

Serving the MCAGCC
Community at
Twentynine Palms, Calif.

VOL. 52 NO. 37
September 29, 2006



WILBURN, A4

OBSERVATION POST



"STRHATE TALK," B1

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

THIS ISSUE

A3 - Best of the Best

A8 - MCMAI Course

B3 - Soccer

HOT TOPICS

PHILIPS ROAD REPAVING

The Philips Road repaving project between the tank trail and Camp Wilson is scheduled through Jan. 31, 2007. Vehicle traffic to and from Camp Wilson will be diverted to a dirt bypass road that runs parallel to the existing roadway. Please be attentive to all traffic control signs.

CPR AND FIRST AID CLASS

Infant, child and adult CPR and First Aid classes are being offered by the American Red Cross on Oct. 14, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Community Center. Please call the Red Cross for more information at 830-6685.

TRAFFIC SAFETY - REFLECTIVE

Personnel participating in individual physical training (running/jogging/walking) must wear a reflective vest or a reflective belt during low-light and reduced visibility conditions. This directive applies to all personnel aboard the Combat Center, military and civilian. This is a personal safety issue. Compliance with the Center Order will drastically increase safety for foot traffic on the Combat Center roads.

EXPEDITIONARY WARFARE SCHOOL AND COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE DIS- TANCE EDUCATION PROGRAM SEMINARS

Expeditionary Warfare School and Command and Staff College Distance Education Program Seminars are offered at Camp Pendleton and the Combat Center, and are scheduled to begin in October. Each seminar will meet once a week for two hours. Attendance is voluntary. Seminars will also be offered on different nights during the week to provide flexibility in case a student is unable to attend his/her regular seminar. For more information, call 725-8400 or DSN 365-8400, or visit <http://www.tecom.usmc.mil/cce/index.asp>. Additional information, to include schedules for the upcoming year, may be found at this link: <http://www.tecom.usmc.mil/cce/programs/pmedep.asp>

COMING NEXT ISSUE

- 3rd LAR Homecoming
- Samantha Vargyas
- Football

THIS DAY IN MARINE CORPS HISTORY

September 29,
1812

Seminole Indians
ambushed Marines
at Twelve Mile
Swamp, Fla.

1/7 Marines return from third deployment to warm welcome



Three-year-old Grace Wolfenbarger welcomes home her father, Capt. Craig A. Wolfenbarger, commanding officer of Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, at Victory Field Saturday.

PFC. NICOLE A. LAVINE COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

The police vehicles rounded the bend with their sirens blaring, but there were no accidents or fires in sight. Following the sirens came three white buses, packed full with Marines who were leaning out of the windows with grins on their faces and disposable cameras in their hands.

The crowd of families waiting on Victory Field erupted with joyous yelling and colorful, waving banners.

The Marines and sailors of 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment returned Sep. 21 through Sept.

23 from their third deployment to Iraq.

The second wave of 300 Marines from 1/7 returned home, escorted by the Patriot Guard Riders.

The PGR is a motorcycle group which was established in 2005 to help protect the families and loved ones from protesters at military funerals. The PGR lead the Marines from March Air Force Base all the way to Victory Field. The thunderous rumble of motorcycle engines and sea of billowing American flags attached to the bikes added an even more patriotic edge to the occasion.

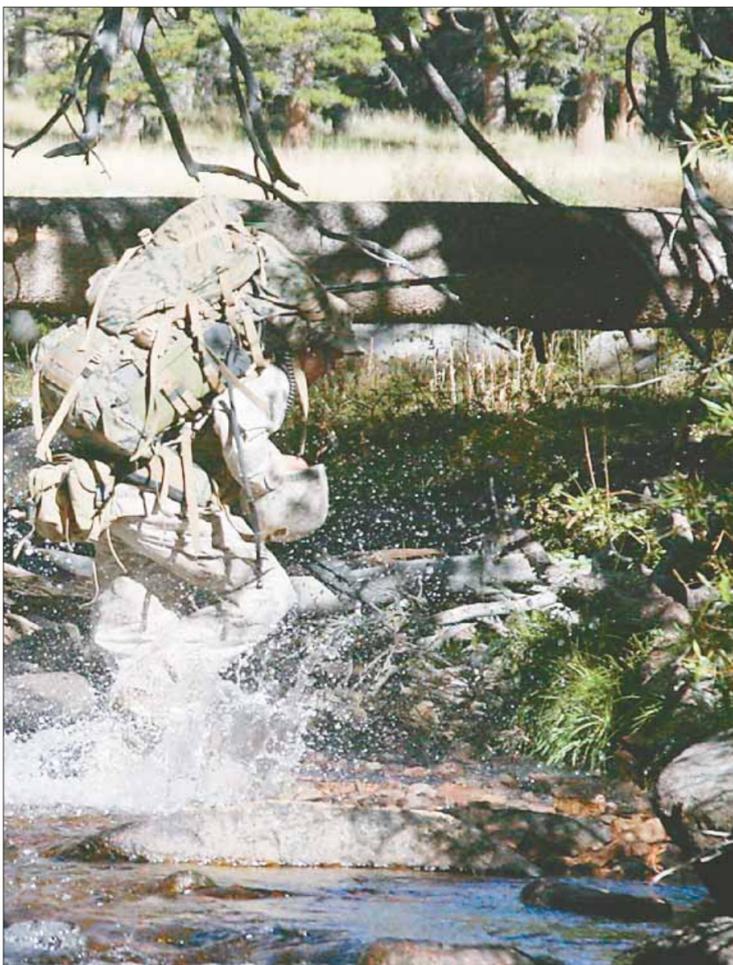
While deployed, Marines conducted operations in An Najaf Province, Al Qaim, Al Anbar province,

and several other Iraqi territories.

Since the battalion's initial deployment to Iraq in 2003, the Marines and sailors have left their mark on the history of a newly self-governed Iraq.

During their first deployment, Marines helped Iraqi law enforcement agencies identify former Ba'ath members by helping create the Ba'ath Party Investigation Committee. They also assisted with operations for the Legal Aid Society in An Najaf, a society created to give under-privileged Iraqi citizens free legal guidance, while also providing opportunities for underused Iraqi lawyers.

See **HOME COMING, A5**



Lance Cpl. Jimmy Saunders, Lima Company, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, splashes a stream with a full combat load during 3/7's final exercise at the Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center in Bridgeport, Calif., Sept. 18.

3/7 wraps up at MWTC Bridgeport

CPL. BRIAN A. TUTHILL COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

The Marines and sailors of 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, finished their month-long training evolution in Bridgeport, Calif., Sept. 18, with a battalion-scale exercise which spanned three days and tested their wits in rugged mountainous terrain.

Since their arrival Aug. 26 to the Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center at Bridgeport, located on 26,000 acres of the Toiyabe National Forest in Northern California, the Marines have been honing their mountain warfare skills as part of the "summer package" offered to units. It has been more than one year since a unit completed the full summer package, said MWTC instructors.

The California Army National Guard also flew in a CH-47 "Chinook" from Stockton, Calif., to transport Marines during the finishing movements of the exercise.

During their first few weeks at MWTC, 3/7 Marines learned to climb, rappel both day and night, with and without full packs, cross expanses, rivers and rope bridges, evacuate casualties from a cliff, and survive and operate in the rough terrain.

The training at Bridgeport is invaluable not only because it prepares Marines for mountain warfare, but because it breeds confidence in their abilities and helps to develop leadership at the small unit level, said Staff Sgt. Robert Warfield, platoon commander, 3rd Platoon, Lima Company. This is especially true since Iraq veterans in the battalion are stepping up to fill squad and team leader billets as new Marines arrive.

"I knew this would be a great opportunity for my small unit leaders to develop their leadership skills," he said.

During the final exercise, the battalion's mission was to eliminate a hostile enemy guerilla force operating in the area by working together and applying their learned skills. Company K, who was dressed in green woodland camouflage utilities, played the aggressors.

See **3/7, A6**

Tanker receives Best of the Best award

LANCE CPL. KATELYN A. KNAUER

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

Finest, greatest, unsurpassed and paramount are only a few words that relate to the word best. So what if you were selected as the best of the best? It would show you had determination and a desire to excel. It would prove that you were squared away and elite.

Staff Sgt. Eric Azevedo, 1st Tank Battalion, tank commander and company master gunner for Alpha Company can claim that title.

Azevedo was presented with The Best of the Best Award at the Combat Center Parade Field Monday for his achievements while attending a school for master gunners.

"When I first went to class they told us the best overall person for the entire year would receive the award," said Azevedo. "So I tried really hard, and I got it. I'm happy to get something for all that hard work."

Azevedo, who joined the Marine Corps in 1997, knows what the top feels like already as he graduated at the top of his M1A1 Basic Armored Crewman course and received a Certificate of Commendation.

In February Azevedo was given the chance to attend a Master Gunner's course in Fort Knox, Ky.

