storage, unsuitable terrain, proximity to people, protected habitat, and cultural and historical sites all restricted live-fire training.

The Marine Corps began working to see if that recommended expansion was feasible. It wouldn't be an easy task. Studies and planning, environmental hurdles, negotiations with Congress and numerous federal agencies, and outreach to convince the public that expansion was necessary to allow Marines to train as they fight would continue well into the next decade.

Despite the upheaval of combat deployments and their heavy human toll, the decade was not without highlight — on 23 April 2006, President George W. Bush became the first president to visit the Combat Center, landing on the parade field near the Protestant Chapel, where he attended a church service then ate lunch, chatted with Marines and posed for photos at Phelps Hall before departing.

That same year, the Combat Center teamed up with the University of California, Los Angeles to give the desert tortoise, a threatened species found throughout the installation, a head start. Biologists began bringing pregnant females to the Tortoise Research and Captive Rearing Site (TRACRS) in the non-live-fire Sand Hill Training Area to lay their clutches of eggs.

The Combat Center itself continued to grow throughout the 2000s, as more Marines were stationed aboard the installation.

In February 2007, the G-5 Community Plans Liaison Office (later renamed Government and External Affairs)

stood up to help foster relationships with city, town, county and state governments, federal entities and individuals in the surrounding communities. The Community Relations, Public Affairs and Community Liaison sections help to ensure the Combat Center is a good neighbor through outreach, event participation, community service projects, and school and other partnerships.

Training in the 2000s underwent another major evolution as the Marine Corps began to focus heavily on urban warfare. By the end of 2005, the CAX program was replaced with Mojave Viper. In 2009, it was upgraded to Enhanced Mojave Viper when aircraft were added to the training mix. The Range 200/215 MOUT complex, resembling villages in the Middle East, went operational and role-players were on call to provide realistic scenarios allowing warriors to practice the skills they needed to successfully conduct operations in urban environments around the globe.

A Virtual Combat Convoy Trainer, the first generation of the Combat Convoy Simulator now operating in the Battle Simulation Center (BSC) at Camp Wilson, also came aboard. Over the next few years, more simulators would be added at the site, including those replicating tactical vehicle rollovers, and the challenging road and weather conditions the drivers may encounter. Approximately 30,000 Marines train annually at the BSC, which added tactical off-road and live convoy operations courses to complement the virtual training.

Battalion- and regimental-level commanders got a training boost when the Marine Corps Tactics and Operations Group stood up to provide standardized training in Marine Air-Ground Task Force operations.

In 2007, a decade after the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory in Quantico began studying urban warfare environments, the Combat Center broke ground on Range 220, also known as CAMOUT for Combined Arms Military Operations on Urban Terrain. CAMOUT would be built in the Quackenbush training area in three phases over the next several years, each phase funded separately and put into operation upon completion.

Opposite page: Iraqi role players wave as Marines and sailors of Combat Logistics Battalion 1 drive through Wardah City near Range 215 during the Day Urban Mobility Operational Course, 14 August 2009. (Cpl Nicole Lavine)

This page: President George W. Bush, 43rd president of the United States, speaks to Marines and family members at Phelps Hall, 23 April 2006. Bush is the only sitting president to visit the installation in its 65-year history. His mother, First Lady Barbara Bush, visited the Combat Center after Marines returned from Desert Storm in 1991. (White House photo by Eric Draper)

THE 2010s

The Combat Center won six Installation Excellence awards over an eight-year period.

This page: Pvt Josh Hurley of the Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School works with Stina Jacobson of Joshua Tree to clean up broken glass and rusted cans at Section 33 in Joshua Tree, 20 April 2013. The land was preserved through the installation's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration partnership with the Mojave Desert Land Trust. (Kelly O'Sullivan)

Opposite page: Marines with Anti-Armor Section, Weapons Company, Ground Combat Element Integrated Task Force, fire an MK153 shoulder-launched multipurpose assault weapon during a Marine Corps Operational Test and Evaluation Activity assessment at Range 107, 11 April 2015. (Cpl Paul S. Martinez)



The first decade of the 21st Century faded into the second with combat rotations and training continuing, construction ongoing, and environmental and expansion issues being addressed.

