

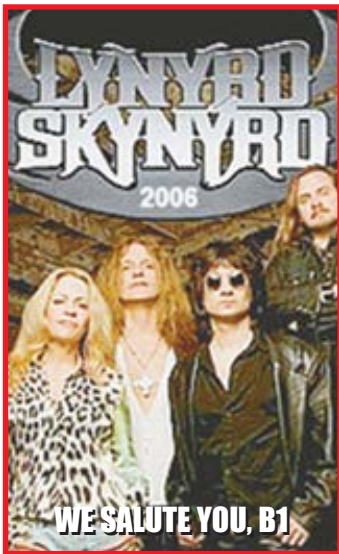


PLANTING PALMS, A6

Serving the MCAGCC
Community at
Twentynine Palms, Calif.

VOL. 52 NO. 20
May 19, 2006

OBSERVATION POST



WE SALUTE YOU, B1

BULK RATE
U.S. Postage
PAID
29 Palms, CA
Permit No. 8

THIS ISSUE

A5- Mojave Viper

A7- Body armor

B8 - TAP

HOT TOPICS

ROAD CLOSURE

Sturgis Road from 1st Street to the main Hospital entrance will be closed June 3 from 6:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. for the installation of cross-walk markers in front of the hospital. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause.

FAMILY HOUSING

OFFICE CLOSURE

The Military Family Housing Office will be closed on May 23 from 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. for staff training. We will be installing a new computer program so we may better serve our residents. Lincoln Military Housing will not be affected by this closure and will maintain their normal hours.

MARINE CORPS

EXCHANGE

RENOVATION

Work has begun on the Marine Corps Exchange Main Store renovation. The remodeling will be done in phases by department. However, there will be a lot of rerouting due to pulling up old tile and carpet and laying new tile and carpet. So please pardon our dust. We apologize for any inconvenience, encourage you to still please patronize the store, and look forward to a new and improved Main Store. Some departments will be relocated, some will be expanded so we can offer more products, and, with the exception of high business areas requiring specialized product knowledge, there will be a centralized check-out. The remodeling timeline will go from now through May, notwithstanding any glitches. As always, thanks for your support!

COMING NEXT ISSUE

• We Salute You

• Mr. Denogean

• CG's Intramural Golf
Tournament

THIS DAY IN MARINE CORPS HISTORY

May 19, 1927:

The 11th Marine
Regiment arrived at
Esteli, Nicaragua,
for garrison duty.



LANCE CPL. MICHAEL S. CIFUENTES

Marines and Sailors with 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, battle the 100-degree Mojave Desert heat during a 12-mile battalion hike aboard the Combat Center May 12.

LANCE CPL. MICHAEL S. CIFUENTES

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

"Step it out! Keep it moving! Just a few more miles. Keep pushing! Stretch your legs! Cover down!"

From the dark hours of dawn to the peak of the morning heat and sunlight, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, also known as "Darkside," made their way through the Combat Center's Mojave Desert terrain May 12 on a 12-mile hike, commonly known as a hump to Marines.

After gathering in front of the Combat Center's obstacle course, the battalion stepped out on their grueling expedition at 5 a.m., returning to their starting point at 10:30 a.m. when the 12-mile hike was complete.

The significance of the hike was readiness, said 1st Sgt. Ryan F. Blue, India Company first sergeant.

"Even though no one really hikes in Iraq, you never know what can happen," said the Omaha, Neb., native. "The battle space changes, so there's no telling what we're going to be doing. We've just need to be ready to adapt to anything."

Recently, the battalion welcomed Lt. Col. Scott C. Shuster as the new battalion commander. He wanted to give himself an intense introduction so the battalion's training would continue its intense course, said Lance Cpl.

Ryan R. Hafley, a 21-year-old infantryman with India Company.

"Even though the hike was very hard for some, there was a lot of motivation," said the Bloomington, Ill., native. "Our physical endurance was definitely tested, and there was so much to deal with — the loose sand, the hills and the treacherous California heat."

Seaman Tyler F. Rutledge, a 20-year-old corpsman with India Company, has been with the battalion for roughly a year. There are many factors and elements Marines and Sailors deal with during any type of training, he said, and the 100-degree weather played a major role in the mood and state of mind the battalion members experienced.

"A hike this long lets you know where you're at physically and mentally," said the Roseburg, Ore., native.

"Along with strength and conditioning, it builds unit cohesion," he continued. "All the Marines are sharing the same hardships. Everyone is bound to get tired and cranky. Everyone's experiencing the same mood and feelings. The only way you can get out of that hardship is through the help of your unit. A hike brings you closer to your guys. And that is all you will have over there [Iraq] — your guys. The hike teaches Marines how to have each other's back."

See DARKSIDE, A5



LANCE CPL. MICHAEL S. CIFUENTES

India Company, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, pass by several M198 Howitzers parked at Exercise Support Division's lot during a arduous 12-mile battalion hike.

Combat veteran reenlistments still high despite war

CPL. BRIAN A. TUTHILL

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

What makes a first-term Marine with two combat tours, nearing the end of his four years in the Marine Corps want to reenlist?

This is a question many career planners aboard the Combat Center face daily when dealing with Marines nearing their end of active service date as they tailor both that question and incentives to each Marine. Their mission — to retain these combat veterans and other experienced Marines despite the possibility of deployments and hardships while a conflict overseas continues.

Yet they still meet their goals and have since Headquarters Marine Corps established new mission goals five years ago. As of April 15, 1st Marine Division was at 84.4 percent of its goal for fiscal year 2006, said Gunnery Sgt. Patrick Whitaker, base career planner.

In fact, reenlistments have become almost more competitive than promotions in some military occupational specialties, where bonuses, special duty and preferred duty stations are enticing Marines more than ever, he said.

"Reenlistments are extremely competitive now," agreed Sgt. Xavisus T. Gayden, 1st Tank Battalion career planner. "When I started career planning, it was first come, first served. It's still kind of the same, but Headquarters Marine Corps is now individually selecting Marines based on their packages."

See REENLIST, A5



CPL. BRIAN A. TUTHILL

Staff Sgt. Phillip G. Hanley, chief instructor, Urban Warfare Training Command, Tactical Training Exercise Control Group, Headquarters Battalion, reenlisted Wednesday.

ThanksUSA announces collaboration to promote \$4 million scholarship fund

PRESS RELEASE

WASHINGTON — ThanksUSA, a non-partisan, 501(c)(3) organization, announced today a partnership with CinCHouse.com/Operation Homefront and a sponsorship by MilitaryConnection.com to encourage military spouses and children to apply for the organization's \$4 million college, vocational and technical school scholarship fund in advance of the May 30 application deadline.

ThanksUSA was founded by two Virginia elementary public school children, Rachel and Kelsi Okun, ages 10 and 8. The scholarships are funded by federal, corporate and individual contributions. Additional donations for the scholarship fund are expected to come from the first-ever nationwide treasure hunt staged to support military troops. In this treasure hunt, participants of all ages will navigate their way through 12 challenging puzzles, each based on a U.S. state, with clues rooted in American history, culture and geography. Information and applications for both the scholarships and the treasure hunt can be found at <http://www.ThanksUSA.org>

“We wanted to show that we care about military families,” said Kelsi, who, along with her sister Rachel, is the primary architect behind the treasure hunt. “They make sacrifices for our country just like our troops, and we wanted to say 'thanks,’” added Rachel, ThanksUSA's co-founder.

Scholarship Application Enrollment Open - Ends May 30

ThanksUSA intends to award at least 1,000 scholarships in amounts of up to \$5,000 each. These need-based scholarships will be awarded on a competitive basis to the spouses and children of active duty military personnel who plan to pursue a post-secondary education, including vocational and technical training. Winners will be selected on the basis of financial need, academic record, demonstrated leadership and participation in school and community activities. Preference will also be given to students who have studied a foreign language. Interested applicants can find more information, eligibility requirements and the official application form at <http://www.ThanksUSA.org>. Applications will be accepted through May 30, 2006.