The Master Gunner's course is an 11 week course that teaches an armor noncommissioned officer advanced gunnery methodology, turret weapons systems maintenance and gunnery training management, according to the Web site <http://www.knox.army.mil>.

To receive the award, the school looks at all the honor graduates from each class during the year and selects the one with the highest academic achievement. Azevedo left the Master Gunners course with a 98.3 percent average.

On top of the prestigious award, Azevedo also claims the title as the first Marine Tanker to receive the award.

"It feels good to be the first, because the Army has pretty much dominated it," said Azevedo.

The school is known as one of the toughest schools and has a 40 percent failure rate, according to the Web site.

So, to be accepted into the school and pass is an accom-

plishment in its own right, but to pass and receive top honors shows that the working skills and ethics behind the individual are strong.

Azevedo credits his success to hard work and certain Marines who he looked up to as a lance corporal.

Azevedo is preparing for his second deployment. Now he

can take the skills he has obtained, put them to use overseas and teach the Marines under his command.

Not only can Azevedo feel pride in being the best, but 1st Tanks can train in the United States or fight overseas knowing they are with someone who carries a great amount of knowledge and has earned the title Best of the Best.



Retired Army Maj. Gen. Robert Shadley presents Staff Sgt. Eric Azevedo, 1st Tank Battalion, the Best of the Best Award at the Combat Center Parade Field Monday.

LANCE CPL. KATELYN A. KNAUER

Hispanic Heritage Month celebrates 'La Raza'

GUNNERY SGT. HERRICK ROSS

MCAGCC EQUAL OPPORTUNITY ADVISOR

September 15 began the 30-day-long special emphasis observance of the immense contributions the Hispanic and Latino communities have provided as a united voice of humanity. Since its presidential proclamation in 1968, a week has been set aside to recognize the role played by Hispanic groups of the past and present, from the early days of exploration and colonization of the Americas to the modern world of today. Effective Jan. 1, 1989, Congress passed a bill to change Hispanic Heritage Week to a month long celebration.

The theme of this year's observance is Hispanic Americans: Our Rich Culture Contributing to America's Future.

Our country's history is filled with the names of individual men and women, who through their genius, perseverance, and faith in the value of what they were doing, created the society which we honor, serve, and defend today. People like Cesar Chavez, who began his life as a migrant worker at the age of 10, later gained attention as the leader of a nationwide boycott of California table grapes in a drive to achieve labor contracts to improve working and economic conditions for migrant farmers. What is often overlooked, however, is the equal importance of the organizations, associations, and

communities which these individuals forged. Made up of individuals who will never be famous, but who all shared in the dreams and values of their founding fathers, partnerships like these are the lifeblood of any society.

Throughout U.S. history, ethnic and racial groups have immigrated, voluntarily or involuntarily, in waves, and within limited time periods. They entered into the existing communities and over a period of two or three generations assimilated themselves into the population as a whole. This has not been the case with Hispanics. Whether crossing the Mexican border or arriving by boat or plane from Cuba, Puerto Rico, or Latin America, Hispanic immigration has been constant, and will probably continue to be so. This influx of new immigrants provides for a constant renewal of cultural ties and language skills, a factor which other traditional ethnic groups did not experience. It thus allows Hispanics to maintain and reinforce their rich, diverse heritage and language even while becoming members of American society. Though Hispanic immigration can be said to be constant, this does not imply uniformity. While Hispanics share many characteristics in common, such as language, religion, and family values, the fact that they immigrated at different times in his-

tory from several different countries, and often for different reasons, has resulted in different approaches to adapting to American society and culture. In some cases, such as New Mexico and California, Hispanics settled the land long before the arrival of Anglo-American culture. In other cases, Hispanics are arriving today from Central and South America often with nothing more than a suitcase and the hope for a better future. Thus, for example, the priorities and attitudes of a recent immigrant from the Dominican Republic to the Dominican barrio of Brooklyn, N.Y., will be distinctly dif-

ferent from that of a successful female Hispanic business owner in Los Angeles who might trace her origin back five or six generations to a time when California was a part of Mexico or even Spain.

Hispanics have always challenged the future. They did it in the past when they set sail on an uncharted sea. They did it in their many countries of origin exploring and building nations, and they continue to do so in the present. As this country evolves, it will find Hispanics keeping in step, if not, in some cases, leading the way.

Sgt. Maj. Wilburn surpasses 30 years, 3 wars, returns for duty

SGT. ROBERT L. FISHER III
COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

Retired Sgt. Maj. Ray V. Wilburn was not your everyday Marine. Wilburn served more than 30 years, through three wars and still calls the Marine Corps home. The Corps even called him back for one more day of duty in August.

Wilburn was born on a cotton farm near Wolfe City, Texas, July 1, 1919, a small farming community with only 1,395 people, he said.

He spent two years in the Civilian Conservation Corps building fences and terraces for \$5 per month. When he finished his time in the CCC in 1939, there was "no money, no jobs and no future," he said. So Wilburn hitchhiked 75 miles to Dallas to join the Marine Corps.

"I didn't have a dime in my pocket," he said.

Twelve others arrived at the recruiting station along with Wilburn to join the Corps, but they only took him and one other. Since he had spent time on boxing and softball teams, he said he was

toughened up and ready for the Marine Corps.

"I was underweight, but I was hard as nails," he said. "The recruiting officer said, 'Take this one, all he needs is three meals a day to fatten him up.'"

He joined on Oct. 19, 1939, and went directly to San Diego for recruit training.

By the outbreak of World War II, Wilburn had already made sergeant. He was assigned to 3rd Artillery Battalion, 10th Marine Regiment, and landed on Gavutu, one of the Solomon Islands in Melanesia, on August 8, 1942, at 10 a.m., where his battery, Battery I, fired the first offensive round against the Japanese.

"They said we'd be there three days, so that's the amount of supplies we took," said Wilburn. "It didn't work out that way."

One long day

His battalion later hopped islands to Tulagi and Guadalcanal.

On the trip to Guadalcanal, "They wouldn't let the Seminole and the sea-going tug [two transport ships] go at the



Sgt. Maj. Ray Wilburn, who retired from the Combat Center in 1971, returned to active duty for one day at the age of 87 for the Combat Center's birthday celebration Aug. 18. He was issued a set of current camouflage utilities for the occasion.

CPL. BRIAN A. TUTHILL

same time because there was too much activity with the Japanese ships in the water," said Wilburn.

After the tug made it to Guadalcanal, the Seminole took off.

Halfway to Guadalcanal, they were radioed about a Japanese destroyer in the area and told to go back. The ship turned around and that is as far as it got; the Japanese destroyer found them. The first round hit the 20 mm mount; the second round hit the refrigeration system, releasing ammonia. Wilburn and the rest of the crew abandoned ship. Dive bombers in the region flew in and sunk the Japanese destroyer.

The crew did not have enough life jackets, so Wilburn, a better swimmer than some of the others, gave his jacket away. He and a couple more Marines started gathering those remaining from the ship into a circle to keep track of them.

"You get in the water and you have to get your shoes and clothes off because it'll pull you down," he said. "We didn't lose anyone. We were in the water probably three hours, and a Higgins boat came over from Guadalcanal and picked us up. Most of us had dog tags on, and that's all we had on."

After cleaning up and getting something to eat, they went to their cannons, already in position awaiting them. And then their day of firing began.

Wilburn and his battalion left Guadalcanal in January 1943 for Wellington, New Zealand, to train and regroup. They returned to the war, this time to Tarawa in November 1943.

A slight miscalculation during the landing on Tarawa, the ship miscalculated the rising of the tide and sailed onto the coral reef surrounding the landing beach. They missed the shore by about 300 yards.

The 75 mm pack howitzers were designed to be taken apart and carried by hand. So Wilburn, now a gunnery sergeant, and his crew carried their gear — rifles, ammo, rations and howitzer pieces — through waist-high water while Japanese forces bombarded them with mortars and

machine guns.

"You had to push dead bodies out of the way because we were almost sitting ducks," said Wilburn. "And you didn't dare stop to check the bodies. If you stopped, you were a sitting target, so you got to keep going. We had to continue to push bodies out of the way to get to the shore. When we got ashore, we had to put our guns together and then go put them into position."

They supported the 2nd Marine Division who took Tarawa in three days.

After securing Tarawa, Wilburn and the battalion went to Parker Ranch, Hawaii, to train with 155 mm towed howitzers. Once he and his newly redesignated battery, 2nd 155 mm Howitzer Battery, 5th Corps Artillery, knew the guns and were ready for battle, they moved to Saipan and then Guam until the end of the war.

The saddest moment

While on Guam, Wilburn saw one of his saddest moments of World War II.

When the Japanese took over Tarawa, they took all the villagers as prisoners. Toward the end of World War II, the Marines pushed the Japanese military forces so hard they could not handle

their prisoners as they retreated across the island.

"My battery happened to be on the main line and as far you could see the natives were coming through — the Japanese had turned them loose," he said. "That was the saddest thing that I have ever seen in my life. Those people were ragged and tattered and undernourished."

