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MARINE CORPS AIR GROUND COMBAT CENTER

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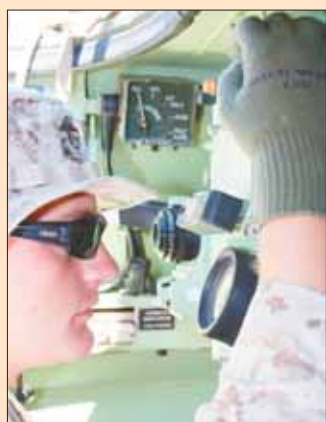
4 Silver Star tank commander gives leadership PME



5 Marines train with the best, prepare for the worst



7 3rd CEB key to rebuilding Iraq



9 3rd LAR rolls out with new turret system

3/8 completes new Afghanistan-specific Mojave Viper



LANCE CPL. COREY A. BLODGETT
COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

Marines with 3rd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, a Camp Lejeune, N.C., -based battalion, are in the final stages of the month long pre-deployment training exercise known as Mojave Viper. The training is usually intended for units deploying to Iraq, but has been modified to prepare the battalion for their upcoming tour in Afghanistan.

Once in country, the battalion will take over for 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, who deployed in April, and will perform combat operations and support the Afghan military and security forces, according to Lt. Col. David Odom, 3/8's battalion commander from Emerald Isle, S.C.

The battalion arrived at the Combat Center the last week of August and immediately began the conventional combined-arms training and stability and support operations training upon

See VIPER, A8

Mortar Marines with Company L, 3rd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, perform fire missions during a mock Taliban ambush prior to the company calling in rotary and fixed wing air strikes during an Afghanistan-centered Mojave Viper exercise at the Combat Center Sept. 17.

LANCE CPL. COREY A. BLODGETT

Base recognizes POW/MIA day

LANCE CPL. ZACHARY J. NOLA
COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

The Combat Center recognized National Prisoner of War Missing in Action Recognition Day by paying tribute to retired Navy Cmdr. James W. Bailey at the flag pole outside the Robert E. Bush Naval Hospital Sept. 19.

After the raising of the colors and an invocation by Navy chaplain, Lt. Cmdr. Steven E. Hicks, friends, family, and admirers sat in silence as guest speaker, Col. Robert J. Abblitt, Combat Center chief-of-staff, described the events that led to Bailey's capture and imprisonment.

"Today's story tells the saga

of a naval officer who lost his freedom to the hands of the enemy," said Abblitt. "Today's purpose is to honor one of our nation's true heroes."

On June 28, 1967, Bailey was the co-pilot in an air strike with, Cmdr. William P. Lawrence in their RF-4B Phantom when their aircraft was hit by enemy fire one minute out from their target.

The two aviators managed to complete their mission, but when the aircraft's hydraulics eventually failed, Bailey and Lawrence were forced to eject and were subsequently captured by the North Vietnamese.

Bailey, who was promoted to the

See POW/MIA, A10



LANCE CPL. ZACHARY J. NOLA

Lance Cpl Carolyn Haschak, and Pfc. Allen Lozano, both with the Traffic Management Office join Petty Officer 3rd Class Sarilyn Ogomoro and Seaman Elston Stewart to fold the national ensign during the Robert E. Bush Naval Hospital Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Remembrance Ceremony Sept. 19.



LANCE CPL. MONICA C. ERICKSON

Sgt. Joseph Modula, an infantry weapons repairer with 3rd Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment, comforts Nica Villarreal at a memorial service in honor of her cousin Pfc. Ernie Villarreal Sept. 18.

1st Tanks honors lost brother

LANCE CPL. MONICA C. ERICKSON
COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

A solemn gathering of Marines, sailors, friends and families of 1st Tank Battalion paid their final respects to one of their own with a memorial service at the Combat Center's Catholic Chapel Sept. 18.

Pfc. Ernie J. Villarreal, 27, infantry weapons repairman and an El Paso, Texas, native, died Sept. 16 at Robert E. Bush Naval Hospital. He is survived by his wife, Wendy, and his three children, Haley, Maverick and Makayla.

At the front of the church was a memorial display with Villarreal's rifle, boots, helmet and dog tags. A framed photograph of Villarreal was also placed at the front of the chapel.

The service began with Navy Lt. Matthew Prince, 1st Tanks' chaplain, reading the invocation and responsive reading of Psalm 23. He also spoke about how Villarreal will continue to encourage the Marines and sailors who knew him.

"Those Marines of the past, including Ernie, directly inspire each

See MOURNS, A15

This Day in Marine Corps History -September 26, 1777-

Marines join the Pennsylvania Navy for action on the Delaware River.