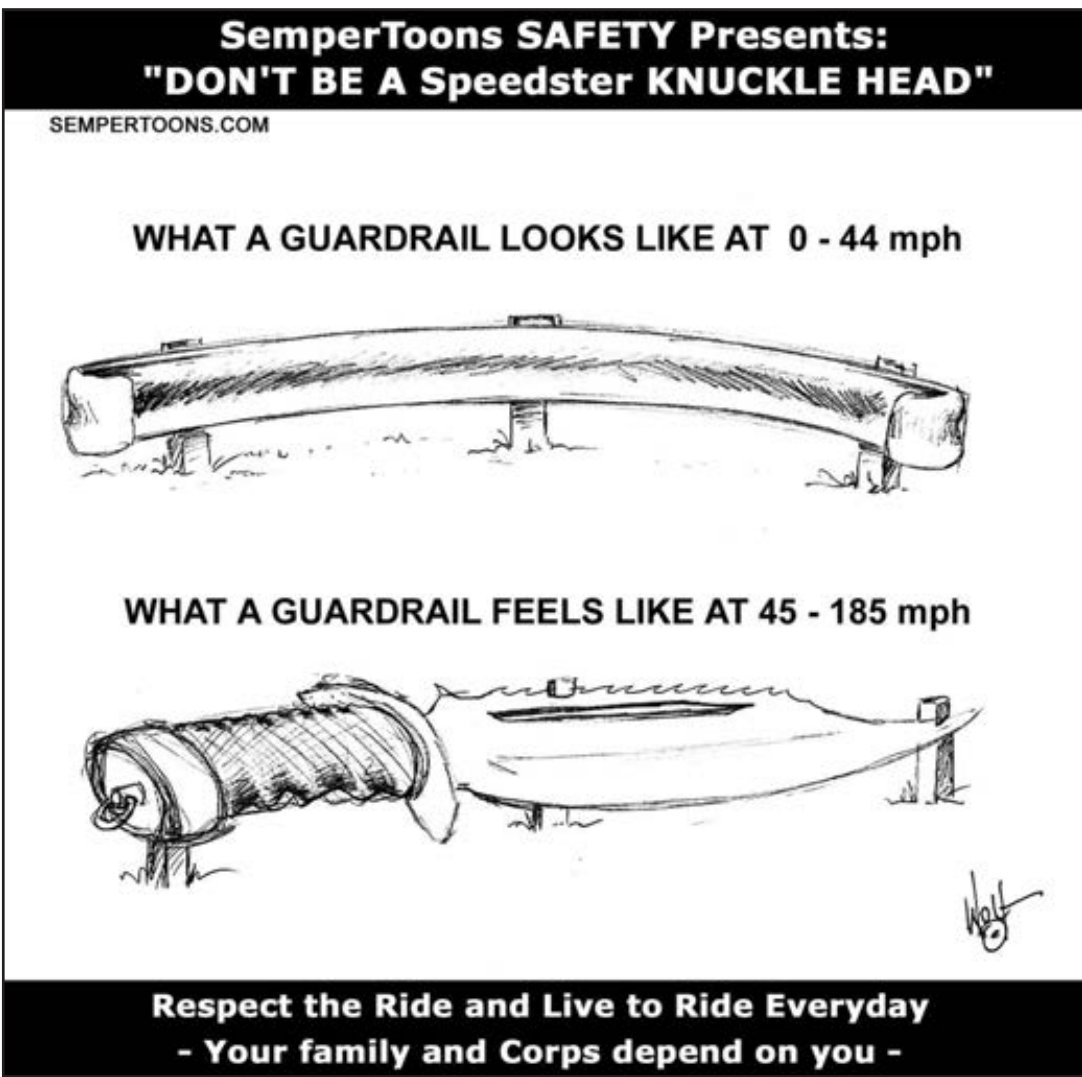
“CinCHouse.com and Operation Homefront support and endorse ThanksUSA and its mission of providing educational scholarships to military spouses and children,” said CinCHouse.com Founder and Chairman Meredith Leyva. “We’ve been impressed and inspired by the patriotism and creativity of Rachel and Kelsi, their family and the entire ThanksUSA organization. We're proud to be associated with such a good and worthy cause.”

Debbie Gregory, President of MilitaryConnection.com, added, “MilitaryConnection.com is delighted to be a sponsor of this extraordinary project benefiting military families. Rachel and Kelsi, ThanksUSA, CinCHouse and Operation Homefront demonstrate the heart and soul of America.”

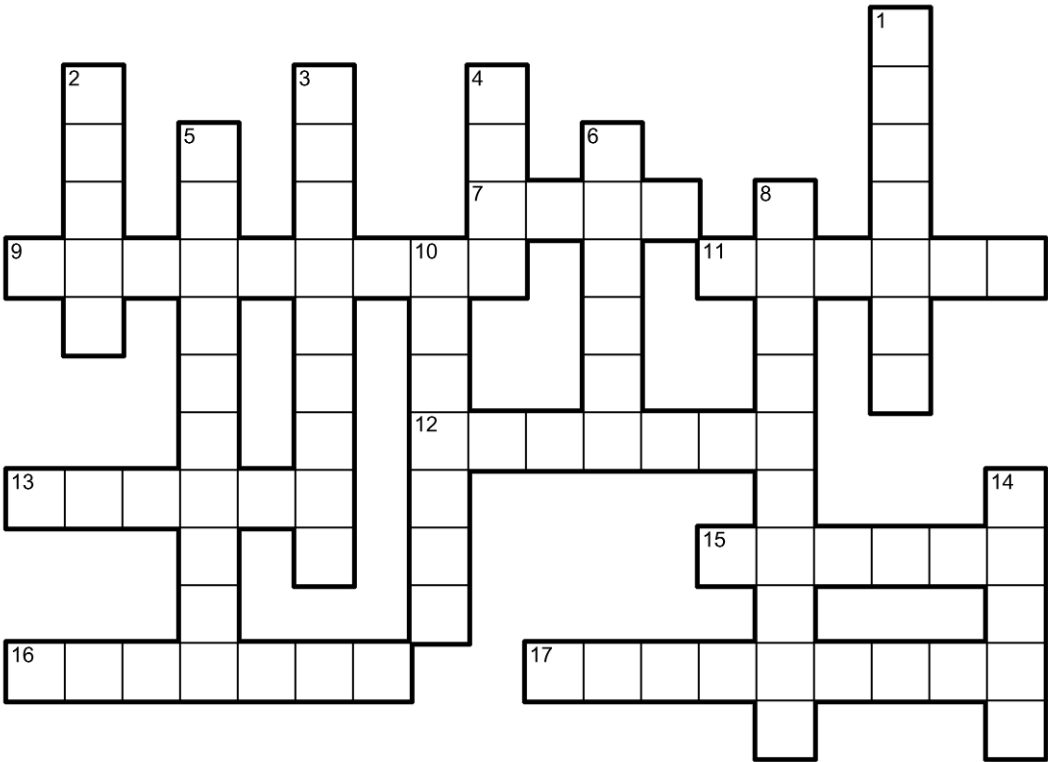
“Our partnership with CinCHouse.com/Operation Homefront in combination with our sponsorship from MilitaryConnection.com will help spread the word about this important scholarship opportunity,” said Kevin Dowdell, Executive Director of ThanksUSA. “This cooperative effort will facilitate ThanksUSA's goal of thanking military families with the invaluable gift of education.”

Sempertoons

By Gunnery Sgt. Charles Wolf



PRESIDENTS OF THE U.S.




ACROSS

- 7 He won the Republican nomination for the Presidency in 1976, but lost the election to his Democratic opponent, former Governor Jimmy Carter of Georgia.
- 9 “Teddy”
- 11 In 1917 he proclaimed American entrance into World War I a crusade to make the world “safe for democracy.”
- 12 During his administration, the U.S. enjoyed more peace and economic well being than at any time in its history.
- 13 “The Gipper”
- 15 He declared war on France in 1940
- 16 He was assassinated in Dallas, Texas.
- 17 He wrote his own epitaph without mentioning that he served as president of the United States.

DOWN

- 1 As a major general in the War of 1812, he became a national hero when he defeated the British at New Orleans.
- 2 “I am not a crook.”
- 3 He is the only president to serve two nonconsecutive terms. The Baby Ruth candy bar was named after his baby daughter, Ruth.
- 4 27th president
- 5 The first president of the United States.
- 6 “Give 'em hell Harry”
- 8 “Ike”
- 10 “With firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds...”
- 14 50 dollar bill


[Solutions on A5]



C.O.P. Corner

Community Oriented Policing

The proactive voice of crime prevention



Presented by the Provost Marshal’s Office Crime Prevention Section

Unattended Juveniles

Combat Center Order 1754.2 states that no children under 12 years of age may be left unattended in your home, that no children under 16 years of age may be left unattended overnight, and that you must be at least 12 years of age to baby sit other children and at least 16 years of age to baby sit children overnight. It also states no children under 10 years of age may play unattended, walk to school unattended, or go to any youth centers unattended.

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

Marines, Sailors, and cab drivers: MCs 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.



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

Bluebonnet
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THANKS FOR DRINKING RESPONSIBLY

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A COMMITMENT TO THE SAFETY OF THE MARINE CORPS AIR GROUND COMBAT CENTER


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



Centerspeak


“Are you going to the Lynyrd Skynyrd concert?”

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




STAFF SGT. NICK MENDOZA
BRAVO COMPANY, 2 ND AABN

“I’d love to except the Marine Corps and their wonderful timing has us departing to Camp Lejeune at 8 p.m.”




LINDSEY QUINN
WORKER AT NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

“Yes, I’m going, but the only song I know is ‘Sweet home Alabama.’ Plus it’s a free event and they will have free food.”



PFC. RANDY CONTRERAS
1/7 WEAPONS COMPANY

“No, I’m not going. I just got here and I’m going back home to L.A. to get my furniture and stuff.”



CPL. SETH KROLL
3RD LAR

“I think it’s pretty cool they’re showing their support for the military even if they’re getting paid. Me and a bunch of friends are going.”

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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Lance Cpl. Michael S. Cifuentes
Lance Cpl. Regina N. Ortiz

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Spotlight on Mojave Viper

Knocking off the ‘Rust’

1/6 Marines cover the basics during Mojave Viper training

CPL. PAUL ROBBINS JR.
COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

The training exercise known as Mojave Viper provides realistic combat situations and advanced knowledge of enemy tactics to the Marines who participate; but before Marines can tackle this rigorous training schedule, it’s back to the basics.

The Marines of 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, spent their initial week, May 8-12, of the combined arms exercise aboard the Combat Center refreshing their basic skills as an infantry battalion.

“We essentially took a week at the front end of Mojave Viper and put in training to knock the rust off,” said Master Sgt. Luis H. Hernandez, operations chief for the battalion.

The training focused on individual skills as the companies set out to let each Marine fire his respective weapon system.

Machine guns, rockets, mortars, service rifles and pistols were all tested and fired at the ranges.

“Every weapon organic to

the infantry battalion, short of the TOW missile system, was exercised,” said Hernandez, a 48-year-old native of Coral Gables, Fla.