After the war, Wilburn's battalion returned to Hawaii. By this point, Wilburn was down to 127 pounds after having malaria five times. He was "pretty well gone," he said. A doctor forced him to return to the United States to recover.

Wilburn spent the next few years bouncing around multiple stations from McAlester, Okla., all the way back to Japan and finally Dallas for Inspector and Instructor duty.

When the Korean War started, Wilburn was transferred to Camp Del Mar, Calif., to set up a school to train Marines in artillery before sending them to join 11th Marine Regiment already in Korea. After teaching seven courses and sending those Marines to war, Wilburn, too, received orders to Korea in 1951.

On Oct. 25 that year, his unit, 2nd Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment, set up in Artillery Valley received a barrage of enemy 122 mm rounds.

The first round hit the water



MCJROTC Marine Instructors Wanted in Chicago:

If you are looking for a great second career as rewarding as your current career and in a fantastic location, consider MCJROTC in Chicago, Illinois. Starting salary is equal to or better than what you would receive if called to active duty in Chicago. You will utilize the same knowledge, leadership and teaching skills that you developed over your active duty career in the Marine Corps. Join our team, be a founding faculty member at a new Chicago campus of Noble Street Charter High School. We are unrelenting in preparing our students for a successful life through post-secondary education. Our focus is academic excellence, health and fitness, and community service in a disciplined, safe environment. Noble Street is well known nationally for its success and has received significant financial funding to create new campuses. The MCJROTC program is an integral part of our success. MI's will be hired at all new campuses, two a year for the next three academic years (AY). One vacancy remains for AY '06-'07, two vacancies for AY '07-'08 and two vacancies for AY '08-'09. We are looking for dedicated Marines to make a positive difference in the lives of young people and to be part of the founding faculty of these new campuses. MI's must apply for their certification within 1 year to 60 days of their approved retirement date. For more info on the MCJROTC certification process go to <http://www.mcjrotc.org/instructors/> For more information about the City of Chicago, go to <http://egov.cityofchicago.org>. For more information on Noble Street Charter High School call LtCol Tom O'Connell USMC (Ret) toconnell@goldentigers.org (773) 862-1449 ext.226

See WILBURN, A5

WILBURN, from A4

tank of a nearby battery, the next round hit the communications tent and the third round hit the mess hall and knocked off the number four gun's sight mount. The whole attack left four ammo trucks burning. Remarkably, everyone survived with only injuries to account for any losses.

One last war

Wilburn arrived in Vietnam as a sergeant major with the 1st Medical Battalion in 1967. Capt. Jim Sharp was the commanding officer of the medical battalion, but he was also a surgeon, so he spent much of his time in the operating room and did not have time to lead, said Wilburn.

"He's one of the best sergeants major the Marines Corps ever had," Sharp said on the phone Sept. 21 about Wilburn. "He was my best problem solver and my most reliable advisor. He's been through a little bit of everything. I relied on him, and he always had an answer."

The Viet Cong mortared the battalion nightly, leaving them to operate behind shaking walls in flak jackets and helmets.

Wilburn gladly took charge of the battalion as needed. He took care of them because he wanted to, not because it was his duty, he said.

"It was one of my most rewarding experiences of my life," he said. "There was so much I could do."

A final tour of duty

Wilburn requested to stay in the Marine Corps beyond 30 years and was approved. But after three wars and 31 years, four months and 15 days in the Corps, he was medically retired March 4, 1971, as the Combat Center Deployable Force Troops sergeant major.

"If you can retire after three wars, that's something to be proud of," he said.

But the Marine Corps was not finished with him.

They asked for one more day. The Marine Corps needed him one last time, so Wilburn was issued orders to

attend a ribbon cutting ceremony at the Combat Center Aug. 18. Along with orders to report to the commanding general, they issued him the proper uniform of the day, a set of desert digital camouflage utilities and a pair of new boots.

He remarked that they were a definite improvement on what he had grown used to during his career.

"I put this on and paced up and down the front of the house," he said. "This is the greatest invention since canned beer."

Many things have changed since Wilburn retired. Everything from leadership styles to military vehicles has evolved, and Wilburn remains confident the Marines of today will take care of America the same as those of yesterday.

"It's mind-boggling the responsibility placed on these young Marines today," he said. "We're about as protected as could be. You see these young lads and you know you're in the best hands."

Looking back on his life, Wilburn accomplished what he set out to do. He survived three wars, traveled around the world a couple of times, and finally settled down in Twentynine Palms, Calif., with his wife, Irma, of South Gate, Calif.

"I wouldn't do anything different," he said. "I set out to go from the bottom to the top in my career. What I lacked in formal education, I made up for in determination and drive."

Wilburn did not have much to begin his life's journey, but he set out, headstrong, "tough as nails," and ready to take on whatever the Corps threw at him. He became a Marine, but he accomplished more in his 31 years of duty than the everyday Marine.



Patriot Guard Riders escort the 1/7 Marines down Adobe Road toward the Combat Center.

PFC. NICOLE A. LAVINE

HOMECOMING, from A1

The second deployment began in August of 2004. It was there that the Marines served as security along roadways and in cities, did urban patrols, border security and sweep operations.

The objective of their third deployment was to help re-build Iraqi Army Police units while assisting in eliminating insur-

gents in the Al Qa'im territory.

The Iraqi Army units learn the same material Marines learn prior to deploying. This includes patrolling, security check points, and responding to improvised explosive devices. The Iraqi units proved very useful in aiding with interaction among the locals in the region.

"The big difference between other units and this one is that you can see what changes these Marines did," said Lt. Col. Nicholas F. Marano, battalion commanding officer in his speech to the crowd before the Marines stepped onto the field.

The families agreed and shared their appreciation and enthusiasm.

"This is his third deployment," said Yang Johnson, wife of Staff Sgt. Phillip Johnson, mess chief and native of Jewett City, Conn. "What really got me through were the phone calls. We would talk once a week," she said.

Tyler Johnson, their son, could hardly contain his excitement as he kicked his legs and shifted constantly on the wooden bench he sat on. Then, half-standing on his seat, he said, "When he gets here, I want to play golf with him over there," as he pointed to the golf course to his right.

Christine Gibson, mother of Cpl. Chris Gibson, sat at another table with three friends and clasped her hands together in anticipation.

"The first thing I'm going to do is bring him home and feed him some country fried steak," said Gibson with a chuckle.



1/7 Marines arrive on buses to the Combat Center Saturday.

PFC. NICOLE A. LAVINE

'America's Battalion' looks to help locals



LANCE CPL. ERIK VILLAGRAN

Cpl. Giancarlo J. Albelice, a vehicle commander from Philadelphia, attached to Weapons Company, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 5, clears the back yard of an abandoned home.

LANCE CPL. ERIK VILLAGRAN

1ST MARINE DIVISION

GHARMAH, Iraq — Marines from 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, are making the effort to help the Iraqi community.

Weapons Company Marines conducted a census in their area of operations to find out how Marines could help the people in the area.

"We go out and talk to the people and see how their living conditions are," said Cpl. Giancarlo J. Albelice, a 22-year-old vehicle commander from Philadelphia. "We also see if there is anything we can help them with."

At each destination Marines

set up security. They surrounded homes with humvees, and Marines on the ground provided security. Marines spoke with the owners of the homes to find out if there was any information they could use to help local citizens.

When people needed food or water, Marines were quick to hand over a box of Meals-Ready-to-Eat or a case of water, Albelice said. Although they were short-term solutions, it let the people know Marines are there to help them.

"It's important for us to do things like this," said Lance Cpl. Steven Torturro, a 20-year-old from Brooklyn, N.Y. "It gets them to help us, and these people need all the

help they can get."

Marines also stopped at three mosques to speak with imams. It was important to talk to the imams because they have strong influence in the community, according to Cpl. Jesse E. Leach, a section leader assigned to Weapons Company. Marines spoke with the imams in an effort to gain their support.

"We get the peoples' hearts and minds with the help of the imams," said Leach, a 28-year-old from Charlotte, N.C. "If we get in good with the imams, we get in good with the people."

Marines gave kids in the neighborhood treats while they provided security. They handed out candy, cookies, Pop-Tarts and anything else the kids might enjoy. Marines in the turret tossed treats to

the kids who were too shy to get near Marines handing treats out.

Marines have seen improvements with the locals since they arrived more than two months ago. They said they believed missions that help the community are helping Marines earn the trust of the people.

"When we first got here people wouldn't really come up to us," Torturro said. "Now they aren't shy to talk to us or let their kids come and get candy from us."

The operation went smoothly and without incident, Torturro said.

"It was successful mission," Leach said. "We found three mosques and got to speak with two imams. We'll be able to accomplish more with their help."

3/7, from A1

"Our main tactic was to hit and move," said Lance Cpl. Lincoln Crall, a squad leader with 3rd Platoon, Company K, and Boulder, Colo., native. "The Marines did a lot better than I thought they would because we have a lot of new guys here."

