



OBSERVATION POST



BULK RATE
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THIS ISSUE

A9 – 1st Tanks Scouts

B1 – CG Basketball Championship

B4 – PREP workshop

Serving the MCAGCC
Community at
Twentynine Palms, Calif.

VOL. 52 NO. 12
March 24, 2006

HOT TOPICS

INFORMATION SEMINAR ON WEAPONS SAFETY AND REGISTRATION

The Provost Marshal's Office will offer information on military and civilian firearm registration regulations and weapon safety at the Marine Corps Exchange March 31, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. They will also be giving out free cable locks. For more information, call the Physical Security/Crime Prevention office at 830-6904.

LANDSCAPING

There will be landscaping construction at the bottom of the hill between the west side of Adobe road and the jogging trail, from the main gate to Del Valle. This work will take place from March till the end of May. Traffic will not be impeded during this period.

2ND ANNUAL MSG REUNION

All Marines, whether active, retired or former, who served as Marine Security Guard's are welcome to attend the 2nd Annual MSG Reunion June 3, at Hashmarks SNCO Club. The bar opens at 6 p.m. and there will be a free buffet. Casual attire is expected and the dreaded blue blazer is optional.

Anyone interested in helping out with the planning of the reunion should Contact Master Sgt. Cowan at 830-5543.

WHEN YOU DRIVE ON BASE, YOU WILL BE SAFE!

Drive safe or your vehicle will get towed and the violation might be reported to your DMV. On March 15, the Provost Marshal's Office began towing all vehicles of those who are driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, driving on with a base or state suspension, driving with no insurance or reckless driving (usually 20 or more MPH over the speed limit). The base has contracted with four local tow companies who will be charging the vehicle owner a cost of \$150 for the tow and an additional \$30 per day for storage. There is a \$75 charge for after-hours release. In addition, if you are apprehended on base for a DUI, a notification will be made to the California Department of Motor Vehicles and your state's DMV.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

- **Charlie Company, 1st Tanks deploy**
- **L.I.N.K.S. CAX**
- **Comic Night**

THIS DAY IN MARINE CORPS HISTORY

March 24, 2003

Marines met fierce resistance at An Nasariyah during the fourth day of Operation Iraqi Freedom.



Capt. Mike Jerone, Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 1 safety officer, smiles with his 2-year-old daughter Ohana and wife Lilly upon his return to the Combat Center.

CPL. BRIAN A. TUTHILL

VMU-1 welcomed home after 7 months in Iraq

CPL. BRIAN A. TUTHILL
COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

Georgine Thompson laughed restlessly with friends and fellow spouses as she waited for the arrival of her husband. Victory Field had filled with more than 150 anxious family members, friends and fellow remain behind element Marines in anticipation of Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 1's return to the Combat Center Monday.

Over the blaring loudspeakers and the harmonies of the MCAGCC Band, the crowd listened to updates on the progress of the white buses, which whisked their loved ones away on the first day of their deployment months ago, and now would return them home again.

As voices and shouts surged together with the sounds of wailing sirens, Thompson grabbed her family and her camera as the buses hissed to a stop and spewed Marines onto the field.

Moments later, she held her husband, Staff Sgt. John Thompson, in a long and tearful embrace for the first time in seven months.

"It's so good to have him home," Mrs. Thompson said through smiles and tears. Many of the 141 Marines and Sailors of VMU-1 were welcomed home in similar fashion after their deployment to Iraq's Al Anbar province.

"Pretty much our whole family came out here for this," said Mrs. Thompson, who resides in Twentynine Palms but was joined by other family members from Texas and Los Angeles for the event. "We have his mom, sister, brother-in-law, niece and our two sons.

"This deployment has been good," she continued. "We were able to keep in touch more this time because he had internet access and sometimes was able to use the phone. Our kids took it much better this time because they were able to talk to him."

VMU-1 departed the Combat Center in August to support II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) units. The squadron is one of only two units in the Marine Corps that operate unmanned aerial vehicles, which serve as a source of near-real-time tactical aerial reconnaissance for ground commanders.

See VMU, A6

'New England's Own' heads to Al Anbar

CPL. EVAN M. EAGAN
COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

First Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, 4th Marine Division, arrived at the Combat Center Jan. 4, to train for their upcoming deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Like all ground units deploying to Iraq, 1/25, a reserve unit based at Devens Reserve Forces Training Area, Mass., came to the Combat Center to take part in the Mojave Viper training evolution, which facilitates exercise force training in the core competencies of combined arms, urban warfare and intelligence driven operations.

Having spent the greater part of this year training in the California desert, the Marines of 1/25 are more than ready to get to Iraq.

"I don't know why I'm not there yet," said Cpl. Brad Blais, a machine gunner with the personal security detachment, before he boarded a bus Tuesday to begin the battalion's deployment. "This is my third time around. I'm ready for it."

Blais, one of the more experienced members of the battalion, served his first two deployments as a member of 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment.

See 1/25, A7



Seaman Gerson Estrada, a corpsman with Headquarters and Service Company, 1st Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, 4th Marine Division, kisses his daughter, Adriana, before leaving on a seven month deployment to Iraq Tuesday.

CPL. EVAN M. EAGAN

1/14 leaves Combat Center, joins War on Terror



Marines with 1st Battalion, 14th Marine Regiment, 4th Marine Division, load buses Friday to depart the Combat Center for a seven-month deployment.

CPL. EVAN M. EAGAN
COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

After spending nearly three months aboard the Combat Center training for a deployment to Iraq, 1st Battalion, 14th Marine Regiment, 4th Marine Division, began their departure over a two week period beginning March 15.

First Battalion, 14th Marine Regiment, is a reserve artillery battalion based in Alameda, Calif., and is reinforced by an active duty artillery battery and a reserve military police company.

The battalion deployed under the auspices of Task Force Military Police, and will conduct detention operations, assist the Iraqi police in operational matters, and conduct other military police missions in Al Anbar province.

Having recently concluded Mojave Viper, the month-long training evolution consisting of range training and military operations in urban terrain, the battalion has made the transition from artillery to military police.

Because they spent an extended period of time at the Combat Center, training and getting acclimated to the desert environment, many members of the battalion are anxious to get to Iraq.

See 1/14, A7

C.O.P. Corner

Community Oriented Policing

The proactive voice of crime prevention



Presented by the Provost Marshal's Office Crime Prevention Section

The Cost of Drinking and Driving

(Based on an E-6 w/ 15 yrs of service)

Cost Average	Description
\$ 2,500.00	Attorney's Fees
\$ 187.00	Towing and storage for vehicle
\$ 266.00	Booking, finger printing, photo fee, and license reinstatement
\$ 550.00	DUI Class
\$ 7,360.00	Insurance rate increase
\$ 1,696.00	Misc. fees (court fees, restitution, DUI Victim's Fund, etc...)
\$ 2,427.90	NJP fine
\$ 18,624.00	Lost Base Pay due to not promoted
\$ 82,500.00	Lost Retirement pay over 25 years
\$116,110.90	Total monetary loss for a DUI

In addition to fines, punishments and fees, expect the following:

- 1 hour in cuffs
- 4 hours in jail
- 3 hours retrieving car
- 2 days at DMV
- 2 days picking up highway trash
- 2 nights Victim's Impact Panel
- 15-week DUI Class
- 4 months without license
- 1 year suspension of base driving privileges
- 3 years probation

Information provided through case studies conducted by PMO and by:

Jany K. Wasdin
Financial Management Program Advisor
Marine and Family Services, BLDG 1551
(760) 830-7342

The following services are available to on-base personnel and residents through Crime Prevention: literature, briefs, education, crime assessments, safety tips, the Stranger Danger program, McGruff the Crime Dog, the Officer Friendly program, the Property Marking program, and the Child Identification and Fingerprinting program. For more information call Crime Prevention, 830-6094/5457.

Presented by the Provost Marshal's Office Crime Prevention Section

Sempertoons

By Gunnery Sgt. Charles Wolf

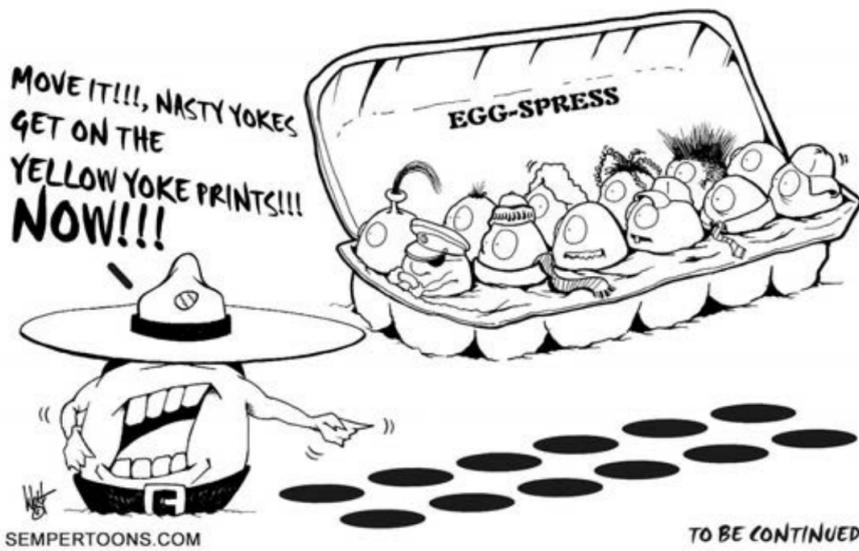
PART 1 of a 4 PART SERIES

SemperToons Presents: How Easter Eggs get hard for Easter.

The eggs come from all over the United States to Yoke Depot, CANDY EGGO. Where they meet their Senior Easter Egg Instructor "HARD BOIL".