In addition to the individual skills training, the Marines also familiarized themselves with convoy operations, squad attacks, and integrating armor, such as tanks and amphibious assault vehicles, into their operations.

By the end of the training cycle, many of the Marines found the group exercises to be the most rewarding.

“We don’t get many opportunities to integrate with tanks and learn how to operate beside them,” said Gunnery Sgt. Dennis J. Dodd, company gunnery sergeant for Charlie Company. “It’s also important for the squads to develop confidence in each other and in their squad leader’s ability.”

Through repetition of the training they conduct year round, the Marines of 1/6 found the training to be an essential step during Mojave Viper.

“Without the basics, you can’t move forward,” said

Lance Cpl. Cameron S. Golden, a squad leader for Charlie Co., “Your Marines have to crawl before they can walk and walk before they can run.”

With more than three weeks remaining and the difficulty of the training ever increasing, the Marines known as “1/6 Hard” feel more than ready to meet the challenge.

Between the training here at the Combat Center and at Camp Lejeune, the battalion is ready for its next deployment, said Golden, a 21-year-old native of Jessup, Md.

“My Marines are prepared for it.”



CPL. PAUL ROBBINS JR.
Cpl. Brett A. Brehmer, a tank gunner with Company D, 1st Tank Battalion, communicates with the patrol leader during a mock patrol, May 10.



CPL. PAUL ROBBINS JR.
Marines with Company C, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, patrol behind an M1A1 Abrahams Main Battle Tank during a class on the integration of tanks into an infantry patrol here May 10.



CPL. PAUL ROBBINS JR.
Sgt. Aaron R. Barney, a squad leader for Company C, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, provides security as Lance Cpl. John L. Williams, a rifleman with Company C, searches a mock terrorist during a class on site exploitation here May 12.

Washburn, Ill., native joins 2/7 after protecting president

CPL. BRIAN A. TUTHILL
COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

After spending more than two years protecting the commandant of the Marine Corps and then the President of the United States, one Marine is now adapting to life with the Marines of Fox Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, as they prepare to deploy to Iraq.

Corporal Richard R. Casper, a 21-year-old Washburn, Ill., native, said he never dreamed he would stand in the oval office or have his photograph taken with the president six times.

“The whole experience was awesome,” said Casper, who now serves as a fire team leader with 1st Squad, 1st Platoon, in Fox Company. “While I was doing it, I knew it was probably something cool I was doing, but looking back now I see how much it actually meant. I met two presidents, the joint chiefs of staff, the commandant and sergeant major of the Marine Corps and so many higher-up people — all as a Pfc. or lance corporal. I’m so glad I was able to do it.

“I went infantry the whole way, though,” Casper said. “I didn’t even think about doing

anything with Security Forces in the first place but ended up loving my time there.

Casper, whose father served in the Navy, said he was the first in his family to join the Marine Corps in June 2003 and wanted simply to be an infantryman but was selected to go to Marine Security Forces and to presidential security after being screened at recruit training in San Diego.

After training at the School of Infantry at Camp Pendleton, Casper was sent to Chesapeake, Va., for Security Forces training before being assigned as a guard to Marine Barracks, Washington for 11 months.

“I was at 8th and I for 11 months because I had to wait for my top secret clearance to go through,” said Casper. “Marines are there different amounts of time while they wait for that; some shorter or longer.”

Once his clearance was approved, Casper was transferred to Naval Support Facility Thurmont, popularly known as Camp David, which serves as the president’s private retreat in Maryland.

“I met President Bush a number of times

and he was awesome, just awesome,” said Casper. “He seemed like a really cool guy or someone you would want to be your grandpa. When he sees a Marine, he’ll always wave or stop and say hi to us. It was the same with his dad, too.

“I have six different photos of me with the president,” added Casper. “One thing I’m really proud of is when Marines leave there, they get to go to the white house to the oval office and bring one guest for a photo, so I brought my mom. They sent the photo to us and President Bush signed it personally to both of us. At Christmas and holidays, all the Marines get cards from the president and joint chiefs, too.”

From his arrival, he and his fellow Marines, who lived in the barracks aboard the facility, kept busy, not only with regular duties, but also with infantry training. They were constantly refreshed to better ready them to leave for regular Marine units.

“At camp, they still push a lot of infantry skills and training, especially for the Marines who are leaving to fleet units, because they know as a corporal you may be put into a fire team or squad leader position,” said Casper. “They push that a lot there. So if we weren’t working, we were training.”

One Marine in Casper’s platoon, 20-year-old Lance Cpl. Oscar Martinez, also a fire team leader, said he sees a difference in Casper and other Marines coming from Security Forces.

“He’s a grunt, just like us, but with a different background,” said the El Paso, Texas, native, who has been with 2/7 for more than a year-and-a-half and has completed a combat tour in Iraq. “It’s just a different branch of the same tree. I notice the difference in Security Forces Marines and fleet Marines, but they are

not bad differences. I’ve learned a lot from him and he learns from us.

“He’s a good Marine, too,” continued Martinez. “He’s smart. They don’t come from Camp David empty-minded, and he knows his stuff. What’s nice is he’ll have a lot to look back on when he gets out of the Marine Corps because he’s guarded the commandant, then the president, along with a tour in Iraq.”

For the Marines of 2/7, their upcoming deployment next year means a lot more training must be accomplished before they ship out again. Casper said one challenge he faces is educating many of the Marines who recently came to the battalion from SOI.

“It’s been challenging for me working with all the new Marines,” said Casper. “You really have to break things down for them more than I’m used to sometimes. At camp, most Marines have been in for at least a year already. Here we are going to have to work with these Marines a lot before we deploy next year, but we’ll be ready.

“We have time to identify weaknesses in the Marines and focus on them so when more difficult training comes around, they’re ready,” Casper said.

Although Casper will end his active service near the time 2/7 will return from Iraq, he said he is willing to extend his contract to be able to deploy.

“When he does deploy, I think he’ll set some of the standards for us in good leadership, good discipline and will set an example all around,” said Martinez. “He is also good a follower. It takes a good follower to be a good leader and he has that.”

“I’ll go to combat with him any day,” Martinez said.



Cpl. Richard R. Casper, Fox Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, patrols Range 210 with his fire team.



Cpl. Richard R. Casper, Fox Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, looks over his sights as he ascends a stairway at Range 210.



Cpl. Omar F. Covarrubias, a team leader with India Company, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, leads and motivates members of his platoon during a grueling 12 mile battalion hike aboard the Combat Center's desert terrain May 12.

DARKSIDE, A1

Most everyone felt as if their bodies were in the worst environmental conditions, said Hafley, but those who showed true motivation and true camaraderie to their fellow platoon members are the ones who led the way.

“My team leader and squad leader kept my mind from stressing,” said Pfc. Jerome E. Henry, a 20-year-old ammunition man with India Company, and a Tuba City, Ariz., native. “The leadership is good in this battalion and it really showed during the hike. They strive to make sure we know what we’re doing and that we make it OK.”

The hike wasn’t the longest the company has been on, said Pfc. Christopher R. Yarborough, a 21-year-old machine

gunner with Lima Company, remembering the 18 mile hike the battalion went on in Bridgeport, Calif., in March. Most Marines know a hike can’t kill you, unless a you’re really dehydrated, he said.

“The pain is only temporary,” said the Los Angeles, native during a break after the sixth mile. “I always tell myself that it’s not going to last forever. It’s going to go away eventually.

“What gets me through this is the thought of what I’ll be doing when we’re done,” added Yarborough. “After we’re done with this, I’m going to be lying down in my rack. I know I’ve been through a hump like this before, and I’ve definitely been through worse. I know I can keep doing it. This is my time to set an example for the Marines I work with, and my leaders.”

Going in to the summer season, the biggest focus for 3/4 is that the Marines are able to execute their billets and support their unit, said Blue. They need to know exactly what they’re doing and exactly what to do in any situation. A hike is a movement drill that allows leaders to stand out and perform their billet.

“I need to know if they’re going to make or break,” said Blue.

The culminating point of infantry training and pre-deployment training is Mojave Viper, added Blue. After three or four more grueling hikes, military operations in urban terrain training, marksmanship training, lane training and live fires, Darkside will ride the remainder of pre-deployment training in the month-long Mojave Viper training evolution, until heading out to Iraq for their fourth combat deployment.



1st Sgt. Ryan F. Blue, India Company gunnery sergeant, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, leads his company alongside Lance Cpl. Dimitri J. Taylor, carrying the company guidon, during a 12 mile battalion hike May 12.

REENLIST, A1

“It takes a lot for Marines to come back and want to serve again,” said Gayden, a 25-year-old Houston native who has the highest reenlistment rate on base after already reenlisting 53 1st Tanks Marines for this fiscal year.

“A lot of them are Marines who have been to Iraq once, twice, and they have seen their friends or fellow Marines be injured or killed. Those kinds of things can either make them stronger or make them want to leave. For them to come and say they still want to reenlist is hard.”

For Cpl. Richard Guerramorenoreno, 21, a field radio operator with Tactical Training Exercise Control Group, Headquarters Battalion, reenlisting to go to Okinawa, Japan, to see more of the world and the Marine Corps was a natural choice.

“One reason I joined the Marine Corps in the first place was to just get out there and do something different,” said the Moses Lake, Wash., native, who deployed to Iraq in May 2004. “So now I’m

heading to Okinawa.”

Guerramorenoreno said the process to reenlist was quick once he began talking to his battalion career planner.