Significant upgrades to installation infrastructure were undertaken, with more than \$500 million spent on projects that included construction and renovation of barracks, and new family housing units. Every successive year would see quality-of-life upgrades benefiting those who live and work aboard the Combat Center.

Quality-of-life improvements throughout the decade included a new 136,182-square-foot main exchange and a more modern exchange at Camp Wilson, a \$1.2 million renovation to the Sleepy Tortoise Lodge, which reopened in February 2012 with 35 refurbished rooms and a breakfast room; a new RV storage lot completed that doubled the size of the old one; a new Lifelong Learning Center offering 13 classrooms and administrative spaces and a second electrical cogeneration plant that, at 9.2 megawatts, is the largest in the Marine Corps. With two cogeneration plants and more than 50 photovoltaic solar arrays, the Combat Center can supply 90 percent of its electrical consumption annually.

The Combat Center also became the first command in the Marine Corps authorized to train its own instructors in the Department of the Navy's Continuous Process Improvement program when three members of the Business Performance Office were certified as senior instructors. Over a 10-year period, BPO, renamed Performance and Innovation, completed 78 improvement projects, saving the Marine Corps more than \$24 million and training more than 3,000 service members and civilians at the Combat Center and other installations.

For the cumulative effect of its improvements to training programs, service to warfighters and fidelity to families, the Combat Center won numerous awards, including an unprecedented five consecutive Commander-in-Chief's Installation Excellence Awards. The award bestowed by the Office of the President of the United States recognizes the military installation whose workforce achievements are worthy of emulation throughout each of the services. In all, the Combat Center won six Installation Excellence awards over an eight-year period.

In 2010, the Combat Center partnered with the Mojave Desert Land Trust for the installation's first Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) project. The program, aimed at combating encroachment on the installation, preserves natural habitats and landscapes surrounding military installations and ranges through partnership opportunities with conservation and other organizations. The Marines helped the land trust acquire 955 acres in the village of Joshua Tree that serve as a wildlife corridor between the installation and Joshua Tree National Park. The Quail Mountain project area also was important to the Marine Corps because of its location under two main military air training routes connecting the desert installation to Camp Pendleton and Marine Corps Air Station, Miramar. By 2016, five more REPI projects had been completed in the surrounding communities, with a total of 2,949 acres preserved, and more projects on the horizon.





With the death of al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in May 2011 and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, MAGTFTC leadership worked to ensure that its warriors were ready for whatever the future held.

A few months earlier, when CAMOUT's final phase went live in January 2011, the Marines had something no one else in the world had, but everyone wanted, a seven-district, 1,560-building city the size of downtown San Diego that could easily accommodate up to 15,000 troops during training. No building's footprint was the same and the real-world scenarios that could play out in and around the 274-acre facility were nearly endless. Remote-control cameras on site allowed commanders to record and review the action to determine their units' strengths and weaknesses.

CAMOUT was expected to meet the Marine Corps' urban training needs well beyond the required date of 2015. By 2017, the number of U.S. and allied service members who had trained on the range numbered in the thousands. Law enforcement agencies from around the region also train periodically at the site.

In June 2012, the command activated its newest professional assessment and standardization unit, the Marine Corps Logistics Operations Group, after its move from Camp Johnson, North Carolina. This solidified the installation's role as the professional authority for MAGTF operations, giving the "crown jewel in the desert" the capability to train and assess all four MAGTF elements preparing for missions across the globe.

That September, the Enhanced Mojave Viper training curriculum faded into history as the Marine Corps returned to traditional warfighting skills via the Integrated Training Exercise (ITX). The new training incorporated a building-block approach, beginning at a platoon level and increasing to a battalion-sized element, where Marines utilized combined-arms tactics to employ counter measures, or initiated attacks on simulated enemy targets.