His job, to get these ordinary eggs Hard Boiled and ready for coloring before Easter!

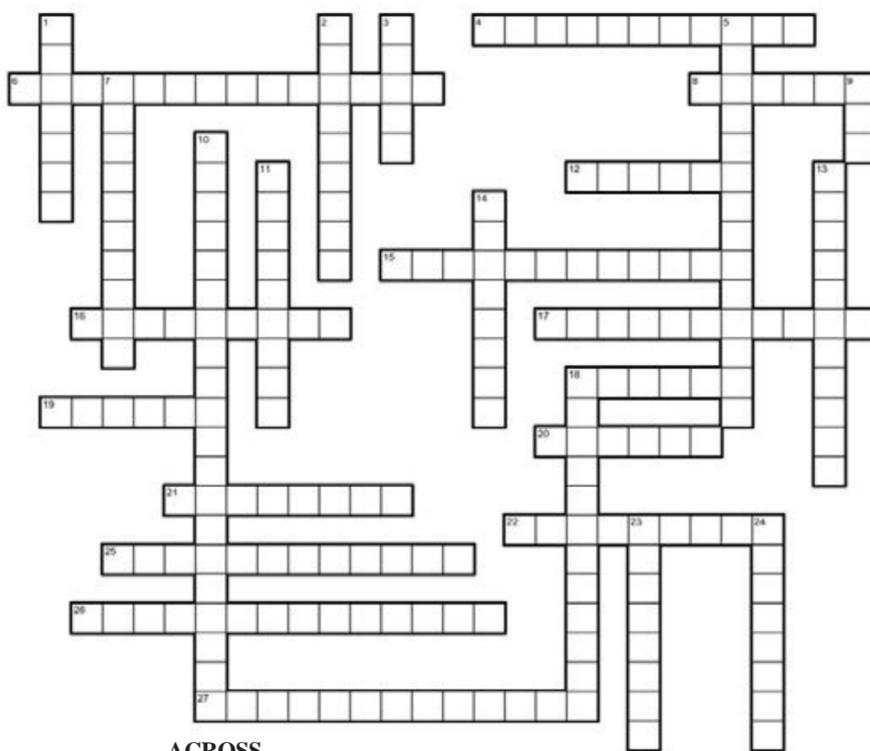
They arrive on the Depot EGG-SPRESS.



SEMPERTOONS.COM

TO BE CONTINUED

CARTOON CHARACTERS AGAIN



ACROSS

DOWN

- Don't have a cow, man.
- His car was powered by his feet
- Owns his own lab
- A white dog with black spots. He has a yellow bird for a friend
- Wore a yellow shirt with a brown, zig-zag line across it
- Timid dog that solved mysteries
- Someone framed him
- A sailor that loves spinach
- He wore a "Metallica" shirt
- Full name Stimpson J. Cat
- Knows propane and propane accessories
- What's up, Doc?
- Works at Springfields nuclear power plant
- Lives "down under" causing ruckus
- A "family" oriented toddler with a football-shaped head

- Respect his authority when you're in Colorado
- "Hey, hey, hey!"
- Dies at the end of every show
- Fastest mouse in Mexico
- A Sailor and a duck
- An edgy chihuahua
- lives in the city of Bikini Bottom, deep in the Pacific Ocean
- A duck that spits when he talks
- Loony gunslinger
- Had a stuttering problem
- A "family" oriented father
- He wore an "AC/DC" shirt
- Always stole picnic baskets

[Solutions on A6]

Marines, Sailors, and cab drivers: MCOS will reimburse ANY licensed cab company for transportation to the Main Gate, Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center. Drivers: please legally record information from your fare's military I.D. card. Thank you for participating.

ARRIVE ALIVE
A Combat Center Car Company 367-7433
Top's Taxi 361-6748

MCOS ARRIVE ALIVE
The endorsement of the sponsor is intended to support the federal, state, or local government.

Centerspeak

"What do you think about increased punishment for drunk drivers?"

Opinions expressed in Centerspeak are not necessarily those of the OBSERVATION POST, the Marine Corps or Department of Defense.



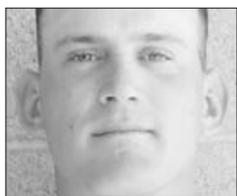
GUNNERY SGT. ROBERT COLE
HEADQUARTERS BATTALION

"It's a good thing. Marines are not above the law, they should be held accountable."



PFC. BRANDI ARMENDARIZ
MCCES STUDENT

"It's right. You shouldn't be drunk driving anyways."



CPL. JOHN ALBERT
3/11 MIKE BATTERY

"Our standards are already high. No matter how much you increase it, it's not going to stop those Marines who want to do it."



CW03 DARRYL MCCOY
FINANCE OFFICE

"Yes, everybody's been warned don't drink and drive. You get what you deserve."

What's on your mind?

Centerspeak welcomes questions or submissions from service members, Department of Defense civilians and family members.

Address submissions to:
Commanding General
Public Affairs Office
(Attn. Press Chief)
MCAGCC
Box 788200
Twentynine Palms, CA 92278-8200

Or E-mail to:
evan.eagan@usmc.mil

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Customers alerted to rise in fraudulent coupon use

MARINE CORPS PRESS RELEASE

FORT LEE, Va.— Be careful how you get your Internet coupons.

That's the word from Defense Commissary Agency officials who are alerting customers about a recent rise in the use of fraudulent Internet or home-printed coupons and steps the agency has taken to address the issue.

Commissaries gladly accept Internet or home-printed coupons provided they meet these requirements: the coupons must have "dot-scan" bars below expiration dates or bar codes with Product Identification Numbers (PINs), and they can't be for free products. This is an expansion of acceptance criteria for home-printed coupons because counterfeit coupons have shown up recently in commissaries and other supermarkets nationwide. Officials are pointing to Internet trading as the source of the counterfeit coupons.

"Counterfeit coupons are circulating on the Internet through auction services, message boards, e-mails and other means causing millions of dollars in losses to the grocery industry," said Scott Simpson, DeCA's chief operating officer.

Fraudulent coupons presented recently at commissaries were for products ranging from laundry detergents, air fresheners and deli meats to sodas, chips and over-the-counter medications. Defining more stringent requirements for stores to

accept home-printed coupons is one phase of action the agency is taking to combat the problem. Educating customers about how to avoid getting taken by counterfeit coupons is the other phase, and it's been described as the best line of defense against possible fraud, Simpson said.

People who purchase or trade coupons are inherently at risk of receiving counterfeit coupons, therefore customers shouldn't buy or trade for coupons. The sale or transfer of coupons is a violation of virtually all manufacturers' coupon redemption policies, according to the Coupon Information Center, a coupon industry watchdog. These policies are printed on the coupons.

Customers can be assured they are not obtaining counterfeits if they get their coupons directly from newspapers or magazines, directly from a manufacturer or from some other legitimate coupon channel, including Internet sites. Legitimate Internet coupons are featuring new dot-scan bars below their expiration dates. The dot-scan bars look like bar codes with broken bar patterns. Internet coupons also usually have PINs and bar codes, and they are not for free products.

Here are some tips to avoid possible counterfeit coupons:

- Look for the dot-scan bar below the expiration date on Internet coupons. If they don't have a dot-scan bar, look for a PIN and bar code. Many now have both a dot-scan bar along with a PIN and bar code.

- Look out for coupons printed on photocopy, plain white, photographic or card stock and coupons with fuzzy images or misspelled words.

- Look out for unusually long expiration dates.

- Look out for coupons sent to you in electronic format by someone other than a manufacturer or its authorized representative.

- Look out for coupons with printing on only one side.

- Look out for multiple coupons for the same product with identical PINs.

The Defense Commissary Agency operates a worldwide chain of commissaries providing groceries to military personnel, retirees and their families in a safe and secure shopping environment. Authorized patrons purchase items at cost plus a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. Shoppers save an average of 30 percent or more on their purchases compared to commercial prices — savings worth about \$2,700 annually for a family of four.

A core military family support element, and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to family readiness, enhance the quality of life for America's military and their families, and help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve their country.

'Phishing' scam targets thrift savings plan participants

SAMANTHA L. QUIGLEY
AMERICAN FORCES PRESS SERVICE

WASHINGTON — Participants, as well as some non-participants, in the Thrift Savings Plan are targets of a "phishing" scam, an official with the board administering the program said Monday.

Tom Trabucco, director of external affairs for the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board, said phishing is an "attempt to get recipients of the unsolicited e-mail to compromise themselves by giving up their personal financial information."

Thrift Savings Plan administrators would never request personal or financial information via e-mail, Trabucco said. "Do not respond to unsolicited e-mail, and never give out information of a personal nature [through] unsolicited e-mails," he said.

The Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board alerted Thrift Savings Plan coordinators to the scam in a March 17

memo, the day after the scam was discovered. The memo described it as an unsolicited e-mail with a link to a bogus Web site appearing to be the thrift plan's account-access site.

The bogus site asks for a recipient's social security and Thrift Savings Plan personal identification numbers. Entering this information takes the user to another screen where they are asked for financial information, including a credit card number, he said, adding that this information can be used to steal an individual's identity.

As long as participants have not responded to this scam e-mail, their accounts have not been compromised, investment board officials said in the memo. Those who did respond should contact their financial institutions immediately for guidance. They should also call the Thrift Savings Plan at 1 (877) 968-3778 and ask to have their account access blocked, according to the memo.

Phishing e-mails generally appear to be from a business or organization the recipient may deal with, according to a Federal Trade Commission Consumer Alert issued in June 2005. It may request that the recipient update, validate or confirm account information, the alert said.