Keeping Kids Safe in a Web-Savvy World

LIFELINES.USMC.MIL

If you came across an instant message conversation your child was having on your computer and discovered the acronym "PAW," would you know what to make of it?

If not, you aren't alone. With cyber bullying and predators becoming a large presence online, many parents are realizing that the age-old discussion of how to safely cross the street is morphing into a more tech-savvy conversation; how to stay protected on the Internet.

According to a 2006 study on social networking by CA, Inc. and the National Cyber Security Alliance, 51 percent of parents who are aware that their children use social networking sites do not restrict their children's profiles so that only friends can view them. Further, 36 percent of parents surveyed did not monitor their children on social networking sites.

CA has teamed up with Boys & Girls Clubs of America to donate Internet security software to Boys & Girls Clubs across the country and to offer parents and caregivers the following simple tips to help them monitor their children's Internet activity:

- Surf the Web together. Ask your child to tell you about the things they did online. Show genuine curiosity, and make it fun. Familiarize yourself. Have them show you their online profile, favorite chat rooms and friends.
- Learn the lingo. Common chat acronyms include "PA" (Parent Alert) and "PAW" (Parents are Watching).
- Inform. Explain why children should never share passwords, even with friends. Tell your child never to click on links or attachments sent by e-mail, unless they know the sender. Even in those cases, use caution.
- Fight cyber-bullying. Watch for signs of cyber-bullying, such as your child becoming agitated after using the PC, and learn how to respond by saving chat logs and contacting the cyber-bully's Internet provider.
- Establish control. Keep your PC in the living room or other common area, and install parental controls with Web filtering and optional time restrictions that you can adjust yourself. Furthermore, give your child a separate sign-on name.

New California legislation bans use of text messaging devices while driving

CAMILLE ANDERSON

California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger today reinforced his commitment to keeping California's roads safe by signing legislation that prohibits drivers from using text messaging devices while operating a motor vehicle.

"Building on legislation already helping save lives in California, I am happy to sign this bill because it further encourages safe and responsible driving," said Schwarzenegger. "Banning electronic text messaging while driving will keep drivers' hands on the wheel and their eyes on the road, making our roadways a safer place for all Californians."

SB 28 by Senator Joe Simitian (D-Palo Alto) specifically bans the use of an electronic wireless communications device to write, send, or read a text-based communication while driving a motor vehicle. The bill would impose a base fine of \$20 for a first offense and \$50 for each subsequent offense.

This bill compliments an existing law which Schwarzenegger signed in 2006. SB 1613, also by Senator Simitian, requires motorists to use hands-free devices while talking on a mobile phone when driving a motor vehicle.

Employee Spotlight

Name: Laletra James
Organization: Marine Corps Community Services New Horizons, Child Development Center
Job Duties: To oversee attendance, administrative work, and ensuring the program is run properly.
Hometown: Detroit
Hobbies: Math, tutoring middle school and high school students, being an active participant at my church, Gospel Fellowship.
What Do You Like Most About Your Job: Getting to see the children in the morning, getting to welcome the parents and children and interacting with my co-workers.
Significant Achievements: Moved from program assistant to general clerk and received a praise report from parents.
Military Service: None
Time At The Combat Center: Since December



ADDED DIMENSIONS

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- ACROSS**
- Blue Grotto's isle
 - Haul in
 - Gives a boost to
 - Risking everything, in poker
 - Ashe Stadium org.
 - Volt or watt
 - Touch down follower
 - Genealogy chart
 - Bids a bonvoyage to
 - Toy holder
 - Bank acct. accrual
 - "Ditto!"
 - "Goosebumps" author R.L.
 - Hard-hit baseball
 - Ice server
 - Contest submission
 - No-goodnik
 - Colonial bugs
 - Allow access to
 - Put aboard
 - Dent or scratch
 - Pinker inside
 - Singing Carpenter
- DOWN**
- Gowns' companions
 - Skin care ingredient
 - Ballet bend
 - Soap removals
 - Recites, melodically
 - Dennis the Menace's dog
 - Round fig
 - Broke the fast
 - Links score card figure
 - Novel producer
 - Concerning, on memos
 - Peters out
 - Proof reader's word
 - Toward the stern
 - Buffalo Bill
 - Coin makers
 - Missing nothing
 - Fork-tailed flier
 - Notary's need
 - Being on key
 - Part of IV
 - Look over wolfishly
- 30. Words of compassion**
- Darth
 - Idyllic settings
 - Joke response, informally
 - Nursery outfits
 - Orson Welles's Wisconsin birthplace
 - Atlanta Braves' div.
 - Moth-eaten
 - Dagger part
 - Niccollette's "Desperate Housewives" role
 - Rx items, forshort
 - Slaw or fries
 - Defeatist's word
 - "extra cost!"
 - Bring up
 - Lose firmness
 - Temple University athlete
 - F. Bailey
- [Solutions on A11]

Centerspeak

Why do you think it is valuable to be registered to vote?