One of the most talked-about challenges from 3/7 Marines was the change of environment from the relatively flat, sandy desert of the Combat Center to the steep hills of Bridgeport at more than 10,000 feet of elevation. By the end of the exercise, most Marines had walked more than 15.5 miles.

"3/7 has been to Iraq three times," said Lt. Col. Rodger B. Turner Jr., 3/7 commanding officer. "You live in the desert and then you deploy to the desert. Coming up here and giving a change in venue has been invaluable to the battalion and broadened the perspectives of the individual Marines and leaders."

"This builds flexibility and confidence and cohesion, and that's the main aim of this. And it's a super package," continued Turner.

Marines carried weapons and essential gear with them in their assault packs and wore load bearing vests in lieu of flak jackets. Before coming to MWTC, 3/7 went on conditioning hikes around the Combat Center's hills to better prepare them for their time at Bridgeport.

Each night of the exercise, their main packs, which contained extra clothes, gear, food and sleeping bags, were trucked out to them as temperatures plummeted into the teens when a cold front moved through the area.

"There are big changes in the weather here," said Warfield. "It was warm before and you only need your bivy bag and poncho liner — to now being so cold you need all of your bags at night."

On the final morning's assault, Marines kept their full packs, some weighing close to 80 pounds, and were transported via helicopter to

a remote landing zone in enemy territory. Marines and sailors of Company L tactically worked their way downhill more than 1,000 feet to a lower elevation, crossed a stream, then headed up another 1,000 feet of hillside. They served as a stopgap while Company I swept through the adjacent canyon for the main assault.

The assault lasted five hours as Marines invaded Company K's main base. Once the "enemy" had been defeated, units were air lifted back to Lower Base Camp for a shower and hot food.

"There are a lot of tangibles which are learned up here, but I think more importantly are the intangibles that are gained," said Turner. "What is the value of a Marine who is scared of heights doing a nighttime cliff assault when he can't see? Or the confidence gained by rappelling down a 300-foot rock face sideways with a pack on? I think that kind of stuff just breeds a lot of confidence in the individual Marine and perhaps in the future when he's in Iraq or wherever, they are able to overcome that like they were for this training here."

Turner said his favorite part of being at MWTC with his Marines was watching them grow from being unsure and apprehensive while operating in a new environment to handling very difficult situations with ease and confidence.

"The Marines are walking around like they're 10 feet tall," Turner added. "They're fit and they're confident and have gained a lot of skills being up here. I think this will pay us dividends long after we leave here. I would definitely recommend other units taking advantage of coming up here, because the lessons learned are well worth the time."

The Marines and sailors of 3/7 returned to the Combat Center Sept. 21 after a 10-hour drive and were reunited with their families at a battalion barbecue dinner.

Class dismissed

MCMAP Instructor Course graduates greenbelt ninjas

PFC. NICOLE A. LAVINE
COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

"I think that every Marine should spend at least one week learning more about combat conditioning," said Sgt. Jonathan A. Zehner with 1st Tank Battalion, Headquarters and Service Company, and the Martial Arts Instructor Course 02.06 honor graduate. "We should all try everything in our power to accelerate in every aspect in the Marine Corps."

The MAI 02.06 course graduated Tuesday in the Tactical Training Exercise Control Group classroom here.

The course, which lasted from 5 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, lasted for 15 training days. In

the course, Marines learned not only how to stretch beyond their physical barriers of discomfort, but also uncovered a deeper meaning to Marine Corps ethos and teamwork.

Staff Sgt. Robert T. Mawson with Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School, Company B, was the Martial Arts Instructor for second squad in the 02-06 class.

"If Marines want to do this course, they need to have at least a 225 PFT, a second class swim [qualification], and be Non-Commissioned Officer Profession Military Education complete. If it's a lance corporal, they need to be recommended by their commanding officer before they can take it," said Mawson.

Lance Cpl. Shawn J. Kerns with 1st Tank Battalion, Company B was given the Selfless Award during the

graduation ceremony. Kerns earned the award by exemplifying a tangible example of self-sacrifice and unselfishness throughout the course of the three weeks.

"I didn't even know I was getting an award until this morning. I was just trying to do my best, that's all," said Kerns.

One may wonder why anyone would put themselves through extreme physical and mental stress, but that was a no-brainer to the graduating Marines.

"I'm always wanting to enhance my understanding in things like the Martial Arts Program," said Zehner. "I was a primary marksmanship instructor, but now I can start working towards being a black belt instructor and a swim [qual] instructor, too."

"This really renewed my spirit in the Corps. It was definitely there before, but this made it so much stronger," added Zehner.

Kerns said he agrees that offering this course to Marines is a good chance to advance themselves.

"Earning this belt took more mental and physical discipline than the last one. You really learned how to put others before yourself," said Kerns.

Mawson said discipline is a trait that is very strongly enforced.

"Only 20 percent of this course is actually physical. The rest of this course is a mental test. It teaches respectful use of force and when and when not to execute that force," said Mawson.

"This course teaches leadership, makes well-rounded Marines and exposes us to different walks of life in the Corps," added Mawson.

Kerns said he was glad to have this chance at becoming a more proficient Marine.

"Every opportunity is a good opportunity," he said.

There were 10 Marines certified as Martial Arts Instructors after being rigorously tested on physical capabilities, mental resolve and character. They were then sent on their way to share the useful skills they acquired.



LANCE CPL. SHAWN SPITLER

Lance Cpl. Shawn J. Kerns kicks Lance Cpl. Michael Biondic during a sparring match.



LANCE CPL. SHAWN SPITLER

Sgt. Anteli Linares leads the group in squad push-ups.

Ameriyah's Police prepare for independent security operations

GUNNERY SGT. MARK OLIVA
1ST MARINE DIVISION

AMERIYAH, Iraq — Sgt. Amir bounced around his sparsely decorated Iraqi Police station headquarters here. He's a busy man and today was even busier. His station was attacked by mortars again this morning. His police withstood the attack without a Marine or soldier in sight.

Amir's station might just be the example of the hope for Iraq. He's got a strong police station, loyal Iraqi Police who patrol the village's streets daily. They have their difficulties. They get attacked, but they don't run.

They are the thin blue line keeping insurgents out of their city.

"My guys are prepared for everything," Amir said through a translator. "They are ready to do their job."

Just hours after the morning mortar attack, there was no trace of trouble at the station. Iraqi police walked casually in the building, toting their AK-47 assault rifles. They sipped chai tea and chatted with U.S. Army soldiers from the Police Transition Team, who arrived on a scheduled visit after the attack.

Marines moved forces out of the area several months ago. Units regularly perform operations in Ameriyah and nearby Ferris, but the day-to-day security responsibilities fall on the shoulders of the police. They aren't just holding the line. They're keeping insurgents on the run.

"In the beginning, people thought the U.S. military came here to take advantage of them," Amir explained. "Now, they know they've come to help. The insurgents don't want to help. They want to destroy and kill everything in the area."

The police station here is a bit of an exception. Other police stations in the area still require constant support, with Police Transition Teams living with police at their stations. Ameriyah is different. Soldiers with the PTT stop in periodically to resupply, perform spot inspections and offer advice. For days and even weeks at that time, though, police here do the job on their own.

"We went from not having a station here to a fully operating station without Coalition help," explained Army 2nd Lt. Jill M. Glassenapp, a 23-year-old from Mauston,

Wis., who heads up the PTT mission here. "They are completely self-reliant. Ammunition and weapons are the only things they really need for support."

Glassenapp said that self-reliance started from beginning when Regimental Combat Team 5 leaders sought to establish a police presence in the small city south of Fallujah. Ameriyah Police worked out of the police station in nearby Ferris, but when the call went out for a new station, Amir and the Iraqi police captain stepped up.

"They found the building and took care of everything themselves," Glassenapp said. "They had everything packed ready to move in the next day."

Police brought chairs, couches, desks and even beds from their homes to furnish their new station. They hand-painted signs in Arabic for each office space. They built a reinforced locked door for their armory.

Even more telling is the fact their police are on duty. They've been attacked by improvised explosive devices, mortars and small arms. The day the soldiers visited a visibly battered police truck sat destroyed outside the police station. An improvised explosive device crushed the side of the truck, shattered windows and tore holes through the thin sheet metal.

Still, Iraqi Police show up. They strap their armored vests over their bodies and climb into their pickup trucks. Every day, they serve their community.

The million-dollar question is why?

"The people here support us," Amir explained. "We take them to hospitals in our vehicles. We give them all the support they need."

Amir and his police have made inroads with the community. Local sheiks and tribal leaders throw their support behind the police. They offer information about insurgents' activities.

"Every time we get

attacked and we fight, the locals trust us more," Amir said.

The police here didn't get to this point overnight and there's still room to grow. More and more, though, Iraqis are stepping to the front here with Coalition presence stepping further back.

"At first, they wanted us here all the time," Glassenapp explained. "But there's really two people who have made this happen on their own and that's the captain and the sergeant. If it wasn't for them, this station wouldn't be running so well."