“The process is pretty simple; you just need to get it started. It’s very competitive,” he said. “Get your package in early because you can always say no.”

One new system to help Marines and career planners alike is the new Automated Career Retention System, or ACRS, which is available to all Marines through their MarineOnline account.

Marines must merely fill out their preferences for duty stations, special assignments and interests before meeting with their career planner to help streamline the process and help save time and effort, said Gayden.

One point career planners and reenlisting Marines stress is the importance of starting early on putting together and submitting a package.

“My best advice would be to start early as soon as you’re eligible and submit a package, even if you’re not sure,” said Gayden.

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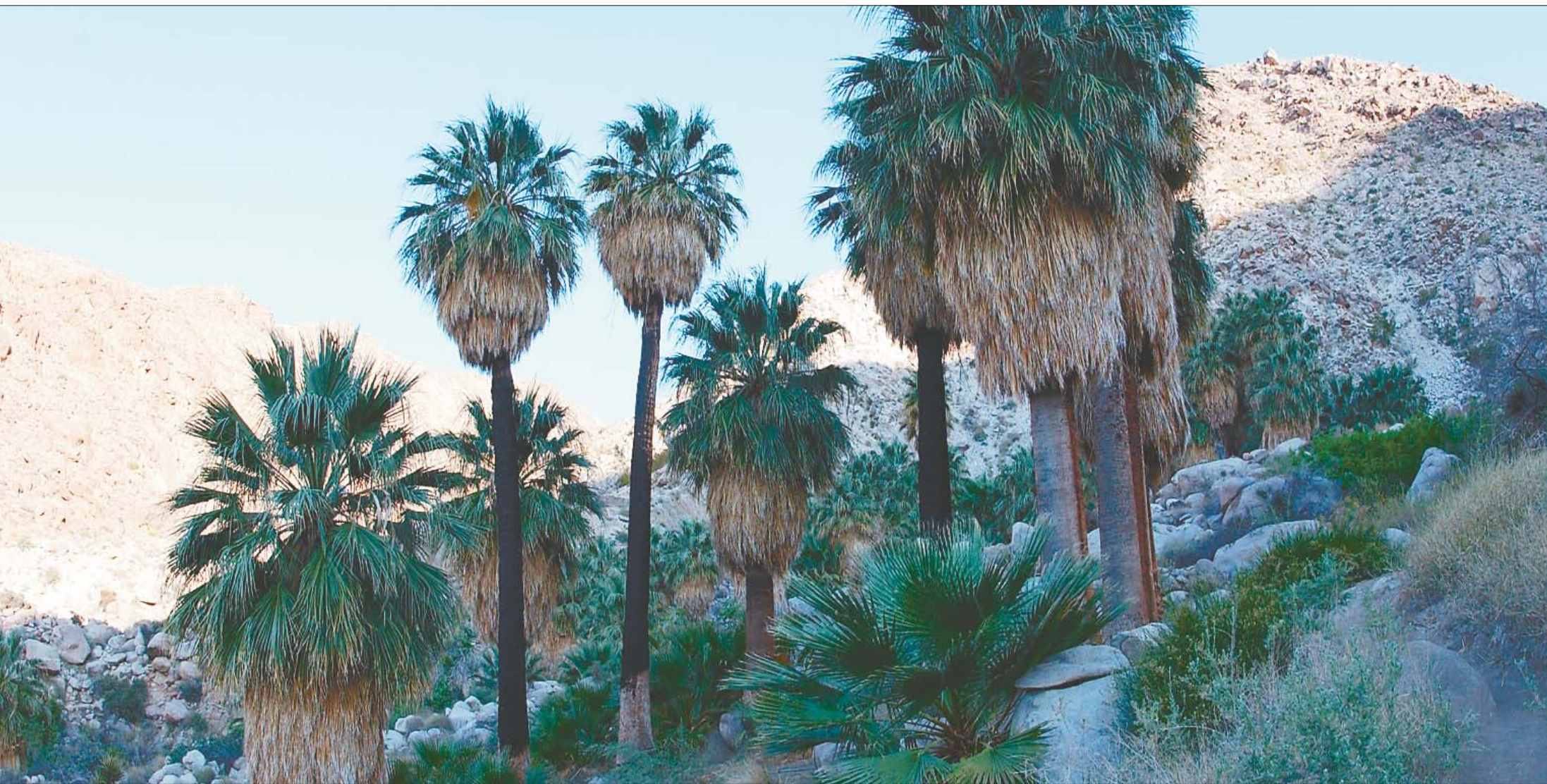
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LANCE CPL. MICHAEL S. CIFUENTES

Soon 29 palm trees similar to these will be planted along Adobe Road from the main gate to Del Valle Drive.

Coming soon: 29 palms to Combat Center

LANCE CPL. MICHAEL S. CIFUENTES
COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

Former Combat Center commanding general, Maj. Gen. Richard C. Zilmer, had an idea in the summer of 2005 to make the Combat Center’s main entrance more welcoming. Since then, civilian architects, engineers and contractors got together and came up with a plan to execute Zilmer’s idea. Currently, contractors are making Zilmer’s idea happen along the west side of Adobe Road when entering the Combat Center. Twenty-nine palm trees are being planted in between the physical fitness test course and the bike trail, beginning at the main gate and ending at Del Valle Drive. The construction began in March. Each palm tree, specifically known as California fan palms,

is 16 feet in height, from the bottom of the trunk to the tip. The trees will be planted in individual concrete masonry units, said Bob P. Lehman, the Combat Center’s chief of engineering and the base architect. “From the beginning of the base’s main entrance, there will be a nice-looking row of palm trees, which I picked out myself from a nursery in Indio [Calif.],” said Lehman. The communities thematic element is palm trees, said Lehman. When traveling off base into the city of Twentynine Palms, one feels the theme of palm trees. “I think putting these palm trees along the base’s entrance enhances that feel,” said Lehman. “It also ties the base with the local community. “The whole sense of making our entrance more welcoming

also ties with upgrading houses, barracks and the quality of living,” continued Lehman. “This base is no longer just metal buildings. We’re trying to make some good changes for those who live here, work here or are visiting. Adding some palm trees will help. It creates a sense of pride and being.” Another important reason why the image of palm trees is significant to the base’s entrance is to welcome troops home from deployments, and let them know they are back in Twentynine Palms, said Don I. Clark, the deputy head of Facilities Maintenance Division. “When troops come rolling back in on a bus from a deployment, the 29 palm trees will give them a feel of ‘welcome back to home,’” said Clark. “The trees are a big symbol of support to the town, and to the ones who come on this base.” The palm trees are expected to arrive to the Combat Center in June, just as the final touches the planting units are complete, said Lehman. The project is scheduled to be finished by the end of June.

Body armor keeps Marine in the fight

CPL. GRAHAM PAULSGROVE
1ST MARINE DIVISION

GHARMAH, Iraq — When an optional piece of gear became mandatory, complaints were lodged, but when the gear did its job — saving a Marine’s life — a few opinions were changed.

Lance Cpl. Robert F. Dean, a light armored vehicle crewman with D Company, 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, owes his life to the small arms protective insert he had strapped to the side of his body armor when he was shot by an insurgent sniper May 14 near the city of Gharmah.

“I thought someone had thrown a rock at me,” said Dean, from Spring, Texas.

Dean soon realized it was not a rock, but a bullet fired by an insurgent from roughly 500 meters away.

“We had an area cordoned off and the scouts were out searching the area,” recalled Cpl. Dustin R. Nelson, Dean’s vehicle commander. “I reached down to give him some water. As he popped out of his hatch to take it from me, I heard a crack.”

The Marines immediately responded to the insurgent attack.

“The bullet would have hit his femoral bone, and possibly gone through and hit his femoral artery,” said HN Chad T. Kenyon, 20, the corpsmen who treated Dean after the incident. “If that happened, he could have bled to death

within a few minutes. It would have been a sticky situation, but the plates did their job and stopped the bullet.”

“The round hit the very bottom of the plate, shattering some of the ceramic, but the fiber paper [backing the plate] caught the round like a baseball mitt,” added Nelson, from Grand Junction, Colo.

Marines here are equipped with the interceptor body armor system, which consists of an outer tactical vest made of Kevlar and the small arms protective insert plates. The OTV and associated neck, throat and groin protec-

tors are designed to offer protection from fragmentation weapons.

The ceramic SAPI plates are designed to defeat multiple hits from assault rifles common on the current battlefield. Recently, the side SAPI plates have been added to the armor system.

When the side SAPI plates were originally issued to the company, Marines with jobs that kept them inside their eight-wheeled vehicles — the drivers, gunners and vehicle commanders — could choose whether or not to wear the plates. But, once the unit started operating around Fallujah under Regiment Combat Team 5, wearing the side plates was no longer a choice, it was a requirement.

“They make it harder to get in and out of the vehicle, but without them, I would probably be in bad shape,” said Dean, 20, about his side SAPI plates. “It was a good thing that they made all of us wear them.”

When the gear became mandatory for the Marines, some complained, but have since rescinded their objections after seeing the plates in action.

Thanks to the side SAPI plates, a life was perhaps saved and serious injury was definitely prevented.