Participants are encouraged not to attempt to access their accounts by clicking links offered in any e-mail, according to the memo. Only by opening a new Internet browser and typing the Thrift Savings Plan's Web site into the address field can a participant be sure of accessing the authentic thrift plan Web site.

The thrift plan is a retirement savings plan for 3.6 million federal civilians and service members, Trabucco said. Officials don't know how many plan participants the scam has affected, but the FBI is investigating, he added.

All-Marine chess players wanted

QUANTICO, Va. — Calling all Marine chess players.

The deadline for Marines interested in applying for the All-Marine Chess Team is April 21.

MarAdmin 084/86 made the call to all U.S. Chess Federation rated Marines to put in their bid via resume to be part of the six-person team that will meet in head-to-head competition during the Inter-service Chess tournament June 11-17 in Jacksonville, Fla. The top finishers from each service and the top remaining finishers overall will move on to compete

internationally in the NATO Chess Tournament held this year at Wellington College, England, August 19-26.

Rest assured, this is no afternoon at the club chatting and sipping wine. These are the services' best tacticians concentrating and calculating over five straight 12-hour days of mindbending tactics, fianchettoes, zugzwangs and intermezzos. The services each take turns hosting the event, which includes the main tournament to determine a service team champion, a speed tournament and an awards ceremony to

acknowledge the participants.

Applicants should carefully read and follow the directions in the MarAdmin to ensure their resume is accurate and correctly submitted.

The point of contact at Headquarters Marine Corps, Marine Corps Community Services is Ms. Donna Seabrease, (703) 784-9542 (DSN 278).

Arrive Alive brings Marines home safe

Name _____
 ID # _____
 Pick up at _____
 Destination _____
 Total fee _____
 Driver _____
 Date/Time _____
 Customer _____
 Signature _____

MCCCS **ARRIVE ALIVE** *ARRIVE ALIVE*
 MARINE CORPS COMMUNITY SERVICES **WE ALL MAKE A DIFFERENCE**
 THE AIR FORCE BRIGADE

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MCCCS **ARRIVE ALIVE**
 A Combat Center
 Car Company 367-7433
 Top's Taxi 361-6748

**Marines, Sailors, and cab drivers:
 MCCS will reimburse ANY licensed
 cab company for transportation to
 the Main Gate, Marine Corps Air Ground
 Combat Center. Drivers: please
 legibly record information from your
 fare's military I.D. card.
 Thank you for participating.**

CPL. BRIAN A. TUTHILL
 COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

"The Arrive Alive card program really picked up here last year and there is no doubt that it has saved lives of our Marines," said David Roman, Combat Center drug demand reduction coordinator.

The Arrive Alive program, which offers Marines, Sailors and their spouses, a free taxi ride home through Marine Corps Community Services, began more than five years ago but only last year saw a surge in use, said Roman.

The cards, which each battalion is given, are designed for those who don't have the money to pay for a cab ride home anywhere in the High Desert area. The card can also be used in any sort of emergency as well, but is targeted at those who may be too drunk to drive, said Roman.

"This program not only saves lives, but

saves careers," said Maj. Matt Baker, deputy director of Marine Corps Community Services.

Fines and penalties imposed on DUIs can easily exceed \$12,500 and company or battalion level punishments. This gets them home no questions asked, said Roman.

"Recently the command here authorized harsher punishment for on-base DUIs," said Roman. "Too many Operation Iraqi Freedom vets come back and buy new cars, but then get a DUI and can't drive on base anymore. On top of that their insurance can go up almost 400 percent.

"It really comes down to the individual Marine," continued Roman. "There are too many choices and alternatives out there for any Marine to choose to drink and drive, and now they are really going to pay for it."

When a Marine uses an Arrive Alive card, they simply give the cab driver the card and their ID card to fill out the appropriate informa-

tion and MCCS will send an invoice to be repaid within 30 days. Only when the Marine has paid their debt will another card be issued.

The cards are not going to waste, said Baker. In 2005, there were 244 cards used. As of Wednesday, 53 cards had already been redeemed by Marines and Sailors to get home safely.

Currently, two local cab companies accept the cards: A Combat Center Cab Co. and Top's Taxi. Other cab companies who accept the cards can also be used, said Baker.

"The Marine Corps is not saying 'stop drinking,'" said Roman, who deals with Marines in trouble for substance abuse. "The goal is to have those Marines who do drink be responsible about it.

"There is just too much for someone to lose," continued Roman. "Good Marines sometimes make bad decisions. This program helps them make that good decision."

Bush: success in Tal Afar shows evidence Iraqi strategy working

DONNA MILES
 AMERICAN FORCES PRESS SERVICE

WASHINGTON — President Bush Monday pointed to the dramatic turnaround in Tal Afar, Iraq — a city once gripped by terrorist oppression that's now undergoing a vibrant revitalization — as concrete evidence that the national strategy for victory in Iraq is working.

Speaking at the City Club of Cleveland, a free speech

forum, the president said developments in Tal Afar show clear progress on the political, security and economic fronts and proof that the Iraqi people want to live in freedom.

Calling the northern Iraqi city with its diverse population "a microcosm of Iraq," the president said its example "gives me confidence in our strategy."

Tal Afar's 200,000 residents lived under the intimi-

ation of insurgents who were using the city as a base to organize, train and equip terror cells.

U.S. and Iraqi forces drove out the insurgents in "Operation Restore Rights," in fall 2005. Government forces are now rebuilding housing, schools and other facilities.

Iraqi forces took the lead in securing neighborhoods and, during two weeks of intense activity, killed 150 terrorists and captured another 850, the

president said. In addition to ridding the city of terrorists who'd established a hotbed there, the effort won the citizen's confidence and encouraged them to participate in their country's new democracy, he said.

"In this city, we see the outlines of the Iraq that we and the Iraqi people have been fighting for," Bush said. "A free and secure people are getting back on their feet ... (and) participating in govern-

ment and civic life."

The story of Tal Afar also shows that with a basic level of safety and security, Iraqis can live together peacefully, he said.

Bush said the strategy for victory is working, and "we know it because the people of Tal Afar are showing their gratitude." He cited a letter from Najim Abdullah Abid Al-Jibouri, the city's mayor, praising "the courageous men and women of the 3rd

Armored Cavalry Regiment, who have changed the city of Tal Afar from a ghost town, in which terrorists spread death and destruction, to a secure city flourishing with life."

The mayor called these soldiers "avenging angels sent by the god himself to fight the evil of terrorism."

Bush said it's understandable how U.S. citizens who see horrific news images from Iraq but never hear of successes like the one in Tal Afar might question the U.S. mission there. "I understand how Americans have had their confidence shaken," he said.

The war in Iraq has "tested our resolve" as a nation, the president said. "The fighting has been tough. The enemy has proved to be brutal."

In the face of this adversary, the United States has adapted to reflect realities on the ground. Bush described how the situation in Tal Afar gave rise to the new "clear, hold and build" approach that's being used throughout Iraq. That strategy builds on cooperation between coalition and Iraqi forces and new capabilities within Iraq's forces, he said.

"Under this new approach, Iraqi and coalition forces would clear a city of the terrorists, leave well-trained Iraqi units behind to hold the city, and work with local leaders to build the economic and political infrastructure Iraqis need to live in freedom," the president said.

Turning Tal Afar and other Iraqi cities over to Iraqi control enables U.S. forces to move on to other areas to hunt for "high-value targets" like Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Bush said. But he noted that it also accomplishes another, even more important objective. "By turning control of these cities over to capable Iraqi troops and police, we give Iraqis confidence that they can determine their own destiny," he said.

Today, Tal Afar represents a shining example of democracy taking hold in Iraq, the president noted. And that's the United States' and coalition's ultimate goal for Iraq, he said. The decision to enter Iraq three years ago was difficult, Bush acknowledged, but he insisted, "The decision to remove Saddam Hussein was the right decision."

Bush called Iraq the central front in the war on terror, noting that if the United States wasn't fighting terrorists there, the extremists wouldn't be idle. Rather, they'd be busy planning more attacks against the United States, he said.

Staying the course in Iraq and seeing the U.S. strategy through to victory will help prevent that from happening, he said. "We will settle for nothing less than victory," Bush said. "The United States will never abandon Iraq. We will not leave that country to the terrorists who attacked America and want to attack us again."



GUNNERY SGT. MARK OLIVA

Iraqi soldiers drive one of their new armored humvees. The Iraq's 2nd Brigade, 1st Iraqi Division took delivery of 10 armored humvees, purchased by Iraq's Ministry of Defense.



GUNNERY SGT. MARK OLIVA

An Iraqi soldier inspects the undercarriage armor of his newly issued armored humvee Saturday.

Iraqi soldiers roll in armor, thanks to Marines

GUNNERY SGT. MARK OLIVA
1ST MARINE DIVISION

CAMP HABBINYAH, Iraq — Iraqi soldiers in Fallujah are rolling in armored humvees, just like their Marine counterparts.

Iraqi soldiers from the 2nd Brigade, 1st Iraqi Army Division took delivery of 10 new armored humvees, complete with their unique paint scheme and Iraqi flags painted on the sides. It was a significant step forward in increasing the capabilities and confidence of Iraqi soldiers to carry out their own independent operations.

Until now, Iraqis patrolled the streets of Fallujah in Nissan pick-up trucks, decked with armored doors and blast shields along the bed.

"This is very important to the soldiers," said Gunnery Sgt. Herbert J. Kennedy, a 36-year-old assistant supply officer liaison to the Iraqi 2nd Brigade. "This is something they were looking forward to. It's a very good day."

The humvees were bought by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense and fitted and painted by contractors and soldiers from 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment.