To support the new ITX curriculum, the G-4 established an Exercise Logistics Coordination Center (ELCC) to serve as the focal point for units to register and synchronize their logistics requirements with activities aboard the Combat Center. The ELCC was activated 1 October 2012, just days after the final EMV wrapped. ITX 1-13 kicked off 11 January 2013 with more than 15 units from across the Marine Corps training on the Combat Center's vast expanse of ranges, including 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines, 7th Marine Regiment, which was preparing for deployment to Afghanistan for Operation Enduring Freedom in March.

"Darkside" returned home from Afghanistan in fall 2013 and began preparing to deactivate as part of a Congressional mandate to reduce the number of active-duty Marines to 175,000. The colors of the Marine Corps' most-deployed battalion of the past decade were cased on 30 May 2014 during a ceremony at LCpl Torrey L. Gray Field, but 3/4 wouldn't be out of service for long. On 17 September 2015, the unit unfurled its battle colors for the eighth time since its initial activation at Naval Base San Diego in 1925.



Opposite page: Range 220, seen from the air in 2012, is the size of downtown San Diego. (Kelly O'Sullivan)

This page, from top: Marines with Tank Platoon, Company B, Ground Combat Element Integrated Task Force, send rounds down range via lanyard fire at Range 500, 1 March 2015. (Cpl Paul S. Martinez)

Cpl Kimberly Behmlander, driver, Tank Platoon, Company B, Ground Combat Element Integrated Task Force, loads a .50-caliber machine gun atop an M1A1 Abrams tank during a Marine Corps Operational Test and Evaluation Activity assessment at Range 500, 7 March 2015. (Cpl Paul S. Martinez)

Marines with Amphibious Assault Vehicle Platoon, Company B, Ground Combat Element Integrated Task Force, roll out to firing positions during assessment at Range 500, 3 March 2015. (Cpl Paul S. Martinez)



This page, from top: Laura Roberts, left, and Erika Harkins, wives of Marines stationed with Marine Wing Support Squadron 374, participate in a simulated field exercise during the Lifestyle, Insights, Networking, Knowledge and Skills program's CAX for Spouses in October 2010. (Courtesy of Heather Miner)

The Johnson Valley Shared Use Area was added to the Combat Center's training lands in 2013. The first training conducted in the area occurred in August 2016. (Kelly O'Sullivan)

Cpl Don Robinson, artilleryman with Lima Battery, 3rd Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment, reconnects with his 8-month-old daughter, Samira, 4 June 2012, after returning from deployment with the 31st MEU. (Sgt Heather Golden)

Opposite page, clockwise from left: Marines with Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, conduct platoon attacks at Range 220 during ITX 1-17, 7 November 2016. (Sgt Patricia A. Morris)

Marines with 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion move a simulated casualty to a secure location during the clear stage of Enhanced Mojave Viper training at Range 220, Sept. 5, 2011. (Cpl Andrew Thorburn)

Cpl Dwight Jackson, a military working dog handler with 1st Law Enforcement Battalion, 1 Marine Expeditionary Force, poses with Hugo, a 4-year-old patrol explosive detector dog, during Large Scale Exercise-1, Javelin Thrust 2012, 11 July 2012. (Cpl Joshua Young)

Marines with Amphibious Assault Vehicle Platoon, Company B, Ground Combat Element Integrated Task Force, maneuver through Washboard Road, 27 February 2015. (Cpl Paul S. Martinez)



Perhaps the biggest news of the new decade occurred in December 2013, when the National Defense Authorization Act of 2014 (NDAA 2014) was signed into law, authorizing the withdrawal of federal land and the purchase of non-federal land adjacent to the base for the purpose of meeting MEB-level training requirements.

The land expansion the Marine Corps had been seeking for nearly a decade had come to fruition, with NDAA 2014 setting aside approximately 107,000 acres west and south of the Combat Center boundaries in Johnson Valley for exclusive military use. Another 56,000 acres, known as the Shared Use Area, would be jointly managed by the Marine Corps and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Under the agreement, the Shared Use Area would be available for public recreation 10 months each year, with two 30-day periods set aside each year for military training.

The expansion and the joint agreement between the two federal entities required considerable coordination and preparation as the Marines prepared to utilize the new training lands. Boundaries were surveyed, signs marking the installation installed, cultural sites identified, tortoises translocated from training areas, and new training objectives put into place and exercises incorporating the new training lands formulated.