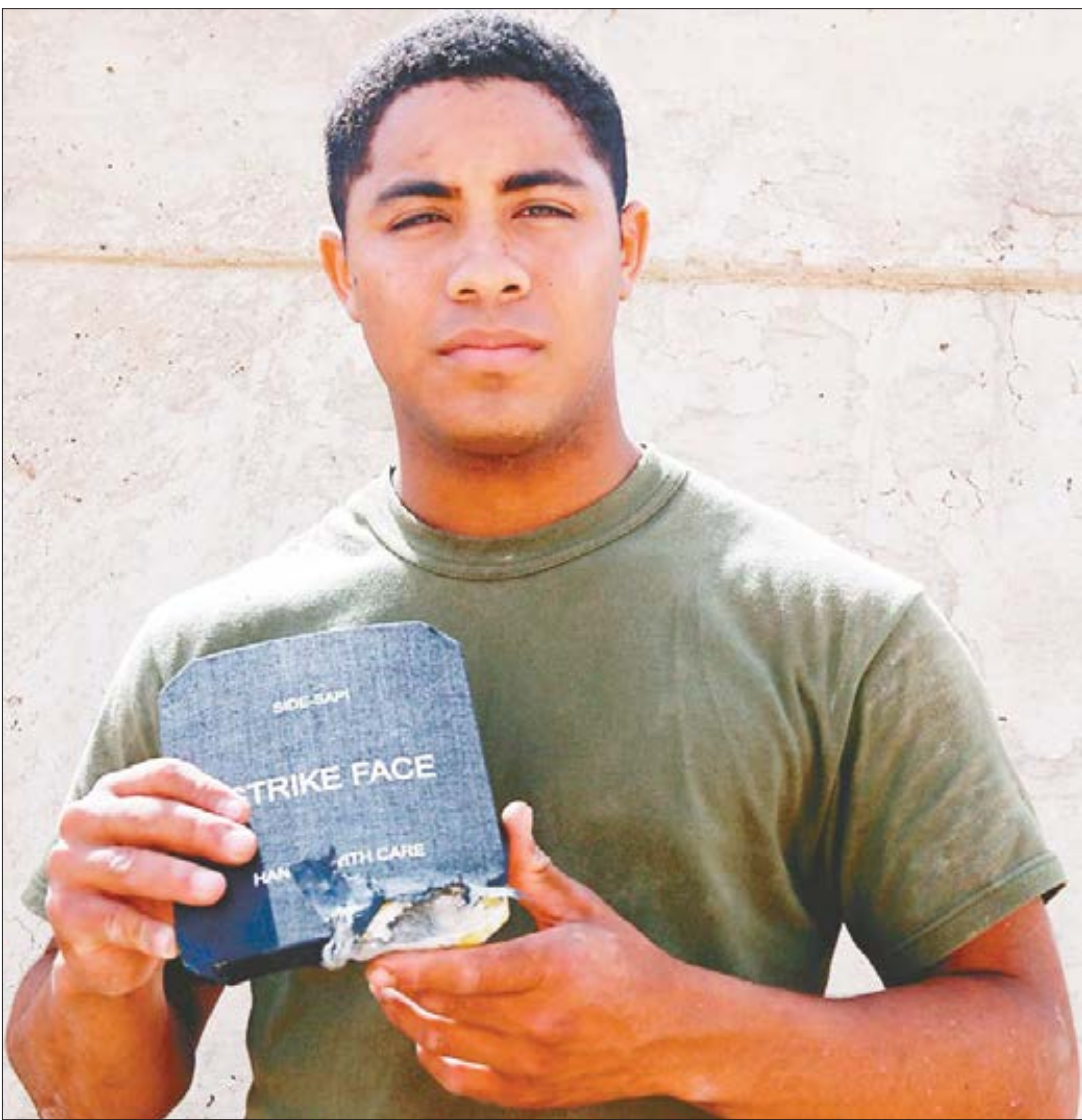
“Now, our interpreter wants side SAPI’s, before he was complaining that his flak was too heavy,” Nelson said.

The Marine Corps has made several advancements in providing enhanced personal body armor for Marines and Sailors deployed to Iraq. The level of protection of individual body armor has increased as advancements in the armor technology has improved and in response to the threats in the area.

Advancements include enhanced SAPI plates, which offer greater protection against small caliber weapons, the side SAPI plates, which increase protection on the flanks of the torso, and a new lightweight Kevlar helmet, which offers the same ballistic protection as the previous version but is easier to wear for long periods of time.



CPL. GRAHAM PAULSGROVE
Ceramic small arms protective insert plates are designed to defeat multiple hits from assault rifles common on the current battlefield.



CPL. GRAHAM PAULSGROVE
Lance Cpl. Robert F. Dean, a light armored vehicle crewman with D Company, 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, displays the small arms protective insert that protected him from an insurgent sniper's bullet May 14 while operating near Gharmah, Iraq.



CPL. GRAHAM A. PAULSGROVE

An Iraqi soldier checks the I.D. of an Iraqi civilian in Ar Rutbah, Iraq.

Iraqi soldiers purge former smuggler's town

CPL. GRAHAM A. PAULS-GROVE

7ST MARINE DIVISION

AR RUTBAH, Iraq — In this urban city located in the center of miles of open desert in western Al Anbar province, Iraqi soldiers are taking the lead in operations to keep criminals and insurgents out of the region.

The Iraqi soldiers are doing the majority of the work here — checking IDs, searching cars and people at the city's various checkpoints — while Coalition Forces assist.

"It's more us helping the Iraqis, than the other way around," said Cpl. Victor M. Moreno, one of the Marine battalion's scout team leaders. "They've been doing fantastic."

In recent months, U.S. Marines here say Iraqi soldiers have continually progressed towards operating independently, evidenced by their security operations here.

Rutbah is the most populated city (about 25,000 people) in Anbar's southwestern region — a mostly barren desert stretching from the Jordan/Iraq border to 120 miles east.

Once known as a smugglers' town, Rutbah is the first major city along the supply routes from Jordan and Syria eventually leading to the Al Anbar Province's known hotspots — Ramadi, Fallujah and Baghdad, according to Col. Stephen W. Davis during a Pentagon press briefing several months ago. Davis was the commander of Marine forces in western Al Anbar province in 2005.

"This town had the unfortunate occurrence of being strategically placed there — very convenient for smugglers, terrorists, insurgents to operate in and out of there," said Davis.

Coalition forces and Iraqi soldiers have been working together to root out the insur-

gents. In January, an eight-foot tall berm was built around the city to prevent insurgents from entering Rutbah, requiring all traffic entering and exiting the city to pass through the checkpoints manned by the Iraqi soldiers.

So far, Iraqi soldiers have caught 64 insurgents since the coalition and Iraqi military forces beefed-up security measures here five months ago.

The Marines who work here daily say the city used to be a base of operations for insurgents — from planning attacks to storing weapons.

"We assess that many criminal and insurgent activities are planned and financed from Rutbah," said Maj. Ken Kassner, executive officer for the Twentynine Palms, Calif.-based 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, which arrived here nearly two months ago — about a year after the unit's last deployment to this very area in Al

Anbar province.

"By maintaining the security of Rutbah, we significantly affect the ability of the insurgents to operate," said Kassner.

And the plan is working — a full gamut of terrorists have been caught by the Marines and Iraqi soldiers in and around Rutbah — from those who plant roadside bombs, to high-level officials in the insurgency, according to Moreno.

"Insurgents have been fleeing [the city] and we have been catching them [at the checkpoints]," he said.

"[The berm and checkpoints have] been getting rave reviews from the population down there because for the first time in years now, the insurgents can't freely travel in and out of that city — one more step in making western Al Anbar a prohibitive environment for the insurgents and terrorists to operate in," said Davis during the press briefing.

The smuggling trade through Al Anbar contributes to the insurgency by financing criminal operations, and

supplying weapons and munitions, according to Kassner.

But with Iraqi soldiers taking more of the operational workload to secure the city, Coalition and Iraqi forces have been able to curb insurgent activity here and ultimately block insurgents' once-direct route from other countries to the heart of Al Anbar province, according to Kassner, a native of Couplan, Texas.

"The Iraqi soldiers are the key to our success," he said. "Ultimately, they will be the ones to fully determine the outcome of this war."

The Marines who operate in this region have taken the role of supervisors; teaching the Iraqi soldiers in the functions of their duties — directing traffic, searching cars and personnel — so they gain confidence and maintain a presence in the local community, according to Moreno, of Modesto, Calif.

While the Iraqi soldiers are making progress in their abilities to operate without the support of the Marines here, there is still work to be done before the uniformed Iraqis are 100-percent ready to operate independently, according to Sgt. Dale Fenner, a 27-year-old from Indianapolis and one of the battalion's squad leaders.

"We don't want to prematurely leave before they're ready," said Fenner, who spends his days supervising the Iraqis and verifying the validity of the IDs of the men passing through the checkpoints and ensuring they are not known terrorists. "This is a work in progress — they are pretty good but have a long way to go."

While the Marines are pleased with the progress of their Iraqi counterparts, the soldiers need more time, training, and experience before they will be given the rubber stamp of approval by Coalition Forces as capable of operating fully independently.

The Marines fully understand that the transition will not take place overnight.

"It took years of training for me as a Marine to get to

where I am now, and it will take years for them as well," said Fenner.

But the Marines here say the Iraqis' progress has been more than just standing posts and checking identification. The Iraqi soldiers have learned the basics of command structure, and more importantly, the role of small-unit leadership and the value of ensuring the welfare of their subordinates — traits crucial to any military organization's success and efficiency, according to Moreno, 21.

The Iraqi soldiers have their own squad leaders in charge at each of the checkpoints around Rutbah, who ensure the soldiers have food, water, and time to rest, according to Moreno.

They also "make sure they wear all their [safety] gear," said Moreno — helmets and body armor.

It may be a work in progress for the Marines, but the Iraqis' hard work is paying off — the berm and checkpoints throughout the city seem to keep the bad guys from coming in, said Fenner.