"Now they can actually feel protected," added Kennedy, from Beaumont, Texas. "There's a better sense of pride."

Pride was apparent among the Iraqi soldiers as they looked over their new vehicles. They opened every door, popped the hood and inventoried parts as Marines gave quick refresher classes to make them familiar with all the controls.

Iraqi soldiers said through an interpreter, they were pleased with the delivery. They praised the "high tech-

nology" and said that with the added protection, they could "destroy the terrorists."

"We're very excited," one Iraqi soldier said. "We can't wait to go into the city of Fallujah with these cars. The terrorists will be more scared and will take more consideration before attacking."

The new humvees are more than just better protection for the Iraqis. It's also a visual reminder of their growing capabilities in the eyes of their own citizens.

"They're a status symbol," explained Capt. Jon J. Bonar, a 31-year-old from Los Angeles who serves as the senior logistics advisor to the 1st Iraqi Army Division. "All the soldiers take their picture in front of the humvees."

Kennedy agreed, adding the unique paint scheme with Iraqi flags sends a message both friends and foes.

"There's a definite distinction between their humvees and ours," he said. "Its' camo pattern won't be mistaken. When they're conquering an objective, they'll be identified by their colors. It's a great honor. It shows the Iraqis are taking the lead in the fight."

The Iraqi soldiers added they're excited about the residents of Fallujah seeing their own army's humvees rolling through the streets.

"The people see we have

modern weapons and will be more encouraged because they will see we can protect them," one Iraqi soldier said.

"I believe this is the best military vehicle in the world," another said.

Lance Cpl. Brent E. Driskill, a 20-year-old motor transport mechanic from Hot Springs, Ark., said the new humvees are just about as good as they get.

"They have the new up-armored kits," said Driskill, assigned to Regimental Combat Team 5. "They're equipped with turbos on the engines. Everything's built up. The turrets they have are more armored than ours."

Driskill added that with regular maintenance, the vehicles should last seven to eight years.

"It's amazing how much of a step up it is for them," he added. "They have more than twice the amount of weight and twice the amount of armor. They're pretty well protected."

The Iraqis drove with Marines from Fallujah to Habbinyah and back. For the mission commander, it was his first time working directly alongside Iraqis. He was encouraged by what he saw.

"We made the assumption that they were not very experienced," said Capt. Jason S. Freeby, a 31-year-old from

Houston, serving as commander of Headquarters Company, Regimental Combat Team 5. "I think we saw an example of the human spirit. No matter what culture, everyone wants to be successful. Iraqis do too."

The Iraqis folded inside the Marine convoy for movement, making the move to and from Habbinyah smooth. Freeby credited it to the burgeoning professionalism of Iraqi soldiers.

"It was like Christmas morning for those guys," he said. "They're excited about being successful. They have some good leadership and it filters down to the younger guys."

Iraqi soldiers said the new humvees also speak to the trust between Marines and their forces. They know that Marines won't be around forever and saw the addition of armored vehicles to their ranks as a step forward to complete military independence.

"It's a very good collaboration between the Iraqi Army and Marines," an Iraqi soldier explained. "I consider them as friends, especially Marines. It will be a memory of a friend, because some day, U.S. forces will leave."



Cpl. Thomas R. Regan, remain behind element, Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 1, stacks sea bags of fellow VMU-1 Marines and Sailors who returned to the Combat Center Monday.



Xander Thompson pushes his older brother Avery while wearing their father's helmet and flak jacket after Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 1's return to the Combat Center.

VMU, A1

While the band played and other families reunited on the field, the Thompson family took group photos to commemorate the happy moment of their hero's return from his third deployment to Iraq.

"It feels great to be back and see everyone again," said Thompson, the squadron intelligence chief. "I just want to take this break to spend as much time with my family as I can."

Other Marines who did not have the support of families present were not left out as Marine Corps Community Services and Key Volunteer Network "Official Huggers" swarmed them with warm welcomes.

"My family is not here, but I got my share of hugs," said Pfc. Jose Cruz, field radio operator, who wore lipstick on his cheek

from the attention he received after stepping off the bus. "We all certainly feel very welcomed."

Through the carnival-like atmosphere, many Marines said the thought of their next deployment is something they can't help shaking.

"I'm looking forward to the deployment just as much as anybody else is," said Cruz with sarcasm in his voice. "We just got back and we'll be going again soon."

VMU-1 has been deploying back-to-back with the Camp Lejeune-based VMU-2 since Operation Iraqi Freedom began because of the unique nature of support the squadrons provide to combat units.

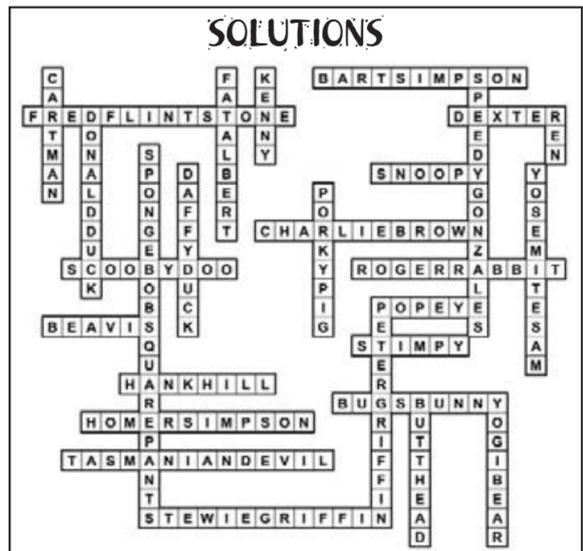
"After we settle in again we'll start preparing for the next time we have to head over there," said Thompson.

The Thompsons helped their Marine carry his pack and sea bags and loaded up their car as the smiles and commotion at Victory Field began to fade.

Other VMU-1 Marines helped take down the signs, banners

and streamers that adorned the area as the event drew to a close.

Marines and loved ones cleared the field and headed for home for well-deserved rest and leave where they could finally put their families first after the long months apart and their return journey from nearly halfway around the world.



1/25, A1

Now as a member of 1/25 his experience will be vital for the battalion, who is directly supporting OIF for the first time.

Many members of the battalion feel they gained a lot of experience and are much more prepared for the deployment, having completed Mojave Viper.

"This was the most training we've done at one time," said Lance Cpl. Shaun Powers, a rifleman with Bravo Company, and an Albany, N.Y., native. It was really good, especially the MOUT [Military Operations on Urban Terrain] town. The last few days of Mojave Viper were the most realistic. I think it was good because it is what we will be experiencing in Iraq."

While in Iraq the battalion will spend its time in western Iraq's volatile Al Anbar province. They will be tasked with conducting counter-insurgency patrols, presence patrols

and training Iraqi Security Forces, among other things.

"I'm excited to get over there," said Powers. "It's been a long time coming. I think we're all really motivated to get over there to help the Iraqi people, and win hearts and minds."

Lt. Col. Bob Underwood, an augment to the battalion from Marine Air Group 41 based in Ft. Worth, Texas, said he was impressed with the Marines' desire and motivation leading up to the deployment.

"These guys came out here motivated from day one," said Underwood, the forward air controller for Bravo Company. "They always had a learning attitude and they took everything serious, whether it was a lecture or a field exercise. I'm very impressed with the way things went."

The battalion is scheduled for a seven-month deployment.



CPL. EVAN M. EAGAN

Staff Sgt. William Jenkins, platoon sergeant, 3rd Platoon, Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 14th Marine Regiment, 4th Marine Division, conducts a weapons count before departing the Combat Center Friday, for a seven-month deployment.

1/14, A1

"They are ready to get out of Twentynine Palms and over to Iraq," said Gunnery Sgt. Ron King, platoon sergeant, 2nd Platoon, Charlie Company, and Dayton, Ohio native. "We had a long and hard work-up and they're ready to get over there and do their job."

Although this is the first deployment for nearly 80 percent of the battalion, King said, the training they received while aboard the Combat Center was some of the best he's seen.

"We are very prepared," said King. "This is my 3rd deployment and this was by far the most extensive training I've received. It really benefits the Marines in the long run."