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



LANCE CPL. KEVIN BRADFORD
RIFEMAN, 3/4

"Your opinion doesn't matter if you don't vote. You need to make a difference."



1ST LT. ANDREW MARKOFF
PLATOON COMMANDER, 1/4

"That's what we're fighting for. It's hypocritical if we don't use the right we have."



STAFF SGT. XAVIER BROWN
RADIO CHIEF COURSE STUDENT, MCCES

"People can get their voices heard. Little people can effect what happens with the country, especially with this election. It's going to be a close one."

OBSERVATION POST

Commanding General Brig. Gen. Charles M. Gurganus

Public Affairs Officer	Jennie E. Haskamp	Editor	Cpl. Michael S. Cifuentes
Public Affairs Chief	Gunnery Sgt. Chris W. Cox	Press Chief	Cpl. Regina N. Ortiz
		Layout, Design	Leslie Shaw

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<p>NOW - 11/15</p> <p>Art Tours Collective Sample works by each artist on the Open Studio Tours Where: A Roadside Attraction, 69197 29 Palms Hwy., 29 Palms (Just off the Hwy. in Indian Cove area) For more info call 362-4100</p>	<p>FRI. 9/26</p> <p>Boxing Night: Featuring Escobedo vs Salcido Time: First Bout at 4:30 p.m. Where: Morongo Casino Resort & Spa, 49500 Seminole Dr. Cabazon. For more info call 800-252-4499 or http://www.morongocasinosort.com</p>	<p>FRI. 9/26</p> <p>Rock concert: Barboyz Time: 9 p.m. Where: Fantasy Springs Resort Casino, 84-245 Indio Springs Pkwy. Indio For more info call 800-827-2946 or visit http://www.fantasyspringsresort.com</p>	<p>FRI. 9/26</p> <p>Art Gallery Opening Time: 6 p.m. Where: Purple Agave Art Gallery at the Cactus Mart, 49889 29 Palms Hwy., Morongo Valley For more info call 363-6076</p>	<p>FRI. 9/26 & SAT. 9/27</p> <p>Native American Week Celebration Fri. 10 a.m.-8 p.m., Sat. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Where: Agua Caliente Cultural Museum, 471 East Tahquitz Canyon Way, Palm Springs For more info call 778-1079 or visit http://www.accmuseum.org</p>
<p>SAT. 9/27</p> <p>Etta James & Roots Band with Tower of Power Time: 8 p.m. Where: Spotlight 29 Casino, 46-200 Harrison Pl. Coachella For more info call 800-585-3737 or visit http://www.spotlight29.com</p>	<p>SAT. 9/27</p> <p>Discover the MilkyWay class Time: 2 - 10 p.m. Where: Joshua Tree National Park, Oasis Visitor Center, 74485 National Park Dr., 29 Palms For more info call 367-5535 or visit http://www.joshuatree.org</p>	<p>SAT. 9/27</p> <p>Officers' Spouses' Club presents Roll out the Barrel: Wine & beer tasting Time: 7-11 p.m. Where: The Officers' Club MCAGCC, Twentynine Palms For more info call 910-9576</p>	<p>SAT. 9/27</p> <p>Passport to Paris HDMC Gala Black Tie Dinner and Auction Time: 6 p.m. Where: Helen Gray Education Center at Hi-Desert Medical Center, 6601 White Feather Rd., Joshua Tree For more info call 366-6324</p>	<p>SUN. 9/28</p> <p>Insects of the Desert field class Time: 11 a.m. - 9 p.m. Where: Big Morongo Canyon Preserve, 11055 East Dr., Morongo Valley For more info call 367-5535 or visit http://www.joshuatree.org</p>

Combat Center's NCO Club a great place to chill

LANCE CPL. MICHAEL NERL
COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

In an effort to get itself back on its feet, the Combat Center's non-commissioned officer club is hosting events every night of the week to raise attendance.

The NCO club, known as Blood Stripes, offers many enticing activities, events and low prices for Marines at its convenient location on base.

"We've got a great establishment here," said Staff Sgt. Brandon Zettlemoyer, the NCO club bartender and a native of Harrisburg, Pa. "The problem is that most people don't even realize what they're missing."