"The insurgents can't get what they need [into the city] to get things started," said Fenner. "I think that is what's keeping things quiet."

Moreover, the Iraqi soldiers are the ones who communicate and interact with city's residents, further putting the Iraqis in the driver's seat of security operations while coalition forces take a back-seat role, according to the Marines.

Here, locals are more inclined to speak with Iraqi soldiers than the Marines since the Iraqi soldiers have a better understanding of their country's culture and language than the Marines, according to Capt. Michael Nakonieczny, a 32-year-old Marine company commander from Buena Park, Calif.

"The Iraqi army is here to protect the people and each day we get closer and closer to complete Iraqi control of the city," said Nakonieczny. "[The Iraqi soldiers] are a tremendous (force) multiplier."

Civil Affairs Marines aid Iraqi families

CPL. ANTONIO ROSAS
1ST MARINE DIVISION

AL QA'IM, Iraq — A 28-year-old Iraqi woman has told Marines and Sailors in region of western Al Anbar Province that all she wants is to be able to walk again.

The woman from Karabilah, Iraq, is missing both of her legs.

But the Marines of the 3rd Civil Affairs Group — a U.S. military unit responsible for assisting Iraqi communities with rebuilding local government infrastructure, commerce and economies — are doing something about it.

They're jumpstarting the lengthy process of finding aid for the woman, who lost both of her legs during combat operations conducted by Coalition Forces against insurgents last year in her hometown near the Iraq-Syria border.

The civil affairs group is working with Iraqi doctors at provincial-level medical facilities where resources for rehabilitation programs or further care are limited. Ultimately, the woman will need a referral to a higher level of care near the nation's capital at Baghdad for treatment, according to CAG officials.

Marines and Sailors from the shock trauma platoon, forward resuscitative surgical suite aboard this U.S. military camp conducted a medical evaluation of the woman for an updated prognosis of her condition.

They also evaluated two Iraqi children, a seven-year-old boy and a four-year-old girl, with genetic diseases. The families sought the help of the Marines because they did not know who to turn to for help.

"Once we establish what's wrong physically, we can engage with the Iraqi health system and government agencies to see if we can get help," said Lt. Col. Larry L. White, the civil military operations center director for the Al Qa'im region.

While the civil affairs group in the Al Qa'im region spend most of their days assisting local towns with rebuilding local commerce and government, providing humanitarian aid is not new to the Marines, who receive requests for help from locals on a regular basis, according to the Marines here.

Though the Marines can't always provide immediate assistance on their own, they



CPL. ANTONIO ROSAS

Lt. Col. Larry L. White, director of the civil military operations center in Iraq's Al Qa'im region, watches as family members of several disabled Iraqis seek medical assistance from the Marines.

can lead people in the right direction to get the aid they need.

"We're out there with the people at the civil military operations center and that's where people go for help," said White.

The patients, whom are of no relation to each other, sought the aid of the Marines several days ago. The Marines helping the woman are currently stationed in the city of Husaybah in the Al Qa'im region of western Al Anbar Province.

"They just came into the center and asked for help," said White, 39, who has spearheaded the project by arranging transportation for the families from Husaybah to a U.S. military camp at Al Qa'im. "This is a humanitarian gesture and we are doing what we can to help them."

Amal communicated through an interpreter that she hoped the Marines were going to fix everything and

make everything good.

"The woman is seeing that some progress is being made by coming to this place," said the interpreter. "She is a good woman who has hope."

Although she lost so much as a result of collateral damage from the fighting, Amal confided that the problem began with the insurgents who came to her home and threatened her family.

Though the woman said she appreciates any help Coalition Forces can provide, she lost more than just her legs last year.

"My sister, my daughter and my mother died during the fighting," she said. "Terrorists came to my house in Karabilah and said, 'You're with us or we will kill you.'"

Caught in the middle of the fighting between Americans and insurgents, Amal watched her family members die.

"She could be hateful, bitter and angry, but instead she's reaching out to the peo-

ple that hurt her," said Navy Capt. Don Elshire, shock trauma platoon, forward resuscitative surgical suite officer-in-charge. "She has a big space in her heart for forgiveness, otherwise she wouldn't be here today."

The woman communicated through an interpreter that she was confident that someone from America would help her.

"I just want to be able to walk again," said Amal. "I've seen the Americans help others."

Although the process of acquiring financial and medical aid is quite a lengthy process, according to White, a St. Paul, Minn. native, the Iraqis are not discouraged as they don't have many options to choose from in this remote corner of Iraq where medical

facilities are scarce. The only options in this region of Iraq are a string of clinics where care is limited to less severe cases.

With medical facilities unable to provide a higher level of care, the families often have to travel a long distance to receive adequate care, according to White.

That's not to say that the civil affairs Marines are not working around the clock to establish satisfactory medical facilities where Iraqis won't have to travel to cities such as Ramadi or Fallujah for care.

For Iraqis near the Syrian border, high-level health care means a referral to a larger health facility hundreds of miles away.

"It's time-consuming and right now the ability to make the system work is frustrat-

ing," said White. "We are trying to build the legitimacy of their health system so they can handle these cases. We need to get the Iraqi system up to speed."

On track to rebuilding that system, the Marines have a number of projects in the works that will address health care, such as construction of several satellite clinics by the end of the month.

A trip to a hospital in another city means hours on Iraq's dangerous roads, and may take several days, said one of the patient's family members through an interpreter.

"Anything we can do to help the Iraqi doctors do better, we will do," said Elshire. "The Iraqis have the doctors to do the work, they just don't have the resources."

SPORT SHORTS

TRAINING TANK
LAP SWIM

Lap swim at the Training Tank is Monday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. This is exclusively for lap swimming only. No PT or recreational swimming is allowed. Recreational Open Swimming will start Memorial Day Weekend. If you have any questions, please call the Aquatics Program Manager at 830-6212.

STEP CLASSES

Step Classes are available at the West Gym on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays at 6 a.m. For more information, call 830-4131.

YOGA CLASSES

Yoga classes are available from 9 to 9:45 a.m. at the Community Center and from 5 to 5:45 p.m. at the East Gym. For more information please call 830-4131

LEISURE

SMOKING
CESSATION

Kick the habit and learn to become tobacco free! The Robert E. Bush Naval Hospital Health Promotions Program offers tobacco cessation classes in the hospital. Classes are offered at two convenient times of noon and 5:30 p.m. To sign up, call Health Promotions at 830-2814. The next set of tobacco cessation classes will start Tuesday. Call now before it all goes up in smoke! Also, don't forget there is a tobacco cessation support group that meets at 4 p.m., in the same classroom as the tobacco cessation class.

RED CROSS SUMMER
YOUTH PROGRAM

The 29 Palms Red Cross Summer Youth Program is fast approaching. The program is for youths between the ages of 13 to 18 years. We have limited availability for youths 13 to 14 years of age. You may pick up an application at the Red Cross office, Bldg 1551, Room 29, Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Applications are due back by June 7. The program begins June 19 and ends August 11. For more information please call 830-6685.

DID YOU KNOW?

It takes 3,000 cows to supply the NFL with enough leather for a year's supply of footballs.

WE SALUTE YOU

Saturday's "We Salute You" Celebration hosted by Marine Corps Community Services promises to be one of the high points of 2006 Combat Center entertainment with barbecue, games and music by the Combat Center band and rock and roll icon Lynyrd Skynyrd.

The free event is scheduled to take place at Victory Field from 4 to 10 p.m. and is open to military members, their families and their guests. If you need more information than is contained here, call 830-5086.

DO'S AND DON'TS

- Do's:**
- **Do bring sunscreen. Temperatures during this time of year are normally around 100 degrees during the day.**
 - **Do bring water.**

- Don'ts:**
- **Don't bring outside alcohol. \$2 beer will be sold on site.**
 - **Don't bring weapons, (including pocket knives).**
 - **Don't bring your pets (stuffed or live).**
 - **Don't bring recording equipment.**
 - **Don't bring video cameras or professional-grade cameras. Professional grade cameras are those with removable lenses.**

PARKING

Only vehicles with event-specific parking passes will be available inside the square bounded by Fifth and Sixth Streets and Brown and Bourke Roads.

Directions to general parking areas will be provided by signage and military police.

SHUTTLE SERVICE ROUTES:

Indicated pickup points are at street intersections.