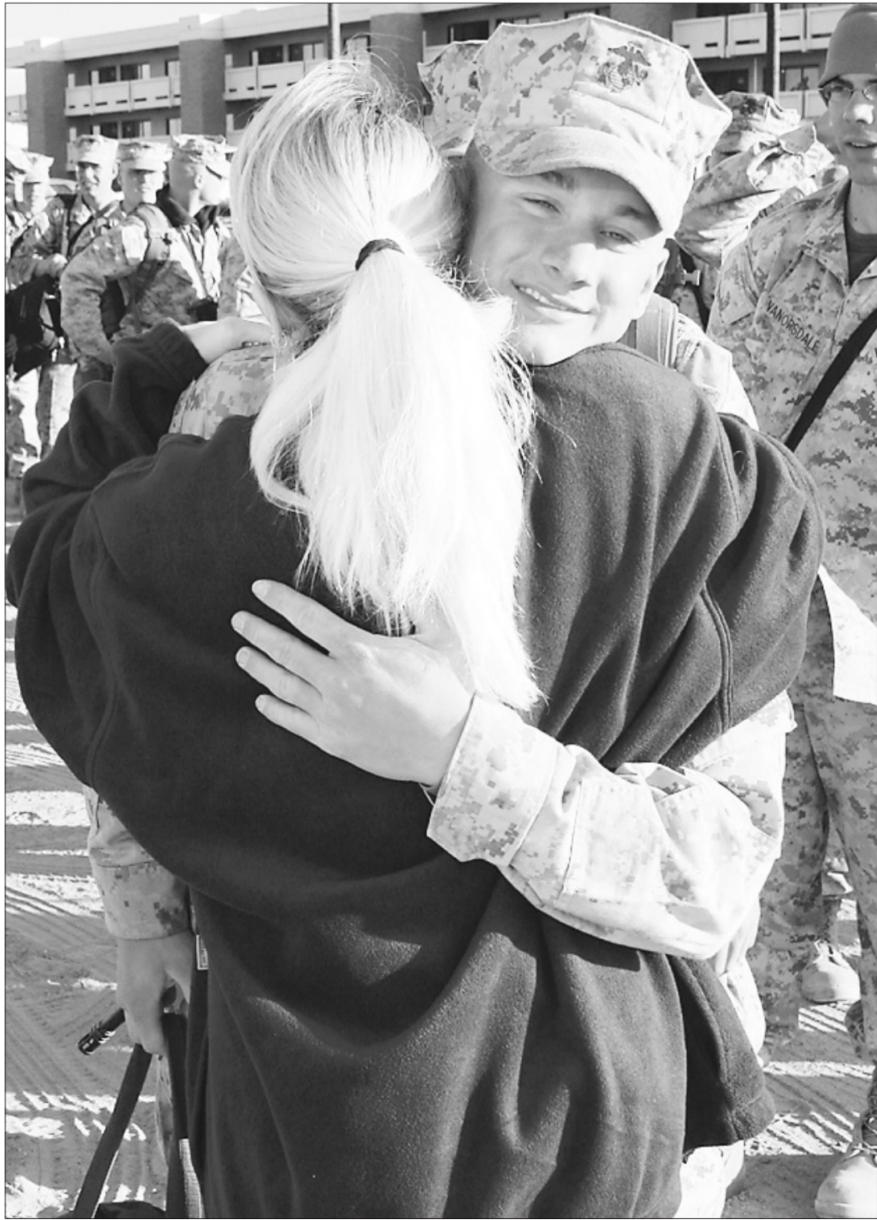
For junior Marines in the battalion, nothing compares to the experience they gained at Mojave Viper.

"The training here prepared us unlike any other

training I've ever received," said Lance Cpl. Greg Dennie, a military policeman with 2nd Platoon, and a 20-year-old Columbia, Ky., native. "Boot Camp and MCT [Marine

Combat Training] can't compare to the training here."

First Battalion, 14th Marine Regiment, is scheduled to be in Iraq for a seven-month deployment.



CPL. EVAN M. EAGAN

A Marine with 1st Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, 4th Marine Division, gets a hug from an "official hugger" Tuesday, before boarding a bus for a seven-month deployment to Iraq.

Iraqi soldiers hone lifesaving medical skills in Al Anbar province

STAFF SGT. JIM GOODWIN

1ST MARINE DIVISION

CAMP AL ASAD, Iraq — Tucked neatly inside the Marines' base here is an Iraqi Army camp, where Iraqi soldiers are training day and night to learn the skills they'll need to eventually relieve Coalition Forces of security operations in Iraq.

The Iraqi soldiers here — part of the 2nd Brigade, 7th Iraqi Army Division — have spent months learning everything from basic marksmanship to administration and now, medical evacuation and treatment.

Most recently, the soldiers here received arguably some of the most crucial training they'll need to survive in western Al Anbar Province: how to deal with a "mass casualty" event.

A "mass casualty" is defined by U.S. military medical personnel as a catastrophic event that results in a number of casualties which could possibly tax a unit's medical staff and equipment. Instead of treating casualties as they find them, first responders must pull their resources, prioritize casualties' wounds and treat them accordingly to save as many lives as possible.

"They're going to get injured, and the better they respond to it, the more people they're going to save," said Petty Officer 1st Class Krishna J. Reyes, a 16-year Navy corpsman and staff member of the Military Transition Staff here.

MTTs are groups of Coalition service mem-

bers assigned to track and guide each Iraqi military unit's transition to full control of security operation in Iraq. Marines from Regimental Combat Team 7 have spent the past 50-plus days at Camp Yasser, the Iraqi unit's camp here, evaluating and advising Iraqi soldiers.

The recent mass casualty drill was another building-block in the Iraqi's progression towards independent operations, which MTT leadership here say will happen by year's end.

U.S. Navy corpsmen from RCT-7, role-playing wounded casualties, offered a touch of realism during the exercise for the Iraqi soldiers. Sprawled in various rooms of an unlit, wooden hut, the sailors moaned in agony while wearing injury-bearing rubber prosthetics. The uniformed Iraqis were required to locate, prioritize and evacuate the casualties while under the watchful eye of the MTT staff and a U.S. Navy surgeon.

The training is considered crucial for troops here because a proper first response can mean the difference between life and death in a real mass casualty situation.

"Anyone can load a patient (on an ambulance) or put on a bandage when they have all the time in the world," said Krishna, a native of Cavite City, Philippines. "That's why we train to do it quickly — because we won't have time."

The soldiers had to accomplish three tasks during the exercise: control the bleeding of patients, provide area security, and evacuate and treat the patients.

With the constant possibility troops can run

into the threat of small arms fire and improvised explosive devices on Anbar's dangerous roads, immediate, life-saving medical treatment is a must for the Iraqi Army.

To add to the scenario's intensity, the wooden hut also contained mock unexploded ordnance, which meant the Iraqi soldiers had to quickly evacuate the patients before treating them and before sustaining more casualties from a possible secondary explosion.

Reyes said the drill was designed to be tough and keep the Iraqi soldiers under pressure, adding a touch of realism to what they'll experience in the event of a real mass casualty event, whether an indirect fire attack on their base, an IED attack on a convoy, or any number of scenarios which could cause a high volume of casualties.

That was something Iraqi Army medic and Warrant Officer Ahmed Jubal was hoping to avoid when he and his cadre of soldiers arrived at the wooden structure littered with moaning, bleeding "casualties."

"We learned today how to stop the bleeding, use IV's," said Jubal through a translator. "I'm confident because we treat the injured like real. We take it serious."

The training gave Iraqi soldiers a taste of the intensity and split-second decision making needed to quickly evacuate and assess casualties' wounds, and gave MTT staff members an idea of the Iraqi soldiers' response capabilities.

Within minutes of the mock casualties' moaning in false pain, a blaring siren grew louder as Iraqi soldiers sped to the scene in their ambulance. Within minutes, the ambulance pulled in front of the building, Iraqi soldiers poured out of the vehicle, evacuated the casualties, and began the treatment process.

By the 30 minute mark, they had successfully evacuated and treated the mock casualties — who had simulated burns, fractures, and severe blood loss — with minimal assistance from the Navy medical staff.

"They did a remarkable job; even more remarkable when you consider there was (only) one medic and a bunch of Jundi (Iraqi soldiers) with limited medical training," said U.S. Navy Cdr. Jay Erickson, RCT-7's surgeon, who observed the drill and gave pointers through a translator to the only Iraqi medic on the scene.

"I was expecting them to take a step back and become overwhelmed," said Reyes, who was impressed at just how well the Iraqi soldiers performed.

One issue the MTT members hoped to bring to light to Iraqi Army leadership through the scenario is the need for additional Iraqi medics for the battalion. During the exercise, only three of the Iraqi soldiers are bonafide, trained Iraqi military-certified medics.

Three medics for an entire unit is simply not enough, said Reyes.

That's why plans are in the works for the MTT staff to begin a training program here that will qualify, per Iraqi Government standards, Iraqi soldiers to medics. The plan is to

provide 2nd Brigade and its three subordinate battalions throughout Al Anbar Province with about 150 more medics within a year.

"To have one guy who can focus on one patient with a restricted airway, for example, would be golden," said Erickson.

As part of the MTT staff here, Reyes has spent about two months advising soldiers of the 2nd Brigade in their daily training regimen, which includes everything from basic marksmanship to the decision-making processes they'll need to function as a military headquarters element. He also squeezes in medical training to the enlisted Iraqi soldiers, known as "Jundi" (pronounced "JUNE-dee"), during their training to familiarize them with medical equipment and combat life-saving techniques.

"They're eager to learn," said Reyes. "They want to perform, and they are."

Following the exercise, the U.S. Navy medical staff gathered in another wooden hut to discuss the soldiers' performance. Though the Iraqis did make mistakes, the Navy medical team and MTT staff were impressed with what they saw, especially considering only one of the Brigade's three medics participated.

In contrast, Erickson used a U.S. military comparison to put the Iraqi soldiers' performance in perspective for the handful of Navy corpsmen that role-played casualties and observed the drill.

"Guys, think about it — if that had been 30 Marines out there and just one of our corpsmen, how would you do?" asked Erickson of his corpsmen during the debrief.

One Navy corpsman was quick to respond, "Not that good!"

Eventually, the unit will be tasked with taking charge of three Iraqi Army infantry battalions and expected to operate independently later this year, according to U.S. military leadership here.

The mass casualty drill came on the heels of another recent Iraqi Army achievement in western Al Anbar Province. Last week, about 100 Iraqi soldiers from the 2nd Brigade's 2nd Battalion, completed their first, fully-independent counterinsurgency operation in Khaffajiyah — a village south of the town of Haqlaniyah along the Euphrates River.

The soldiers, who were accompanied by a handful of Marines in an advisory role only, patrolled through and cleared three kilometers of the village. The battalion of Iraqi troops are partnered with a Marine infantry battalion in the "Triad" area of Haditha, Haqliniyah and Barwanah.

Coalition Forces leadership deemed the operation as a milestone in the Iraqi Army's progress.

"The soldiers were very happy ... because after all the training we went through, we finally were going to get a chance to prove ourselves," said Iraqi Army Sgt. Ahmad Mdr of 2nd Bn. last week following the operation. "This is our one chance to life to prove that we can do our duty alone."