Amir and his captain are a bit of a force of nature in this police station. The captain is a younger man, well-groomed and wears a neatly pressed uniform with the epaulettes of an Iraqi police captain. He has a piercing stare and counts loyalty and trust among his most admired aspects of service.

Amir, his sergeant, is an older man. He's the voice of experience, an experienced veteran.

Amir served in the former Iraqi Republican Guard. He fought in the Iran-Iraq War and watched U.S. forces cut a swath into Iraq during Operation Desert Storm 15 years ago. The gray shows through in his hair and moustache, and the lines in his face run deep. His hands are rough and leathery from years of labor.

They both chain-smoke cigarettes as they herd along their police force, from aging bald men missing several teeth to young men in their early 20s. They are all local men, dedicated to the safety of their families and city. One Iraqi policeman boasted of 10 children and another, just 23-years-old, said his wife was expecting to give birth to twins any day.

"My guys know everybody," Amir said. "They patrol the areas inside the city. They conduct vehicle checkpoints outside the city. They know everybody in the city and they search everybody not from the area."

"They're successful here because of the pride they have

in their city," said Army Staff Sgt. Jason K. Garrison, a 27-year-old from Newport, N.Y. "They won't let their families live in fear. They don't want to see their kids and family live that way."

Things aren't perfect here, though. There are still attacks, mostly mortars from areas outside the city. Amir's police have a good idea of those who are responsible, but they are outside of his area of responsibility. He wants bigger weapons than the AK-47s and PKC machine guns police use. His police brought in brass casings from .50-caliber and 30 mm machine guns they claimed are being fired against them. The brass casings towered over the 7.62 mm bullet from their AK-47 they stood next to it to illustrate to Glassenapp their need for bigger weapons.

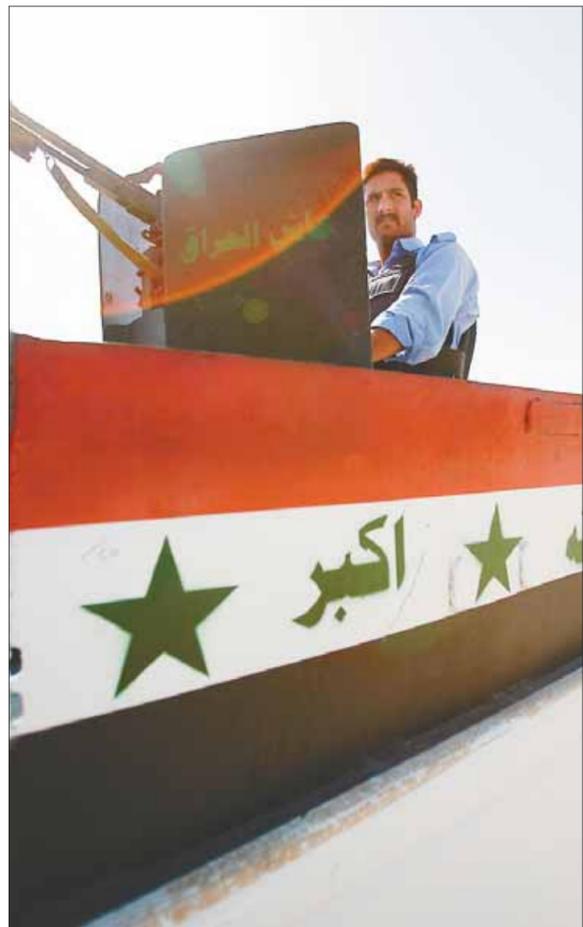
They also still require fuel from Coalition Forces and ammunition. Most of all, they need more forces, Amir said. They're not necessarily asking for more police. Despite rumored differences between Iraqi Police and Iraqi Army, Amir said he needs Iraqi soldiers living in his city.

"We need the Iraqi Army," Amir said.

That's a bold statement in Iraq, where division between Sunni and Shiite are being drawn more boldly than ever. Police here in Al Anbar are Sunni while the Iraqi Army is still largely Shiite. Amir said fighting the insurgency isn't a Sunni or Shiite issue, but one of the larger Iraqi family.

"Yes, sometimes we don't like the Iraqi Army, but we'll work together," Amir said. "We'll work together like brothers for our area. Sometimes brothers don't like each other, but when there's troubles, they work together."

That's the model of hope for security in this region and throughout Iraq. Iraqi Police working alongside Iraqi sol-



GUNNERY SGT. MARK OLIVA

Iraqi Police in Ameriyah, Iraq, south of Fallujah, are operating mostly on their own. They rely on Coalition Forces for resupply of ammunition and fuel, but conduct their own operations and maintain a constant presence in their city.

diers for local security. The alternative, Amir said, means giving in to insurgents who have no hope for Iraq.

They've already demonstrated their intentions, he said.

"The insurgents killed the head of the hospital," Amir said.

This police station is the beacon of hope for this small portion of Iraq, Garrison said. Strong leaders who look out for their police and stand up against intimidation are those who will lead Iraqis past the insurgency.

"It's very hard to find leadership like you find in these guys," Garrison said. "But if I came back here in another year I think this station will still be running with some Coalition support."

"They keep the insurgents at bay," Glassenapp said. "There's a point in the fight, though, where it becomes overwhelming and that's when Coalition Forces step in."

"That's the intent," she added. "These IPs are on the front line and we're here to catch them."

3/7 first unit to complete Bridgeport package in a year, finishes with massive air support

CPL. BRIAN A. TUTHILL
COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

After more than one year without a unit completing a full "summer package," Marines and sailors of 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, some of whom have spent nearly two months at the Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center in Bridgeport, Calif., completed their training package Sept. 21 and returned home to the Combat Center.

The battalion began MWTC's summer package as a whole in late August and had unusually large air support for their final exercises.

"3/7 is a very strong battalion and they did a great job hitting all the wickets while they were up here," said Gunnery Sgt. James Disbro, MWTC chief instructor for unit operations. "They also were able to get support from a number of air units which was impressive."

Unlike most units who have completed these packages in the past, 3/7 called for actual close air support from F/A-18D "Hornets," AV-8B "Harriers," AH-1W "Cobras" and UH-1N "Hueys" from Marine Corps Air Stations Miramar, Calif., and Yuma, Calif., and Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif.

The California Army National Guard also flew in a CH-47 "Chinook" from Stockton, Calif., to transport Marines for the exercise.

"The Marines who gave us air support deserve a lot of props because it's very difficult to come up here," said Lt. Col. Roger B. Turner Jr., 3/7 commanding officer.

"That really enhanced our training and our ability to exercise the full spectrum of ops in this type of environment.

"To be able to have the extra assets we would have in a real fight here really enhanced our training and those guys deserve a lot of credit," he continued. "We also had the California Army National Guard here to let us do helo-borne assaults which we have not done for a long time."

Dozens of Marines were sent up as an advanced party in August to learn crucial skills, which in many ways were similar to what their counterparts would learn but was much more in depth.

"The Marines who came up early learned how to set the things up which the battalion later trained to use," said Disbro. "They learned to tie and set up a rope bridge, where other Marines would only learn to cross it."

Some Marines were schooled in advanced



Marines of Company L, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, board a CH-47 "Chinook" at MWTC Bridgeport's Landing Zone Penguin with full combat load to be transported to Lower Base Camp after securing the area from hostile forces during 3/7's final exercise.

rock climbing techniques in the Assault Climber's Course, where they spent countless hours learning knots and ties as well as traversing rock faces hundreds of feet tall.

Other courses of instruction for the advanced party included rappelling lanes, survival, using mules to haul heavy gear over rough terrain and military mountaineering.

During 3/7's first days in Bridgeport, Marines all learned to climb, patrol, rappel both day and night, with and without full packs, cross expanses, rivers and rope bridges, evacuate casualties from a cliff, and survive and operate in the rough terrain.

In addition to the physical skills learned, one of the most valuable assets Bridgeport offered 3/7 was the opportunity to come together as a unit and hone their small unit leadership skills, said Turner.

One obvious challenge for 3/7 during their training was adjusting to the mountainous region and high elevation.

"Overcoming the terrain has been a challenge for the Marines," said Gunnery Sgt. Mark A. Lopez, Company L gunnery sergeant. "I would say more than half have never trained in any environment outside of Twentynine Palms or been to Iraq. So I think it's a new experience for most everyone. This training really focuses on the squad leaders and team leaders, and I think that has brought the unit much closer together."

The package ended with a three-day final exercise which was a battalion-level operation to eliminate a simulated hostile force from the area. Marines of Company K played the guerilla-style aggressors as other companies fought to flush them out. Marines carried their gear on

their backs and had to use natural water sources while they covered more than 15 miles up and down the steep mountainsides.

As 3/7 prepares to deploy to Iraq for the fourth time next year, many new Marines are filling the ranks and Iraq veterans are taking charge in higher leadership billets.