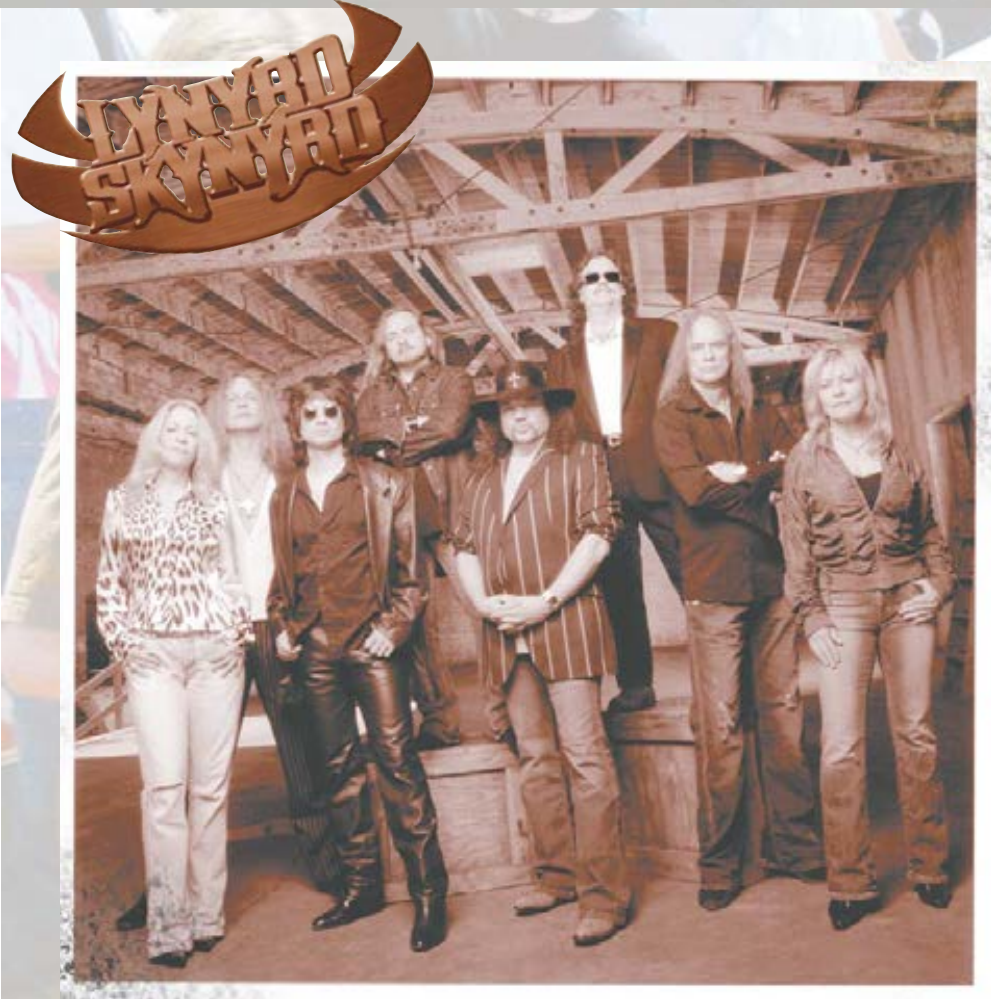
- Route 1: Ocotillo Housing**
- In front of Ocotillo 7-Day Store
 - Daly and Upshur
 - Ashurst and Lejeune Circle
 - Lejeune Circle and Berkley
- Route 2: Joshua Heights, Shadow Mountain, Condor Housing**
- Sagebrush and Smoketree
 - Smoketree and Bullion
 - Bullion and Saddleback
 - Bullion and Gate Hill
 - Gate Hill and Cottontail

- Route 3: Adobe Flats, Marine Palms**
- Condor Road
 - Condor Road and Argos
 - Plant and Elm (dirt lot across from housing)

- Route 4: 801, Joe Davis Housing**
- 2 Mile Road and 2 Mile Drive
 - Joe Davis Circle and Joe Davis Drive
 - Desert Knoll and Aztec

All buses will begin at 3:30 p.m. and run through 11 p.m. Buses run every 30 minutes throughout event.

Drop off and pick up at Victory Field will be on 5th Street.



If you've never heard of Lynyrd Skynyrd, here's a little information about them:

American Southern Rock Band (These guys' music is where "Kid Rock" found his roots after his short-lived rap career). Creators of Rock anthems "Freebird" and "Sweet Home Alabama". Formed as the band "My Backyard" in Jacksonville, Fla., in 1964. Released first single, "Need All My Friends" with B side "Michelle" in 1968. Released first album in 1973, "Pronounced Leh-Nerd Skin-Nerd" Inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in March.

Current Lineup

Johnny Van Zant, lead vocals
Gary Rossington, guitars
Billy Powell, keyboard
Ean Evans, bass
Rickey Medlocke, guitar
Michael Cartellone, drums
Dale Krantz Rossington and Carol Chase, background vocals

HEAT CONDITIONS FLAG COLORS

GREEN
80° – 84.9°*

YELLOW
85° – 87.9°*

Exercise can be conducted and discretion is required for all heavy exercise unless acclimatized to desert conditions.

Strenuous exercise and activity must be reduced for new, un-acclimatized personnel during the first three weeks of heat exposure. Avoid outside classes.

All unit PT must have water available

For current Heat Conditions Flag status, call 830-2190.

Strenuous exercise must be halted or reduced for Marines and Sailors who haven't had up to 12 weeks to acclimatize.

All outdoor activities and training must be suspended. Weather conditions are too dangerous for exercise or movement outside.

RED
88° – 89.9°*

BLACK
90°* – ABOVE

*According to the Wet Bulb Globe Temperature index

Experience nature’s beauty next door

CPL. HEIDI E. LOREDO
COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

The days of long, leisurely driving getaways may be a thing of the past.

With the price of gasoline at record highs, families planning a one- or two-day outing by car must take a more creative and economical approach to the trip — especially when it comes to gas expenses.

Rather than stay at home, Joshua Tree National Park offers adventures, rest and relaxation, without burning holes in the pockets.

The park is open year round, and presently, the comfortable temperatures and blooming wildflowers adds a personality to the desert’s character. Joshua Tree National Park charges a \$15 fee per car entering the park, and allows unlimited entry and exits for seven days. Upon entrance, visitors are given a map of the park.



CPL. HEIDI E. LOREDO

A hiker takes a three-mile stroll through Joshua Tree National Park’s 49 Palms Oasis. The national park, popular for its hiking trails, rock climbing, and camping, offers a nearby getaway.

Visitor centers, ranger stations, and curbside exhibits are located along the main road throughout the park to allow the visitors to familiarize themselves with the park’s adventures.

The national park’s history dates back to before the 1800s when cattlemen grazed their cows in the area and built water impoundments for them. In the midst of the California gold rush, miners dug tunnels through the earth looking for gold and made roads in the desert with their trucks. Homesteaders began filing claims in the 1900s. They built cabins, dug wells, and planted crops. The park protects 501 archeological sites, 88 historic structures, 19 cultural landscapes and houses 123,253 items in its museum collection.

Joshua Tree National Park is popular with the more thoughtful traveler. There is no spectacular central attraction, just many square miles of wild desert scenery. Two factors make the park special; the eerie, spiky Joshua trees which grow densely in many areas, and occasional clumps of huge granite boulders, up to 100 feet high.

“Besides hiking, Joshua Tree National Park is a shrine for climbers who come to scale the rocks in the park,” said Maria Garza, park ranger. “Even if you don’t climb, it’s amazing to watch climbers scale the boulders. If you want to start climbing, there are climbs for every level of experience and guide services are available in town.”

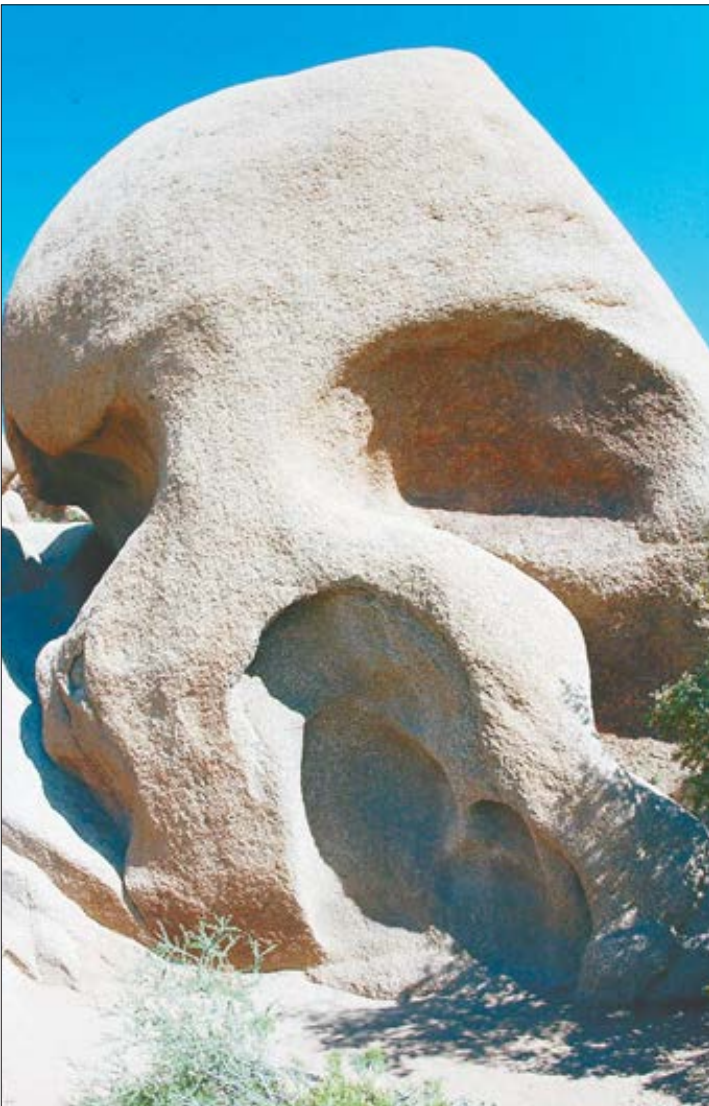
Monstrous granite boulders create a paradise for rock climbers who come from all over the world to climb the extensive system of vertical trails. More than 4,500 established routes offering a wide range of difficulty are concentrated within about 100,000 acres of park land. The rocky maze also provides horizontal, self-guided nature trails that allow hikers to explore the wonders of the Mojave Desert.

This is not a place just to drive past. Visitors can explore away from the main roads — stargaze at Indian Cove, climb some rocks or walk amongst the trees and cacti, but most of all spend a night there and watch the sun set.