1st Tanks scouts demonstrate that diligence is key in Iraq

1ST LT. NATHAN BRADEN

1ST MARINE DIVISION

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq — Not every day is a “jackpot day” in Iraq, but one unit proves that a patient and persistent approach to counter-insurgency operations can be very effective.

Some days, Marines turn up huge weapons finds. Hundreds of mortars and thousands of small-arms rounds are commonly pulled from buried sites. Some days, though, yield much less. It’s called hitting a “dry hole.”

Marines from Scout Platoon, 1st Tank Battalion, currently assigned to Company A, 2nd Assault Amphibian Battalion experienced this recently during a series of company operations north of Fallujah. The Marines from Scout Platoon are on duty in Iraq with Regimental Combat Team 5.

“The scouts are a good platoon. They take the right approach to what they are doing here,” said Capt. William J. Gibbons, Jr., 32, Company A’s commanding officer from Toms River, N.J.

The first day of the operation started off when the platoon punched out of the company’s assembly area shortly after sunrise in a dusty column of armored humvees.

Their first mission called for them to search a rural area suspected of insurgent activity. They bounced over sparsely vegetated fields and around irrigation ditches for a couple of hours. It was the first of a series of dry holes. The Marines discovered nothing suspicious and headed for their next objective.

“It’s hard to catch people red handed,” said 1st Lt. Troy M. Sayler, the 32-year-old Scout Platoon commander from Sidney, Neb.

The work can be frustrating. Marines headed into the mission with gusto, expecting the intelligence to deliver. But sometimes, it doesn’t match up. It was a pattern that followed throughout the day.

A tip from an informant suggested a local gas station may be involved in insurgent activity.

“We got some intel from a guy we talked to and Lieutenant Sayler decided to check it out,” said Cpl. Andrew Yu, 21, a TOW gunner from Orange County, Calif. on his third deployment to Iraq. “It’s a good idea to check out all the tips because you never know what you might get.”

The platoon rolled directly up to the gas station compound and encircled it, preventing anyone from leaving or entering while they prepared to search the area. Half of the Marines manned the perimeter while the oth-

ers entered the compound.

“The gas station was suspected of being frequented by an HVI (high value individual) and also being used as storage for stolen goods by commercial highjackers,” Sayler explained.

The Marines discovered several industrial-size generators suspected of being stolen goods, but did not have enough evidence to detain anyone or seize the property.

While Marines searched inside the compound, Marines on the cordon stayed busy outside.

“We had to ensure the trucks were in the proper place to cover our sectors,” said Lance Cpl. Matthew D. Partridge, 19, a TOW gunner from Charlotte, N.C., who was one of the Marines on the cordon.

“We controlled traffic on the road, but at the same time we were looking for certain vehicles we were told about,” he added. “We stopped a few trucks and searched them and the people, as the interpreter interviewed them.”

“The op went well, we quickly gained control of the site, searched all the buildings, questioned the five individuals inside and got some information,” Sayler said after their search was complete.

Still, nothing turned up they could act on. Dry hole number two.

The platoon mounted back on their vehicles and continued to search the area before stopping at a local restaurant to talk to locals and ask about insurgent activity in the area.

Their diligence paid off this time.

They collected several tips when the Marines used one of their more rewarding tactics, treating people with respect.

“People open up and just tell them stuff,” Gibbons said. “That leads to them developing a trust and confidence with the people at the same time getting bad guys off the street.”

“They reserve the heavy hand for those guys who really need it,” he added. “Lieutenant Sayler knows how to butter people up. His section leaders are the same way.”

Although the platoon did not detain any suspected insurgents or locate any improvised explosive devices this day, they made several significant contributions during their deployment.

“We’ve probably done at least 50 cordon and searches,” Sayler said. “But, where the platoon has really shined is finding IEDs. We’ve found close to 30 of them here.”

The Marines know that dry holes are part of the job in Iraq. They understand that not every



1ST LT. NATHAN BRADEN

Cpl. William J. Nelson, 22, from Herrick, S.D. and Cpl. Michael O. Muhlenbruch, 21, from Galena, Mo., search a man's workshop while looking for weapons and evidence of insurgent activity north of Fallujah March 13.

tip leads to a weapons cache. Still, they leave nothing to chance.

“The hardest thing for a Marine to do is sit and wait for something to happen,” Partridge said. “It’s not in the Marine nature to sit around and wait.”

The one tip they don’t act upon, might be the one that gets hundred of roadside bombs off the street or catches the insurgent making them.

“It’s a good feeling when we catch a guy because I know it helps out our fellow Marines out here, plus it helps the civilians,” Yu said. “Sometimes civilians are scared to give us information and it feels good when we take someone off the street who’s scaring that guy.”

Sayler said he understood the frustrations of days like these, when things don’t turn out like they planned. Still, he said these are successes, and his platoon continues to push ahead because of strong leadership among his non-

commissioned officers.

“I’m very luck to have a platoon with intelligent and professional Marines and strong NCOs,” Sayler said. “The vast majority of the missions are lead by the section leaders, a sergeant and a senior corporal. Both have led over 100 patrols.”

The Marines has developed their tactics into methods that work for them.

“We did good today, we’ve defiantly developed since we’ve been out here,” said Sgt. Christopher J. Fortin, 22, 1st section leader from Lakeland, Fla. “We are at our peak performance after six months of refining our operations out here. We are as good as we are going to get without becoming supernatural.”

Scout Platoon is comprised of TOW gunners, Marines trained to fire wire-guided anti-tank missile systems. The platoons are typically assigned to tank battalions and employed as forward and flank protection for tank formations.

Iraqi soldiers knock-out first independent military operation in Iraq's Al Anbar province

CPL. ADAM C. SCHNELL
1ST MARINE DIVISION

KHAFFAJIYAH, Iraq — While mainstream media debates whether Iraqi Security Forces are making progress toward eventually relieving Coalition forces in Iraq, Iraqi soldiers near this Euphrates River city recently completed their first independent counterinsurgency operation.

More than 100 soldiers from the Iraqi Army's 2nd Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 7th Iraqi Army Division conducted their first independently-executed mission to disrupt

insurgent operations here March 14.

The soldiers, who were accompanied by a handful of Marines, patrolled through and cleared three kilometers of village just south of the town of Haqlaniyah along the Euphrates River in western Al Anbar Province, northwest of Baghdad. The Marines, outnumbered by the Iraqi soldiers 10 to one, were on hand in an advisory role only.

"It's good for the Iraqi people not to see us out there and to see the Iraqi Army doing all the work in keeping their

community safe," said Capt. Quintin D. Jones, a Memphis, Tenn., native and member of the Military Transition Team (MTT) here. MTTs are groups of Coalition service members assigned to logistically assist and guide individual Iraqi military units' transition to independent operations.

The Iraqi-led mission was part of the latest counterinsurgency operation, dubbed "Raging Bull," conducted by Coalition forces in western Al Anbar Province.

The Iraqi soldiers spent

four days rehearsing for the mission. From gear inspections to reviewing patrolling techniques to searching for weapons caches, the soldiers spent 10 hours each day preparing for any possible scenario they might encounter "outside the wire."

"The soldiers were very happy yesterday because after all the training we went through, we finally were going to get a chance to prove ourselves," said Iraqi Army Sgt. Ahmad Mdtr through an interpreter.

"This is our one chance to life to prove that we can do our duty alone," said Mdtr.

While searching for weapons caches and insurgent activity, the soldiers employed many tactics and techniques they've learned from the Marines, such as dismounted patrolling, searching homes, and interacting with locals.

So far, 2nd Bn. has performed five counterinsurgency operations with the Marines, who have spent months bolstering the Iraqis' military skills so they can continue to conduct operations on their own.

"The former MTT team set up these soldiers for success," said Jones, who has worked with the Iraqi soldiers since January. "It's good for them to get this first operation out

of the way because with every operation, it gives them more confidence and brings them one step closer to taking over full time."

Although the soldiers did not find any weapons caches or insurgents, nor was a single bullet fired, the operation is considered a significant milestone in the unit's progression, according to Iraqi Army and Marine leadership here. More than 100 Iraqi soldiers successfully maneuvered through a village - a milestone in urban operations for the unit. More importantly, the mission showed Coalition forces that Iraqi soldiers here can successfully disrupt insurgent operations.

"(This shows) the Iraqi Army wants to play a more important part when it comes to the security of the Iraqi people in this region," said Jones.

"This operation lets the commanders of the Iraqi Army know that 'two-two-seven' is ready to take over operations for the Marines in this area," said Capt. Ahmed through a translator. "We did a good job of showing to the civilians that the Iraqi Army has come to serve them and save them from the terrorists."

Iraqi Army leadership here plans to perform more of these missions in the near future. Within six months, the

entire 2nd Bn. will have its own battle space, according to MTT officials.

"This is their country, this is their fight, and they need to fight in this operation (Iraqi Freedom)," said Staff Sgt. John M. Wear, the MTT intelligence chief and Port St. Joe., Fla., native.

While Iraqi soldiers were hunting down insurgents here, their Marine counterparts from 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, were busy sweeping through Abu Hayatt, a village approximately five miles south of Khaffajiyah, to maintain a security presence in the area. The company inserted into the village via helicopter, searched the city for weapons caches and maintained a presence in the town for four days.

Marines say the continual presence discourages insurgent activity.

"Before we always came in for a day or so and the insurgents would just leave because they knew we would be gone soon," said 2nd Lt. Geoff V. Meno, a Company L platoon commander. "By staying a couple days, it lets them know we plan on sticking around for a while."

In total, Company L found nine weapons caches and detained three insurgents.