While directorates across the installation moved forward with their respective tasks, Government and External Affairs, which was appointed in September 2014 to work with the BLM as part of the Resource Management Group (RMG), began implementing a robust communications strategy to inform the public about training utilizing the new lands.

The decade also would be another momentous one for women in the Marine Corps.

In July 2014, the Ground Combat Element Integrated Task Force stood up at Camp Lejeune to conduct integrated, gender-neutral training as the first step toward opening combat jobs to women. Four months later, the task force headed to the Combat Center, where it would spend three months in the field. Task force Marines also spent time at the Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center in Bridgeport as part of the year-long assessment.

The task force deactivated in July 2015, and several months later, on 3 December 2015, Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter announced that all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces would open combat jobs to women. He accepted the Marine Corps' integration plan on 10 March 2016, and on 3 January 2017, the first



three female infantry Marines joined 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, at Camp Lejeune to begin serving as a rifleman, machine gunner and mortar Marine. The battalion already had women serving as a wire chief, and as logistics and motor transport officers.

The decade also saw dedication of the Combat Center's newest dining facility. The 21,840-square-foot facility, named for posthumous Medal of Honor recipient Cpl Jason L. Dunham nearly 10 years after his death, could seat 440 patrons and featured state-of-the-art design. The 18 February 2014 ceremony at Dunham Hall on 10th Street was attended by six generals and the fallen Marine's parents, Dan and Debra Dunham, who told the Observation Post, "Jason liked to eat, so (the mess hall) is a good thing. He called home one day and said, 'the Navy has the best food,' and I think he is really missing out on a good thing here."

Other amenities added for the enjoyment of Combat Center personnel included a paved footpath connecting Ocotillo Heights housing to the commissary, bike trails, upgraded gym facilities and an 8,000-square-foot community center serving Vista del Sol housing. Victory Park, built on the site of the old Marine Corps Exchange and featuring an amphitheater, playground equipment, grass playing field, and barbecues and seating areas surrounded by a walking path, was dedicated in 2016.

On the environmental front, biologists with TRACRS, the headstart tortoise program established nine years earlier, released the first 35 tortoises raised at the facility back into their mothers' home ranges in Sand Hill in September 2015. They announced that releases would continue until all 475 tortoises given a head start at TRACRS were integrated back into the wild. Tortoises released from TRACRS were equipped with transmitters to allow biologists to track their survival and to determine whether head-started tortoises can successfully breed and produce living young.

In 2015, MCCES activated the Communication Training Battalion to train officers and enlisted Marines under the colors of one battalion.

Training also continued to evolve for units under MAGTFTC operating at two other installations: the Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center in

Bridgeport and Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron 1 at Marine Corps Air Station, Yuma. MCMWTC conducts training courses to prepare units and individuals for operations in mountainous, high-altitude and cold-weather environments utilizing more than 52,000 acres of national forest land under an agreement with the U.S. Forest Service for a majority of the year. In winter, that acreage increases to more than 62,000 acres. In all, about 6,000 service members train each year at altitudes ranging from 6,800 to nearly 12,000 feet above sea level via Winter, Summer and Reserve Mountain Exercises, and an assortment of courses including leadership, scout sniper, medical, communications and survival. The Animal Packer Course teaches Marines how to use mules to transport weapons, ammunition, supplies and wounded personnel, and Special Operations Horsemanship teaches Special Operations forces how to employ horses in mountainous environments. MAWTS-1, commissioned in 1978, provides standardized, advanced tactical training and certification of unit instructor qualifications that support Marine training and readiness. The unit also assists in the development of aviation weapons and tactics. MAWTS-1 conducts two Weapons and Tactics Instructor (WTI) courses annually, producing more than 300 WTI graduates each year.

In 2016, the Marine Corps' hard work to meet its MEB-level training requirement finally saw tangible result when Large Scale Exercise (LSE) 16, the first training exercise utilizing the Combat Center's new lands in Johnson Valley, was held in August. The second, LSE-17, was scheduled for August 2017.