There are nine campgrounds with tables, fireplaces and toilets. Several picnic areas for day use are available. Camping gear can be rented at discounted rates from Outdoor Adventures on base.

“We often get visitors from base looking to get away for the day,” said Garza. “The most popular thing to do here is obviously climb the gigantic rocks, but camping is a close second.”

In addition to the rocks and trees, the park also has hiking trails, four wheel-drive routes, several historic sites



CPL. HEIDI E. LOREDO

What appears as a giant, half-sunken head is a stand-out feature and marks the entry to Skull Rock Nature Trail in Joshua Tree National Park.

and five oases.

The park is always open. Visitor centers are open daily from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. For more information, call 760-367-5500 or visit their Web site at <http://www.nps.gov/jotr/>.

NMCRS receives veterans’ donations

SGT. ROBERT L. FISHER III
COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

The Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society received donated goods from a veterans support group and an America Legion Post in Yucaipa, Calif., Saturday.

“It’s very exciting,” said Rebecca Snoke, NMCRS assistant. “We don’t get a lot donated to us. It’s Twentynine Palms, we’re kind of separated from some of the big spots.”

David Dunn, MilitarySupportHQ.com founder, along with Clyde Kelly, American Legion Post 426 commander, and a few other veterans brought a large load of goods to be donated to the NMCRS.

The donators included the Veterans Affairs

Community Clinics in Palm Desert, Sun City, Victorville, Upland and Corona, Calif.; the Fontana Breakfast Club in Fontana, Calif.; American Legion 25th District; MilitarySupportHQ.com and American Legion Post 426.

“We got together to try and collect 500 pounds of donations; just to let our troops know we care about them,” said Dunn about the purpose of MilitarySupportHQ.com, which he started in 2003. “We just passed 43,000 pounds of donations. We’re not going to stop either.

“We did it just to let them know we care about them; no other goal,” he said.

The veterans were grateful for organizations such as NMCRS that support the service

members and their families.

“Without the door being open, we couldn’t do it,” said Patrick Senter, one of the veterans who helped deliver the donations, about organizations that help families.

NMCRS helps service members and their immediate family in need-based and emergency-based situations, said Snoke. They offer interest-free loans to help those families through dire situations and prevent them from going into debt. They also educate families on how to be prepared for hard times due to family emergencies and how to handle them on their own.

Snoke has worked with NMCRS for more than five years, and she is still amazed how NMCRS has helped countless families, she

said.

“[The donation] helps with things we can’t necessarily do – we can add to a clients needs,” she said. “When they come in and they don’t have enough money to buy food, we can add on top of that an extra bag of canned goods, or we can add a pack of diapers. It extends our service even further.”

Everyone at NMCRS was grateful for the donation, and the veterans seemed happy just to be able to give to those who may need it.

“We did it to show support to troops and their families,” said Kelly. “It doesn’t have anything to do with the branch of service. We’ve all been there. We know what it’s like. We do it because we care.”



SGT. ROBERT L. FISHER III

Paul Larson, a donating veteran, hands a bag of canned goods and baby products to Kathie Smith, Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society volunteer, Saturday.



MCCS

Command of The Grill Semi-Finalists

MCAS Yuma
LCpl Jaynine L. Goodroe

SGT. ROBERT L. FISHER III





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THE MARINES**

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- OFFICER AND WARRANT OFFICER OPPORTUNITIES FOR QUALIFIED OFFICER AND ENLISTED PERSONNEL
- FULL-TIME ACTIVE DUTY GUARD POSITIONS AVAILABLE
- SERVE IN A UNIT IN YOUR HOMETOWN

*One-year non-deployment tours available in all states. Some states also offer two-year non-deployment tours.

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Outdoor Adventures: where the fun begins



SGT. ROBERT L. FISHER III
Robert Bowman III, Outdoor Adventures employee, tests the “Strength Test” before it can be rented.

SGT. ROBERT L. FISHER III
COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

As summer gets into full swing, Outdoor Adventures stands ready to equip service members and their families with the gear they need to enjoy the season.

From water skis to mountain bikes, picnic and camping gear to tents, jumpers to a dunk tank, Outdoor Adventures has whatever one may need for the at-home party or an on-the-road adventure.

“We are part of the support section of Semper Fit, the recreation section,” said John Murdock, recreation assistant. “We’re here to support the families, support the units, and support other [Marine Corps Community Services] activities.

“We can furnish anything they want to do for a short time,” said Murdock. “Snowboarding, biking for a week; they can rent it here cheaper than if they went out and bought it. We can take care of any recreation they want to do.”

Located in building 1262, Outdoor Adventures stands just off Griffin Street behind the stables between Robert E. Bush Naval Hospital and the Navy barracks enlisted quarters.

According to some of the workers at Outdoor Adventures, many Combat Center residents don’t know about Outdoor Adventures or are unaware of their purpose. Even some of their employees never heard of Outdoor Adventure before working there.

“I never knew this place was up here until I started working here,” said Robert Bowman III, Outdoor Adventures employee. “We’re really hidden back here, not a lot of traffic comes through.”

Jerry Jackson, another Outdoor Adventure’s employee, said he would gladly show people around Outdoor Adventures and answer any questions about the rental equipment.

“People go way out in town for the stuff we have here,” said Jackson. “All that time, we had it on base. Come to 2nd and Griffin; we got jumpers and a whole lot of toys.”

For service members checking out of the base, many of them walk into Outdoor Adventures with a surprised look because they never heard of it.

“We have guys who come in here when checking out and they’re like, ‘Wow, I’ve been here for five years and I never knew this was up here,’” said Murdock. “We have stuff up here

to help their stay here more pleasant.” Those who do know of Outdoor Adventures certainly make use of the equipment and many of them find multiple uses for what is available.

“We actually had a Marine who has rented his Halloween costume from us for the past two years,” said Murdock.

With many units home from deployments, workers at Outdoor Adventures expect a bright summer with more rentals than years previous.

“We have more [service members] home now than we’ve had home for the summer in awhile,” said Murdock. “Hopefully we’ll have a big summer.

“We see it this time of the year when it’s warmer, when the units come home – Dad comes in and gets a camping set, and he and his kids go camping,” he said.

For those with big plans for summer fun and vacations, why not stop by Outdoor Adventures before taking off. Also keep in mind, renting equipment over weekends and holidays is free.

“I think we’re a really good program,” said Mary Ellen Barrena, manager. “We offer a terrific break for Marines, Sailors and their families. We take the hassle out of a lot of things. Instead of carrying equipment from duty station to duty station, they can rent it here. It saves them trouble.”



SGT. ROBERT L. FISHER III
Mountain bikes, skis, toys, and an assortment of other recreation equipment wait to be rented from Outdoor Adventures.

TAP class preps Marines, others for military exit

SGT. ROBERT L. FISHER III
COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

Week after week, Marines and Sailors leave the military and return to civilian life. While many of them say they are prepared, there remain some who are unsure of what they will do. Still others leave with no plan for the future.

To help every service member better prepare before leaving military life, the Career Resource Office heads up the Transition Assistance Program and Pre-separation Brief, and the CRO staff stands by their programs.

“Some of them don’t realize how important this is until after the class,” said Dennis Warren, transition program analyst. “We give them a reality check as far as a job. We want the service member to be successful.”

Karen Allen, Career Resource Office manager, agreed with Warren, just in a slightly different light.

“After attending TAP, some Marines have actually decided to re-enlist — that is if they have scheduled their TAP in a timely manner, which is at least one year before their EAS,” said Allen. “We do a great service for the Marines and Sailors.”

The three-day long TAP class is mandatory for all Marines but is open to all service members, and the one-day long Pre-separation Brief is mandatory for every branch of service. The two classes coupled provide service members with vocational guidance and benefit information so they can make a sound decision in life after the service.

“We want people to have a better transition,” said Carlos Alatorre, TAP instructor. “If they’re proactive, the results will be there. We bring them to a point of awareness.”

TAP is an “intensive employment preparation program” that helps service members who are leaving the military to make a smooth transition into civilian life and to find a rewarding and successful career, according to the California Directory of Veteran Services.

Through the course, service members learn job-hunting skills along with learning about training and job placement services, and how to make a resume.

Along with TAP, the Pre-separation Brief offers service members and their spouses information about education, training, employment assistance, National Guard and reserve programs, medical benefits and financial assistance, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

“It’s a benefits brief,” said Allen. “The subject matter experts inform service members of their benefits and entitlements as well as other services available after they’re released from active duty. We prepare them and their family members to transition to the civilian life after military life.”

The CRO does more than just run TAP and Pre-separation. Their office is open to all service members and their families if they need help.

“The purpose of the Career Resource Office is to ensure all active duty separating service members have the opportunity to be made

aware of the transitional services and benefits that are available to them and their spouses for adjusting to civilian life,” said Allen.

“Service members and family members come to CRO to have their resumes reviewed or get help starting one, do job searches and to use our computer lab,” she said. “We have employers who come by, after TAP class, to tell the service members about their company. We want to make sure that when they leave the military they are ready to make a successful transition from military to civilian life.”

Some service members say they have a plan. But the CRO will still help a service

member look at a variety of options.

“Being in the military for two years or 30, it’s kind of hard to readjust because things aren’t what they used to be,” said Allen. “Even though a lot of people say they are going back home, a lot of times you can’t. You go back home but it’s not the same.”

The CRO aims to help simplify and ease the transition for every service member. The key to a successful transition is planning, she said. Their doors are open to everyone who has questions or needs assistance in preparing for the inevitable exit from military life.