"The battalion has been down here a lot but never for an extended period of time," said Meno, a Seattle native. "We want to continue to change it up so we can keep the insurgents on their toes."

The Camp Pendleton, Calif.-based Marines have spent more than six months in Iraq's western Al Anbar Province conducting counterinsurgency operations and providing stability to the "Triad" area of Haqlaniyah, Barwanah and Haditha.

Soon, the battalion will be relieved by another Marine infantry battalion and will return to the United States.

The battalion's redeployment to the U.S. is part of a regularly scheduled rotation of forces in Al Anbar. More than 25,000 Marine and sailors of Camp Pendleton, Calif.-based I Marine Expeditionary Force are replacing the Camp Lejeune, N.C.-based II MEF.



CPL. MICHAEL R. MCMAUGH

Iraqi soldiers with 2nd Battalion, 2nd Brigade, 7th Iraqi Army Division rush into a court yard to search for weapons and ammunition caches and insurgent activity during a counterinsurgency operation in Khaffajiah, Iraq, March 14.

Pace tours earthquake-ravaged area of Pakistan

JIM GARAMONE

AMERICAN FORCES PRESS SERVICE

MUZAFFARABAD, Pakistan — The U.S. chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Monday had nothing but praise for Pakistani leaders who coordinated relief efforts after a devastating earthquake here in October.

“I was struck by two things today,” Marine Gen. Peter Pace said at a news conference here. “One was the incredible natural beauty of your country. The other was the resilience of your citizens and all that has been accomplished in the five short months since the disaster.”

Navy Rear Adm. Michael A. LeFever, who coordinated relief efforts of U.S. forces dispatched here, led Pace on a helicopter tour of the Jhellem valley, the center of the magnitude 7.6 earthquake. The quake killed 75,000 Pakistanis in the rough and rugged terrain that make up the foothills of the Himalayas. The swath of destruction covered an area approximately 100 kilometers by 300 kilometers and left 2.8 million people homeless as winter began.

LeFever called the earthquake a “life-changing event” for those affected and those who assisted.

Operation Lifeline, the American code name for the humanitarian operation, moved food, clothing and building materials to the area, provided medical care to thousands of Pakistanis, brought heavy equipment in to clear roads and build bridges, and flew helicopters to the most remote areas.

The American military spearheaded the international aid effort. At its peak some 1,200 U.S. service members were involved in the operation. The first Americans were in country surveying damage within 48 hours of the earthquake, and the first U.S. helicopters airlifted supplies to the area



Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, reviews a Pakistani honor guard in Islamabad, Pakistan, Monday.

STAFF SGT. D. MYLES CULLEN, USAF

within 72 hours.

The U.S. military also helped Pakistanis sort out the jumble of relief supplies that poured in to Pakistan following the disaster. It didn't matter where the supplies came from, American airmen, sailors, soldiers and Marines helped speed cargo to affected areas. An embassy official said American crews helped repair an Iranian plane that landed with supplies and required mechanical work.

In an illustration of the international aid effort, Pace flew over the affected area today in an Australian Black Hawk helicopter.

“I speak for all of us when I state that this was a mission that we were all very proud to take part in,” LeFever said at the news conference. “We've come together with our Pakistani friends as one team,

focused on one goal: to alleviate the pain and suffering of those struck by this devastating disaster. And together we overcame the odds and the challenge and survived the winter and are now firmly on a course for reconstruction and rebuilding.”

Pace also spoke of the assistance Pakistan has given America in the years since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Pakistani leaders have made courageous decisions in the war on terrorism, Pace said. “You can go back as many decades as you want and you can find examples of friendship between Pakistan and the United States, so it was only natural that when your country was struck by this devastation that we should try to assist you in any way that we could,” he said. “That we have been able to

help gives great satisfaction to those of us in uniform.”

The American military aid mission here ends next week, but the United States has pledged \$200 million to help Pakistan rebuild the devastated area, U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Ryan Crocker said.

Pakistani Maj. Gen. Khalid Nawaz, who commanded the 12th Heavy Mountain Division in the affected area, spoke of how people came together to aid Pakistan in its time of need, particularly Americans. “It wasn't how much rubble they moved, it was the spirit they showed as they did it,” he said. “They worked 24 hours a day, seven days a week and it didn't matter if it was Thanksgiving, Christmas or New Year's, they were on the job.”



Be on the Alert:

Tortoise activity is increasing on the Combat Center. This tortoise was found under a scraper at Range 111 on March 15. Please be careful and look under parked vehicles before you move them. For more information please call NREA at 830-7396 ext. 234 or 236.

COURTESY OF NREA



SPORT SHORTS

MCCES MARATHON
Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School will be holding a marathon, a half-marathon and a 10K run tomorrow. Entry for each is \$25, \$15 and \$10 respectively. All military, DoD employees and dependents are welcome. The race begins and ends at MCCES. Medals will be awarded to the top three finishers. You may register in advance or at 6 a.m. on race day. For more information call Capt. Perrone at 830-6147.

LEISURE

NMCRS GOLF TOURNAMENT

The Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society Committee will kick-off their four-person scramble golf tournament for this year's annual fund drive March 31 at 7:30 a.m. Make your own team. The cost is \$29.95 per person. The price includes a continental breakfast, free range-balls, golf and cart fees, lunch and an opportunity to win prizes. Club rentals are also included if necessary. Please sign up at the Desert Winds Golf Course to reserve your spot. Call 2nd Lt Jennifer Root at 830-3032 or CWO2 Jonell Kosa at 830-1818 ext. 120 for any additional questions.

EASTER

EGG-STRAVAGANZA
The Palms Baptist Church, located at 5285 Adobe Rd., is holding an Easter Egg-Stravaganza April 8, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. There will be pony rides, egg and cookie decorating, a petting zoo, a balloon artist and an Easter egg hunt. Food will be sold at concession stands. Call 367-3713 for more information.

AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY "RELAY FOR LIFE"

There will be an American Cancer Society Relay For Life from 9 a.m. on April 29 to 9 a.m. on April 30 at Yucca Valley High School. You do not have to be there the entire 24 hours, members can sign up for time slots. Relay For Life is a community gathering where everyone can participate in the fight against cancer. Teams camp out at a local high school, park, or fairground and take turns walking or running around a track or path. Each team is asked to have a representative on the track at all times during the event, because cancer never sleeps. Relays are an overnight event, up to 24 hours in length. Relay For Life brings together millions of people to raise money to help prevent cancer, save lives, and diminish suffering from the disease. The relay brings people together from all walks of life with the common goal of eliminating cancer. For more information, contact HM2 Sjaarda at 830-2140 or 367-2324.

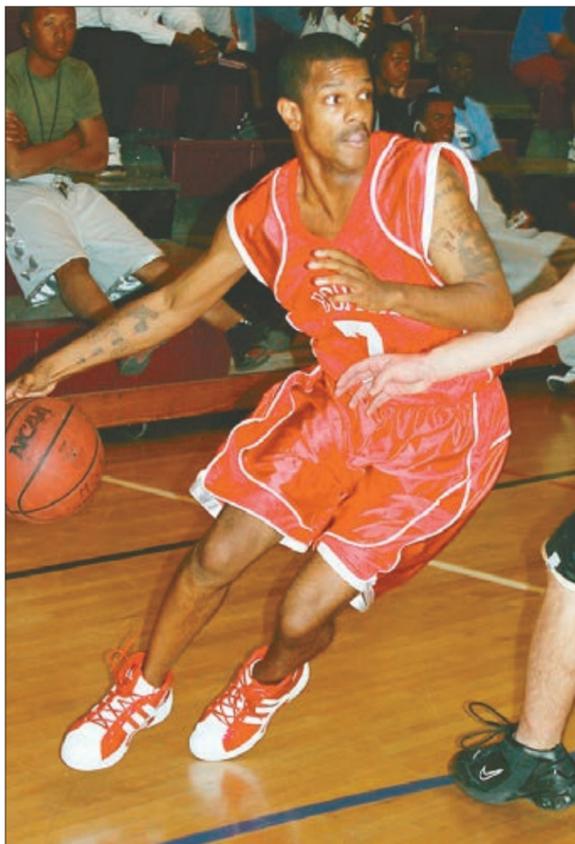
Did You Know?

The Major League Baseball teams use about 850,000 balls per season.



Robert E. Bush Naval Hospital players gather together after winning the Commanding General's Intramural Basketball League championship game against Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School Team 1 at the West Gym March 16.

Naval Hospital takes championship game



Joe Lee, Robert E. Bush Naval Hospital, looks to pass in the championship game against Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School Team 1 March 16.

SGT. ROBERT L. FISHER III

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

The Commanding General's Intramural Basketball League came to a close March 16 as the final playoff game and championship went down at the West Gym.

Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School defeated 1st Tank Battalion 64-60 in the final playoff game of the season.

In the first half, MCCES couldn't push through 1st Tanks' defense as they took the lead.

But MCCES finally did break through in the second half. With only three minutes remaining, they finally took the lead and the win, forging their way to the championship game.

"We've come a long way, we've had a good season," said William S. Harvey, 1st Tanks coach, to his team after the game was over. "It's over, there's no more harping on it, no more complaining. Tonight I'm very happy with how you played."

As MCCES turned their focus toward the championship game, they also faced their fatigue.

"We're tired," said Jerome Hawkins, MCCES coach. "It's going to be ugly, but we're going to win."

A fellow player on MCCES team, Miguel Bridges said the team just had to pull together and get through the game. "We just have to play hard, play through the pain," he said.

Joe Lee, Robert E. Bush Naval Hospital

player, looked forward to the game, aiming for the win.

"MCCES is tired... they have a short bench, we have that advantage," said Lee. "I think we'll do really good."