"I wish we could have held off on this training until we had even more junior Marines here," said Staff Sgt. Robert Warfield, platoon commander, 3rd Platoon, Company L. "A lot of the Marines have already had a deployment or been with an infantry unit. It would have been that much better to have a lot of Marines right from the School of Infantry so they could start working with the senior Marines and work on their skills. Not just the mountain skills but the amazing team building that goes with it here."

SPORT SHORTS

PRACTICE FOR ALL-MARINE SOCCER TRY-OUTS

The MCAGCC soccer team is training for the upcoming Regional Soccer Tournament. Select players may have the opportunity to participate in All-Marine Soccer Camp. All personnel who are interested in trying out for this team should contact LCDR Netzel at 830-2200 or LCDR Schmitz at 830-2140. Practices are held every Tuesday and Thursday at 5 p.m. on Felix Field. If you cannot get in touch with LCDRs Netzel or Schmitz, please show up at the field on those days.

4TH ANNUAL "RUN FOR THE TROOPS"

The Palms Springs HOGS are putting on their 4th Annual HOG ride Oct. 21 to raise money to donate to the Navy Marine Corps Relief Society. The ride will start at the Harley Davidson Dealership on Indian and I-10 and finish at Pappy and Harriet's for an afternoon of food, live music, a Bike Show, the "SLOW" Race, raffles, and an all around good time. Registration starts at 8 a.m. and the ride starts at 10 a.m. Military riders ride FREE! For more info please contact the Director of the Combat Center Navy Marine Corps Relief Society Office, Ray Caldwell, at 830-6323 or 953-5301.

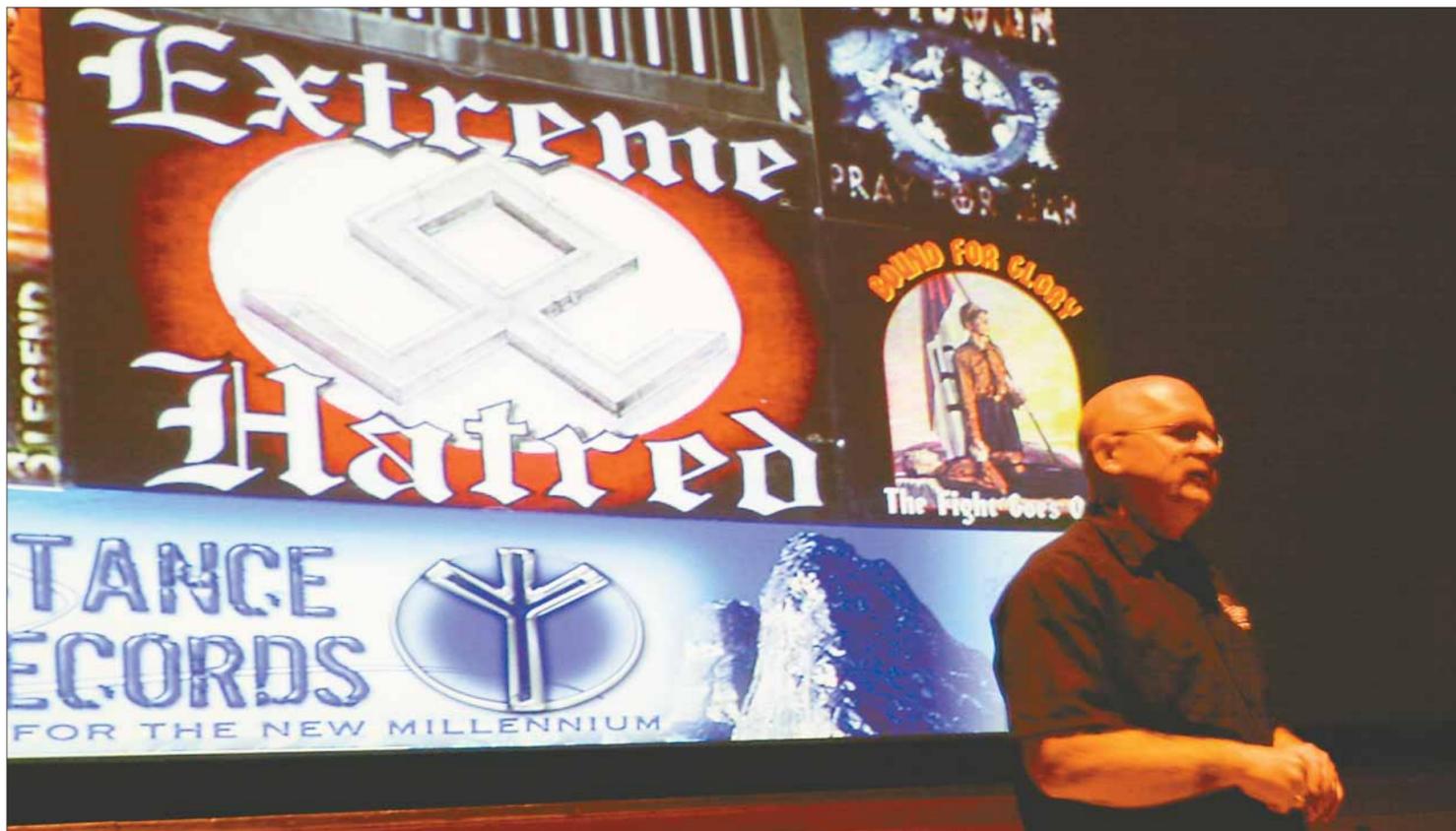
2ND ANNUAL MCCES FUN RUN TODAY

Come one, come all to the 2nd Annual MCCES Fun Run today, open to all military, DOD employees and dependents. There's a new event this year, the 5-Member Team Half Marathon. The 10K and Half Marathon starts at 7 a.m. The Start and Finish line is Building 1831, MCCES. Proceeds benefit the MCCES Ball Fund. The costs are \$15 for the individual 6.2 mile or 10K run, \$20 for individual Half Marathon, \$25 for individual Marathon, \$80 for the 5-Member Team Half Marathon Competition. Marathoners must register in advance. Half and 10K may register in advance or the day of the event. Gatorade, water, and pretzels will be available at aid stations. Make Checks Payable to "MCCES Birthday Ball Fund." For more information, contact Lt. Col. Tolbert at 830-7432.

Did You Know?

The number of times a cricket chirps in 15 seconds, plus 37, will give you the current air temperature.

Former skinhead, Marine 'StrHate Talks' Combat Center



T.J. Leyden, a former neo-Nazi skinhead, member of Hammerskin Nation, and former Marine, shares his unique story of hate, crime, violence and reform to Combat Center personnel at the Sunset Cinema Tuesday.

LANCE CPL. MICHAEL S. CIFUENTES
 COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

T.J. Leyden, a former neo-Nazi skinhead, member of Hammerskin Nation, and former Leatherneck, presented a unique story to Combat Center Marines, sailors and civilians at the base theater Tuesday.

Through his unique perspective, Leyden shared with and put all attendees in the same mindset of his early-life experience: hate, crime, violence and reform.

His story began in 1978, when his parents divorced. He associated himself with a crowd that used radical tactics to portray their feelings, whether it was at a punk rock concert, at a party, or on the street. The tensions he and his peers had with other people were solved with physical and brutal remedies. His extreme life of violence

was in the embryonic state as a teenager and sprouted to radical beliefs involving tremendous hate against others who were not like him and his pals.

He became a member of the neo-Nazi skinhead movement, and then a member of the Hammerskin Nation, the world's largest skinhead gang. As a leading recruiter, organizer and propagandist for the white supremacist and neo-Nazi movement, Leyden spent 15 years promoting hate, segregation and racism.

During this time, Leyden had many clashes with the law, causing him to join the Marine Corps in January 1988.

Leyden's life as a Marine slightly affected his immoral antics and views he had before. His racist beliefs, however, remained the same. He separated himself from those who opposed his lifestyle and continued his efforts in

recruiting while he was in the fleet.

During his second year in the Marine Corps, he tattooed Nazi "SS" bolts on his neck, symbolizing the Waffen-SS, or the combat arm of the Schutzstaffel, a criminal military organization involved with the National Socialist Party during World War II. Leyden was discharged from the Corps under other than honorable conditions due to fighting, a drinking problem and his corrupt attitude. Yet, his service record never reflected his ongoing involvement with hate groups.

After many life-changing events and a profound change of heart, Leyden left the white supremacy movement three years after he was married. His two oldest sons, who were 11 months and 3 years old at the time, were his motivation to take a new path, he said.

Leyden then worked for six and a half years with "Task Force Against Hate" at the Simon Wiesenthal Center

in Los Angeles, an international pro-Zionist Jewish organization that declares itself to be a human rights group dedicated to preserving the memory of the Holocaust by fostering tolerance and understanding through community involvement, educational outreach and social action, according to their Web site.

Since then, Leyden has trained workers at the Pentagon, FBI, U.S. military, law enforcement, educators and over 800,000 students. He has also been a featured guest on over 50 syndicated talk shows around the world.