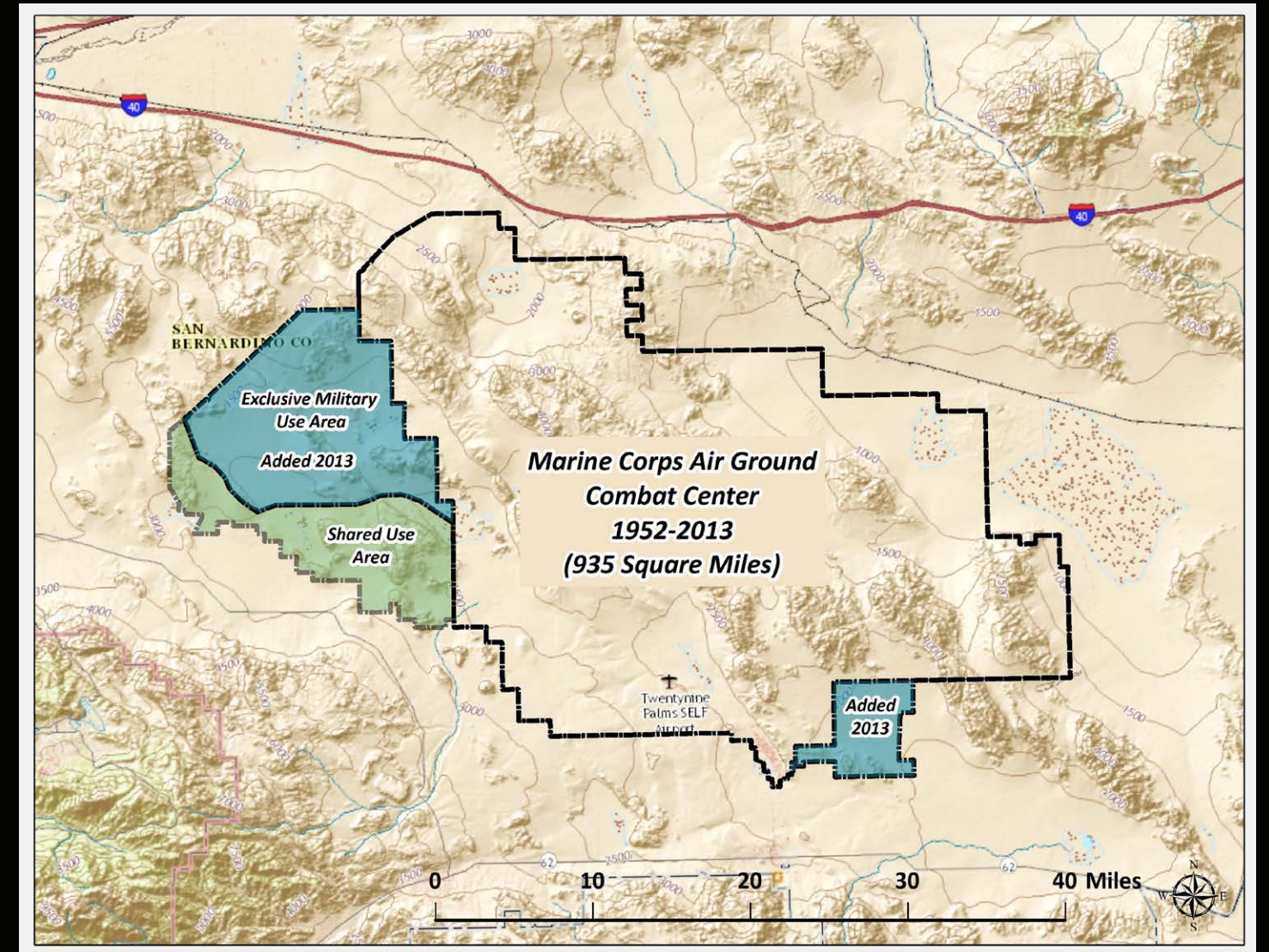
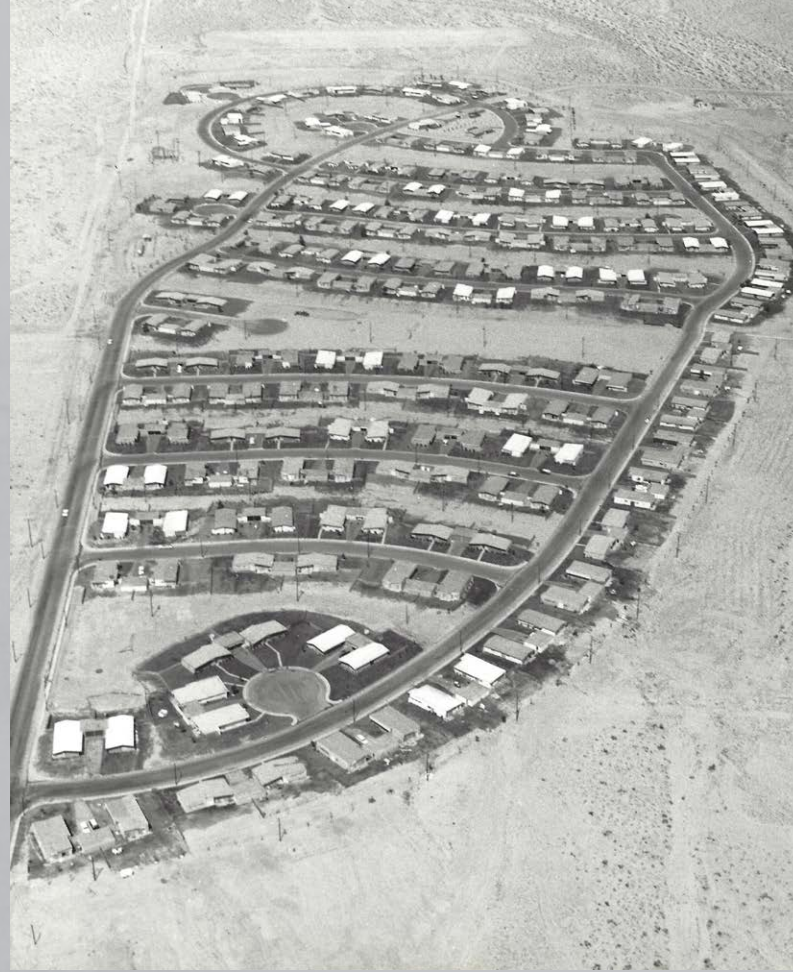
In the 1950s, it was all about space. As the Combat Center's much-needed expansion from 935 square miles to more than 1,100 square miles attests, so it is today.