James Redmond, Naval Hospital coach, said he didn't want to be presumptuous about winning, but hoped his team would win.

"Perseverance and selflessness is the model of our team," said Redmond. "We didn't do so well in the season, but we've been able to pull through."

In the beginning of the season, Redmond said there was a lot of skill in his team; he just had to be a good coach and pull their talents together. On Thursday night, he showed his team finally came together when they took the championship game 60-58.

Naval Hospital finished the first half with the lead 37-30. In the second half, MCCES quickly bounced back with a 15-point scoring heat before Naval Hospital could respond.

But Naval Hospital would not let themselves see defeat so easily. With four minutes remaining in the game, they took back the lead and held it for the rest of the game.

"I didn't want to say we'd win it and then it be an egg in my face," said Redmond. "The Bible says, 'the pride comes before the fall.'"

With the season over, some already look forward to the over 30 league and playing in the CG's league next year.

"We should have the same squad next year. We'll be back," said Antonio DeLeon, 1st Tanks player.



Jerome Hawkins, Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School Team 1, storms the lane in the final playoff game against 1st Tank Battalion.

Commanding General's Intramural Basketball League FINAL SCORES

March 13		
MCCES 1	68-47	HQBN 2
Hospital	47-44	MCCES 2
HQBN 1	97-67	2 / 7
March 14		
MCCES 1	55-51	Tanks
Hospital	60-49	HQBN 1
MCCES 2	49-43	2 / 7
March 15		
HQBN 1	67-65	HQBN 2
Tanks	43-35	MCCES 2
Hospital	65-49	MCCES 1
Tanks	53-51	HQBN 1
March 16		
MCCES 1	64-60	TANKS
Hospital	60-58	MCCES 1



SGT. ROBERT L. FISHER III

Nick Kalokoski, Lima Company, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, makes a wild drive.



SGT. ROBERT L. FISHER III

Kyle Robinson, Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility, chips the ball onto the green at the Golf Championship at Desert Winds Golf Course March 17.



SGT. ROBERT L. FISHER III

Samuel R. Paulk, Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School, putts the ball in.

Golfers 'enjoy the good life' in Golf Championship

SGT. ROBERT L. FISHER III
COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

What started as a somewhat cold day did not deter golfers from doing what they love. They came not just to compete, but to enjoy a refreshing day on the golf course.

Golfers competed in the Golf Championship March 17 at Desert Winds Golf Course.

"It's not really a good turnout this year," said Tim Connolly, Desert Winds assistant manager. "I think the deployments hurt us."

But golfers who did attend said they enjoyed their day and the game, no matter how bad some of their games turned out.

"I came out here to better my game," Tommy Rabak, Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School, said jokingly. "In reality, I got a day off from work. Why not spend it here and enjoy the good life."

Another golfer from MCCES, Tony Gilbert, also enjoyed coming out to play, but was less than happy about the way he played. "I'm playing like I just started. I haven't played so bad in so long," he said.

The day warmed up when the sun came out, and some of the golfers' spirits lifted even higher.

"We're snowbirds down here from the Reno [Nevada] area, running from the snow," said Sylvester Nance, who retired from the Navy. "I saw the sign about the base championship, and I decided to play in it. I'm enjoying it."

After the game, Cisco Harris, executive chef for Duffer's Retreat at Desert Winds, which the base guide mentions is "one of the best places to get a quick, delicious lunch or hearty snack," whipped up a rack of ribs for each of the golfers.

"It's never about the golf, it's always about the food," said Harris.

George Schadegg, Marine Corps Community Services Sports and past base golf champion, won the championship with a 71, one under par, and the longest drive.

"I've been golfing since I was 5 years old," said Schadegg. "I always walk the course. I don't play well when I ride. I've got to fight that getting old thing."

Other winners included Gilbert and Mike Curtin for closest to the pin and Rabak won the net championship with a handicap score of 66.

When the championship came to a close, many of the golfers said they enjoyed the tournament and a day on the golf course.

"Everybody I talked to said they had a good time, everything went really smooth," said Connolly. "The championship was a success."

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LANCE CPL. REGINA N. ORTIZ

Lindsey Quinn follows through after bowling her ball down the lane in the Operation Enduring Families Bowling League.

OEF Bowling League teams unite for third season

LANCE CPL. REGINA N. ORTIZ
COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

The Operation Enduring Families' Bowling League began its third season at the Sandy Hills Lanes Bowling Center March 15.

There are 11 teams of four scheduled to meet every Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. for the next 15 weeks.

Most bowlers in the league are spouses of deployed Marines and Sailors, while some of them are participating to support friends and family, said Bobbi Roper, Sandy Hills Lanes supervisor.

"We started the league in support of OEF," said Roper. "We want to help keep the ladies busy and active in a fun environment while their husbands are deployed."

Todd Makovsky, Sandy Hills Lane manager, offers game and snack bar discounts and a free bowling lesson to the bowlers in the

league, said Roper.

The ladies formed their own teams with neighbors and friends.

One team, Bawlzy Brawds, is four ladies who have been bowling once per week for the past year, said Schellee Harris, wife of Gunner Sgt. Michael Harris, Marine Corp Communication-Electronics School.

"My husband doesn't deploy," she said. "But I like to get out and spend time with my friends who do have deployed husbands."

The Bawlzy Brawds met each other through their busy daily schedules, such as picking up children at school, and waiting in lines at the post office, said Dianna Tanksley, wife of Sgt. Maj. Harrison Tanksley, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment.

"My husband does deploy often," said Tanksley. "And when they're gone, OEF sponsors a lot of events that give us something to do."

Ironwood Ladies is a team of four who live on Ironwood Street, said Yessenia Hagewood, wife of Sgt. Ernest Hagewood, Combat Visual Information Center.

"We're not bowling for score," she explained. "This is just for fun, a way to get out of the house."

Jennifer Reyes, wife of Sgt. Luis Reyes, 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, bowls with the 29ers. Reyes, new to the Combat Center, was welcomed to the community right away, she said.

"This base has to have one of the best communities to live at," she said. "It was real hard to see my husband deploy right after we moved here, and everyone has their hands reached out to help you keep your spirits up."

"I had to do something to keep busy," she continued. "I'm not much of a bowler, but I have a great time with the ladies on my team, so I said 'why not.'"

Andrea Katolin, wife of 1st Lt. Dennis Katolin, 1st Battalion, 7th Maine Regiment, met her teammates because their husbands are in the same unit.

"They're all deployed right now," said Katolin. "One of the team members played last year and said it was really fun."

"I'm just going to try to score 100 by the time the season is over," she continued. "Our team isn't playing to win."

Although the season just started, the teams already have a strategy in mind for the season: to have fun.



PREP gives tools for strong marriages

LANCE CPL. REGINA N. ORTIZ

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

The Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program's Fighting for Your Marriage workshop held once a month at the Combat Center's Protestant Chapel, gives couples the tools for a successful and fun marriage, said Lt. j.g. Karen J. Rector, Combat Center religious ministries' chaplain.

Engaged and married couples spend three days working together to improve communication skills and intensify intimacy through a program founded by Dr. Howard J. Markman, author of "Fighting for Your Marriage," written after 25 years of research.

"Anyone can benefit from this class," said Rector. "It teaches communication and general relationships skills."

The workshop focuses on communicating thoughts and feelings and being a good listener.

"We give couples the tools to communicate what they are really feeling to each other," said Rector. "Many people don't realize that they try to be mind-readers and they are already pre-convinced of what the other person is saying or feeling."

This can result in an argument, if a statement is taken out of context, she explained.

"People don't realize they do this, but people tend to think while others speak, instead of listening," Rector added.

Rector, along with other chaplains aboard the Combat Center, uses workbooks, videos, discussion techniques and exercises throughout the workshop.

"A lot of fighting between couples results from a hidden issue, so a lot of hurtful non-related things are said, never resolving the real issue," said Rector.

The PREP exercises have couples practice speaking to each other about an issue between them, while one of them takes notes and organizes ideas. At the end of the discussion, the couples summarize and evaluate how it went.

"A big problem is people feel someone always has to win an argument," said Rector. "So the whole time couples are fighting just to win the argument, instead of listening to each other and compromising."

Listening to each other can result in a more trusting relationship. Where there is more trust, there is more intimacy, she explained.

Other subjects covered in the workshop are friendship, sensuality and sexuality, personality, forgiveness and money matters.

The couples receive homework assignments, as well. The couples are required to go on dates, said Rector.

"Dating is very important in a relationship," she explained. "Couples need to get away from the children, work and be taken back to the dating days before marriage."

At the end of the workshop, the Combat Center financial management advisor, Jany Wasdin, gives a presentation on money matters.

"We always receive positive feedback about Ms. Wasdin," said Rector. "Most people who think they are actually okay with their money situation realize they can do better."



Lance Cpl. Lisa Posa, Headquarters Battalion, practices discussing an issue with her fiancée Sgt. Jason Truscott, CLB-7, during a PREP exercise.

They love that."

The class ends with a ceremony where couples receive certificates and one last assignment, a date, Rector said.

Many couples come to the class expecting it to be easy, but leave with a different opinion.

"It was difficult," said Sgt. Jason Truscott, Combat Logistics Battalion 7. "I never knew it was so hard to sit and talk to each other, other than talk at each other."

"You don't realize all the things you are doing wrong, and wonder why we still have the same issues," said Truscott's fiancée, Lance Cpl. Lisa Posa, Headquarters Battalion. "But we've learned a lot about each other and ourselves."

The PREP workshop is offered once per month, except June and December. The next class is scheduled for April 26-28. For more information and registration, call 830-6464.

Free childcare is available for children up to four years old.