In early 2002, Leyden and his second wife founded their own organization, StrHate Talk Consulting. It is an organization that works with high schools, colleges, military installations, law enforcement departments and prosecutors' offices.

See "STRHATE", B2

Enjoy relaxation, entertainment at The Zone

LANCE CPL. KATELYN A. KNAUER
 COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

When you enter through the double doors you enter into an atmosphere of relaxation. It's a place to hang up the stresses of the day, be out of uniform and interact with fellow Marines. Music plays throughout the establishment as Marines enjoy the chance to play pool, video games, or just watch sports and movies.

The Zone is the hot spot to go. It is centrally located between the barracks, Marine Corps Exchange and enlisted clubs. It's open year round to offer entertainment and relaxation for all.

"We never close," said Doug Dougwillo, Single Marine Program coordinator. "Anybody can use The Zone up to 8 p.m. at night, and then it is 18 and up."

The Zone offers a wide variety of activities for Marines who may be bored at the barracks to participate in.

"We have 41 video games, 16 pool tables, four 'First to Fight' computers and a movie room with 750 movies to choose from," said Dougwillo.

Currently, to add to the coziness, The Zone is undergoing a \$7,000 renovation.

"We're receiving three new 32-inch televisions," said Cpl. Ronnie Gaither, assistant SMP coordinator. "We just ordered stools to update everything and added a couch to the movie room."



Lance Cpl. Richard Dossa, MWSS- 374, prepares to take his shot while playing pool at The Zone.

The TV's will be used to broadcast sports events such as NASCAR races, basketball and football games.

"The money we use to upgrade is coming from money Marines have spent at the exchange and bowling alley," said Dougwillo. "We're upgrading it to be a first class facility."

The Zone also hosts pool tournaments every second and fourth Tuesday of the

month, with a five dollar entry fee. Free pizza and bowling nights are held every first Wednesday of the month, and "Desert Mail Call" packaging on every third Wednesday of the month.

"Who doesn't like free food?" said Dougwillo. "We order 120 pizzas and it's free of charge to the Marines."

The Zone is seen as a retreat from the daily grind of work and many enjoy every-

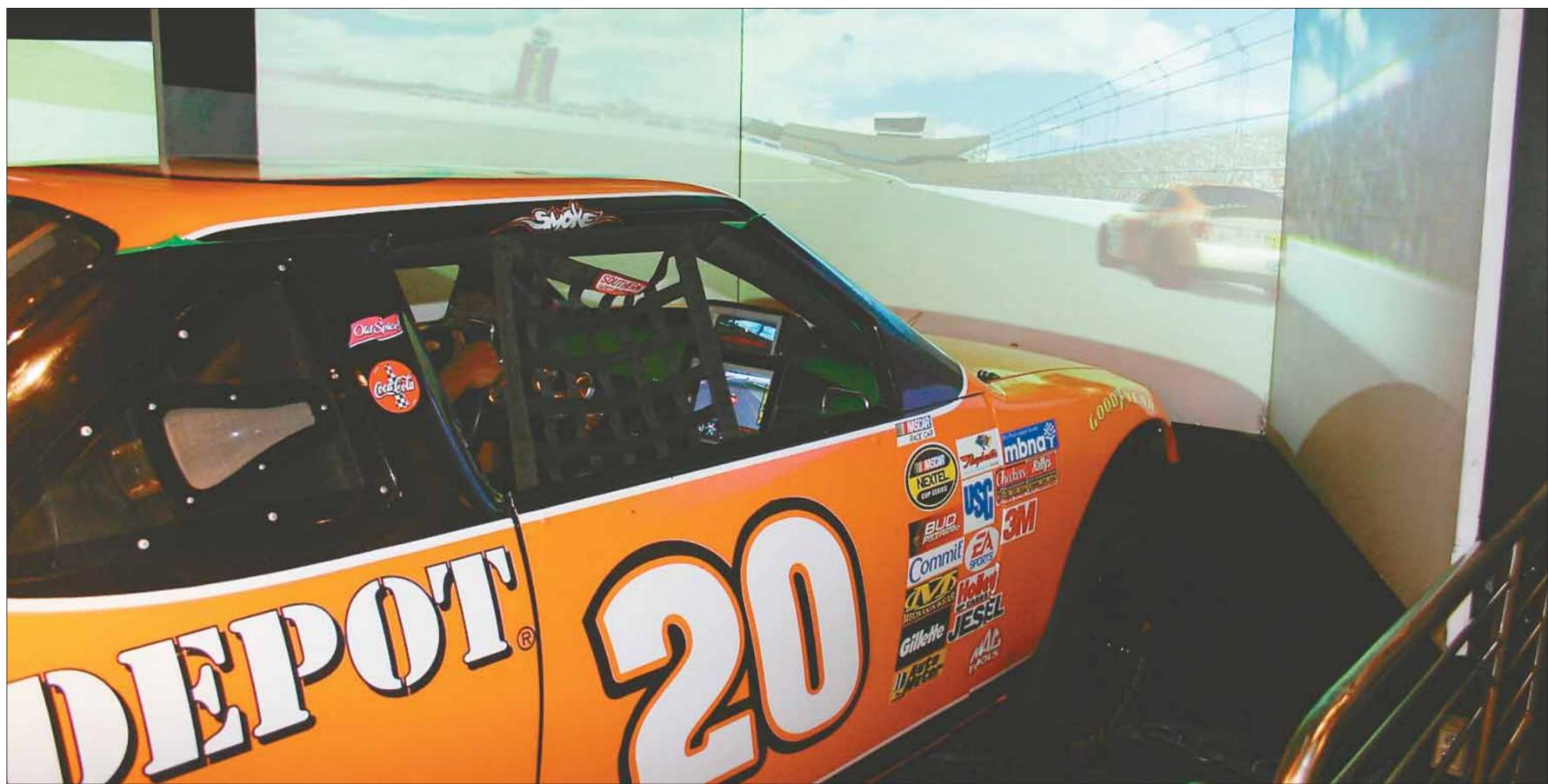
thing it has to offer.

"I have been playing pool since I was 4," said Lance Cpl. Michael Gubert, Company L, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment. "It's a big stress reliever. The environment is nice, and it's cheap."

Suggestions are always welcomed at The Zone, and the SMP program, to meet the needs of the Marines and sailors currently stationed here, said Dougwillo

"Everyone should stop by The Zone at least once and check out what it has to offer," said Dougwillo. "Our vision for the future is to do barracks bashes and pool parties. Plus, we would like to do recreation trips joining up with other bases."

If anyone has questions or suggestions regarding The Zone or Single Marine Program, they can contact Doug Dougwillo at 830-4767.



LANCE CPL. MICHAEL S. CIFUENTES

Pvt. Antonio Salas, a machine gunner with Company E, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, races down a simulated NASCAR speedway at the Sprint Nextel NASCAR simulator Saturday.

NASCAR simulator puts Combat Center behind the wheel

LANCE CPL. MICHAEL S. CIFUENTES

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

Marines, sailors and family members aboard the Combat Center got a chance to go behind the wheel of a high-performance NASCAR race car Saturday. But the thrill-seekers who enjoyed the experience didn't have to drive far to feel like NASCAR champions Tony Stewart or Dale Earnhardt Jr.

The Sprint Nextel NASCAR racing simulator came to the Combat Center to give people the thrill of being a NASCAR driver.

The simulator consisted of two NASCAR race car mock-ups, the Home Depot car, driven by Tony Stewart, and the Budweiser car, driven by Dale Earnhardt Jr. The two vehicles faced widescreen monitors, which showed a virtual track of an actual Nextel Cup series racetrack. The simulator, which was fixed inside a truck trailer, has toured the country since February, before making its Combat Center debut, said Steve Mitchell, the simulator's tour manager and driver of the tractor-trailer.

"We have visited 10 bases this year, and this is our first time

visiting a Marine base," said Mitchell. "I know a lot of people on this base are NASCAR fans, and it shows when they come in here."

Some Marines came to the simulator wearing their favorite NASCAR racer's uniform.

"The Marines really seemed to appreciate us being here," continued Mitchell. "They were lined up outside the simulator's door 20 minutes before we opened. They really enjoyed the ride."

Even those who aren't NASCAR fans, like Sgt. Michael A. Riede, showed interest in racing on a NASCAR speedway.

"It was pretty intense," said Riede, a legal services non-commissioned officer with the base staff judge advocate. "I actually crashed and flipped over. I felt like I was really rolling over."

"I think that it was great for this tour to come our way," added the Pico Rivera, Calif., native. "It was very fun and entertaining. This is also great for the single Marines. It gives them a chance to leave the barracks and enjoy some state-of-the-art fun, especially because it is hard to get to a racetrack around

here and drive a NASCAR race car."

This was the first NASCAR experience for Lance Cpl. Clifford G. Marsh, a sentry with the Provost Marshal's Office.

"I never knew what it was like being in a real race car," said Marsh, a Rice Lake, Wis., native. "Now, after going through the simulator, I can imagine it better. It felt like a roller coaster."