Below: The Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School complex as seen from Bearmat Hill, 3 June 2015. (Kelly O'Sullivan)

Opposite page: Caden Buss, 3, son of Seaman Jonathan Buss, hospital corpsman, 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, steals one last hug before his father deploys to Afghanistan, 26 April 2012. "Tell your mom we want to get pancakes when I get back," Buss said to his son moments before the bus pulled out. Pancakes are the pair's special treat. (Diane Durden)



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This map shows training lands added to the installation when the National Defense Authorization Act of 2014 was signed into law in December 2013. (John Kersey)

Opposite page, from top:

Ocotillo Heights housing as seen from the air in 1964. (Courtesy of Peter Maroulis)

The Combat Center as seen from the air 23 July 2015. (Cpl Medina Ayala-Lo)

Back cover:

Top: The installation's main gate was featured in a 1970 postcard. (Combat Center archives)

Second row, from left: Marines with the 2nd 155mm Gun Battery in the field in 1954. (Courtesy of SgtMaj Ray Wilburn) The Combat Center Drum and Bugle Corps marches down Adobe Road in Twentynine Palms during the 1981 Pioneer Days Parade. (Combat Center archives)

Third row, from left: An MV-22 Osprey with Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 164 inserts Marines with Infantry Officer Course at Range 220 as part of Exercise Talon Reach, 23 September 2016. (LCpl Eric Clayton) Marines and sailors of 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, are welcomed home by cheering friends and family during their homecoming ceremony at Victory Field, 3 August 2009. More than 300 Marines and sailors returned from Fallujah, Iraq. (Cpl Monica Erickson)

Greetings from Twenty Nine Palms



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