The purpose of the tour is to show service members aboard military installations appreciation for their services, said Jeff Curry, Sprint Nextel regional manager of military sales.

"We're here just to thank the troops," said Curry. "I find that a lot of them [service members] like NASCAR racing, so we joined forces with the racing simulator and had them come to the Combat Center. There are many programs we do for the troops, and I would say this is one of our biggest ones."

"We also donate a good portion of what we make, on sales to the base," added Curry. "We offer many military discounts for phones and phone plans, and we donate NASCAR tickets to our military customers. The bottom line is, we're really here to show our appreciation."

"STRHATE", from B1

His mission is as follows:

"I want to combat hate, bigotry, intolerance and discrimination through education," said Leyden. "As you may be aware, one of the most challenging messages to give people today is the message of tolerance and racial understanding in America."

Leyden guided the attendees at the base theater through the journey he and many others have taken. He has been telling his story for 10 years.

"His story was powerful," said Pfc. Gabriel Marrero, a light armored vehicle crewman with Company C, 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion. "It struck me because I didn't think racism was still that bad in some people. I grew up in a predominantly black neighborhood, so I never saw any skinheads. But, it shocked me to see how he acted and how they [hate groups] handled their business."

The importance of bringing Leyden to the Combat Center was to alert service members and civilians that there are extremists trying to recruit, said Gunnery Sgt. Herrick A. Ross, the Combat Center's equal opportunity advisor.

"Apparently, there are extremist in the High-Desert area trying to recruit," said

Ross. "Some of them are even in the Yucca Valley and Joshua Tree area. This presentation was meant to inform all people who attended that getting to know who the people are around you, spotting the extremist and mentoring those who need it can deactivate their recruiting efforts."

During Leyden's time in the Corps, he noticed that some extremists were in the military to get the training needed to become killers. Having a proactive mindset and being on the alert is crucial, he said.

Nonetheless, bringing awareness to installations is just as important as bringing awareness to any individual, even if it is one at-a-time, he added.

"I'll go anywhere I am invited to speak at because I know most people do not have a clue to what kind of racial hate actions are happening these days," said Leyden. "If I can educate one person to stay away or resist it, I've done my job."

"One person can make a change," he continued. "One person can spread the word to many. Out of those he tells, some will spread the word to many more. So many people can change if they just become aware of the negativity racial extremists are all about."

At the end of the presenta-

tion, Leyden tasked all attendees with a mission; to become an active anti-racist.

"Please help this world stop making people like me," addressed Leyden. "Find that kid who has nothing to lose and mentor him. A kid with nothing to lose is a perfect recruit for the movement. Help them. Befriend them. Do what you can. Get them out if they're in. That wrong path will lead to a life of hatred, unhappiness, imprisonment or death. They can destroy lives or they can die."

"For people in the movement [in the military]; look at the people who got your back," he added. "They're black, white, Hispanic and Asian. They will look out for your life because they expect the same. They will defend you. When you're on the battlefield, you all bleed the same color."

Leyden's impact on the Marines, sailors and civilians who attended will stick with them forever, he said.

"When you teach someone a lesson using fists, they will heal," said Leyden. "But words stick to you forever."

His mission was accomplished at the Combat Center. All became aware of who to look out for and what to do to help. It filled him with pride knowing that he paid what he owed the Marine Corps, said Leyden.

Combat Center Soccer team prepares for season

LANCE CPL. MICHAEL S. CIFUENTES

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

The Combat Center soccer team has been training for the upcoming Regional Soccer Tournament. The team, made up of select players who played in the Commanding General's Intramural Soccer League, participated in an All-Marine Soccer Camp and are now practicing to play competitive teams in the Southern California area, as well as in the Marine Corps.

The team is led by head coach Paul Netzel and assistant coach Frank Schmitz. The team has been meeting every Tuesday and Thursday at 6 p.m. on Felix Field, for the past month, said Agustin Molinavarro, midfielder.

"Since day one, we've been conditioning and running short drills," said Molinavarro. "We've progressed since then, and we're now running team drills, rather than small group drills."

Even though the team consists of players who were once on opposing teams, they've come together, and all share the same attitude, said Molinavarro.

"We're all here to win," he said. "We know there is no point of stepping on to the field unless we're there to win. I remember playing against some of these guys. We have to put our differences aside. We all say to each other, 'let's make it happen.'"

Last season, Molinavarro was deployed with 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, and was not able to play. This season, through a change of deployment scheduling, most battalions are aboard the Combat Center, allowing more players to join the team.

This is the third season coach Netzel has been coaching the base team. He also contributes to the team as a defender.

"The squad has been fitting in with each other for over a month," said Netzel. "Some of the members played last year. We're currently trying to change the direction of our playing style. We're shaping the team to play with more finesse and lose the bad habits. We're doing well in practice, and I have good hopes for the team."

The process of selecting players to fill positions has not yet been completed, said Netzel.

"About half of the players who were originally supposed to be on the team haven't been showing up," said Hernandez. "So, we need some more players to come out and join us."

The team the Combat Center has is talented, but undermanned. There are 18 spots to fill on the roster but a little less than half needs to be filled, said Hernandez.

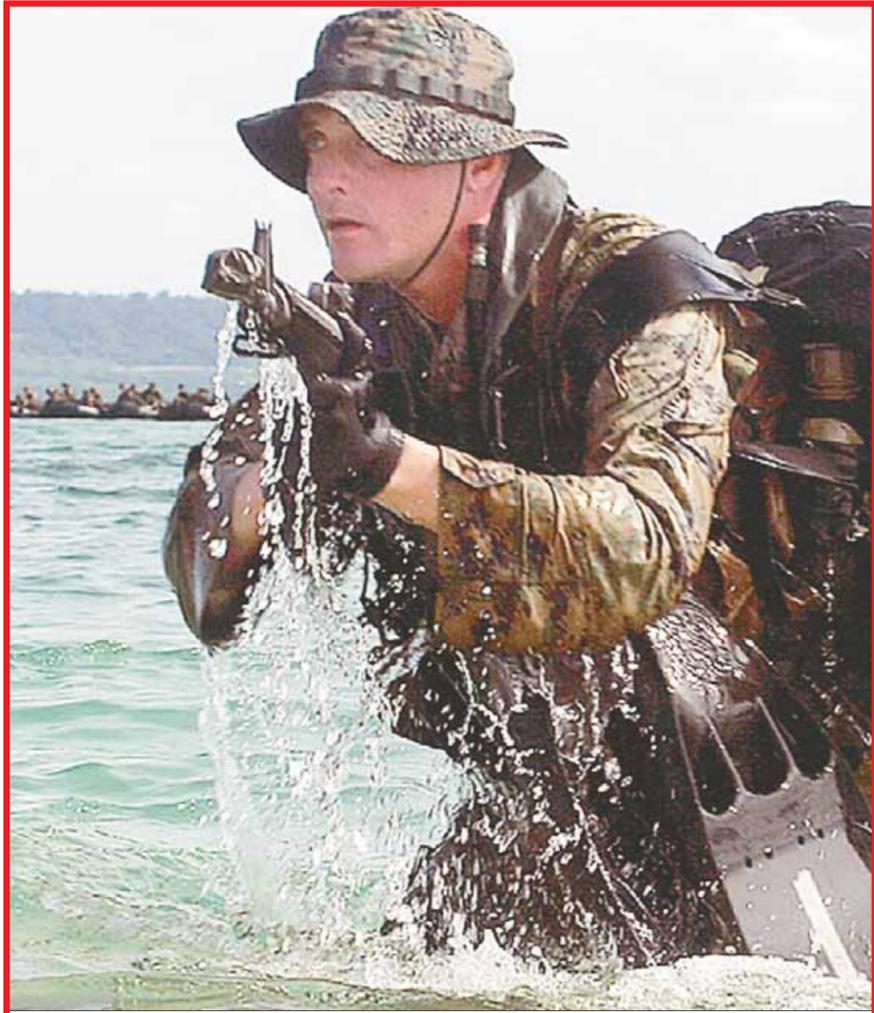
"I know there are a lot of talented players on this base who could really contribute to the team," said Hernandez. "They need to step up and come out. The team is still forming, so whoever is interested should show up to Felix Field."



LANCE CPL. MICHAEL S. CIFUENTES
Jose Hernandez kicks the ball away from Agustin Molinavarro during a keep-away drill the Combat Center Soccer Team executed during Tuesday evening's practice on Felix Field.



LANCE CPL. MICHAEL S. CIFUENTES
The Combat Center Soccer Team stretches before practicing Tuesday evening on Felix Field.



LANCE CPL. BRYAN A. PETERSON

Marco... Polo...

Scout swimmer Cpl. Beau Bauer emerges off Kin Blue beach during a boat raid exercise Sept. 11. More than 100 Marines and sailors with Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, currently serving as the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit's battalion landing team, rehearsed boat raids during the MEU's current pre-deployment training cycle. The scout swimmer's mission during boat raids is to clear obstacles and eliminate enemy threats before the assault.