The club offers free snacks and low prices on food and drinks to attendees, said Zettlemoyer. When football games are televised at the club, pizza and chili dogs are provided.

Every day of the week there is

something people are missing if they're not coming to the club, said Zettlemoyer.

The club shows Monday Night Football and serves pizza, hotdogs and chili dogs, said Zettlemoyer. On Tuesdays and Thursdays the club hosts happy hour with low prices on well drinks [drinks mixed with alcohol]. Wednesdays we've got Ziti night for Marines who like Italian food. Fridays we have social hour food where we have the usual low prices on food, but we're open from right after work until we decide it needs to close.

"Our busiest time of year is during football season," said Zettlemoyer "We have prize drawings and raffles during the nights when we do have big attendance."

Zettlemoyer added he has suggested that the club remain open on weekends to give attendees a chance to come and enjoy it at a time that wouldn't affect their jobs.

"Most bars have their busiest times on the weekends," said

Zettlemoyer. "We have cheaper beer than the bars out in town. There's way less of a risk of getting in trouble for drunk driving, and it's a lot cheaper here."

Zettlemoyer added that the club also has great opportunities for Marines to rent the club out during weekdays from 10 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. and all day on Saturdays.

"You can have the entire place to yourself if you rent the club out," he said. "Also, it doesn't matter if you know other people than NCO Marines. You can let them into the club when you are having a private party as well. That's just one more reason people should come here."

There are also higher-ups in the base command who encourage the use of the club.

"It's a great thing that we have clubs for all the different ranks of Marines -- the NCO club in particular is a very important one," said Sgt. Maj. Susan M. Bellis, the base sergeant major and a native of Boston. "It

exists to provide camaraderie between NCOs. It is also a good place just for them to go and unwind amongst their peers."

Cpl. John Benson, a supply clerk with Headquarters and

Service Company, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, and a native of Kennewick, Wash., agreed that the NCO club provides a great

See NCO, A15



LANCE CPL. MICHAEL NERL
The Combat Center's NCO Club, Blood Stripes, has recently begun to offer special events every night to bring its business up.

**Wednesday Evening
Ballroom Dances**

**Palm Springs Pavilion
7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.**

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Fall 2008

October 1.....	Touch of Class
October 8.....	CD Night with Chris Perry
October 15.....	Dick Richards Ensemble
October 22.....	Milt Rasmussen Band
October 29.....	CD Night with Steve & Barb

Admission Prices:
CD Night - \$5/Person • Fall 2008 - \$7/Person

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5:00	5:25	5:30	5:40	5:45	6:00	6:10	7:00
15 MCAGCC-Palm Springs Friday							
Palm Springs Airport	Indian Canyon & Andreas (Casino)	Indian Canyon & Tacheva (Hospital)	Stater Bros WalMart	MCAGCC			
7:00	7:10	7:15	7:50	8:30			
15 MCAGCC-Palm Springs Saturday/Sunday*							
Base Post Exchange	Building 1664	Subway	29 Palms Community Center	29 Palms Staters	Joshua Tree Park Blvd.	Stater Bros WalMart	Palm Springs Airport
10:00	10:25	10:30	10:40	10:45	11:00	11:10	11:45
4:00	4:25	4:30	*4:40	*4:45	*5:00	*5:10	*5:45
15 MCAGCC-Palm Springs Saturday/Sunday*							
Palm Springs Airport	Indian Canyon & Andreas (Casino)	Indian Canyon & Tacheva (Hospital)	Stater Bros WalMart	MCAGCC			
12:00	12:10	12:15	12:50	1:35			
*6:00	*6:10	*6:15	*6:50	*7:35			

*SUNDAY SERVICE BEGINS AT 29 PALMS COMMUNITY CENTER. All weekend service is for Saturday only except for the final return trip which includes both Saturday and Sunday service.

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Retired tanker gives motivating leadership PME

LANCE CPL. ZACHARY J. NOLA

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

1st Tank Battalion welcomed a familiar face Monday when retired Gunnery Sgt. Nicholas A. Popaditch spoke to the Marines and sailors of his former unit in the battalion classroom.

Popaditch was awarded the Silver Star medal for his actions during a battle in Fallujah, Iraq, in April 2005 while attached to 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, and is also the co-author of a new book called "Once a Marine: An Iraq War Tank Commander's Inspirational Memoir of Combat, Courage and Recovery."

Before Popaditch addressed the Marines and sailors of the battalion, Lt. Col. Thomas J. Gordon, 1st Tanks commanding officer, spoke to his Marines about what Popaditch's presence represented.

"It's a little opportunity to reflect on who we are," said Gordon, a native of Boston.

Gordon also took time to encourage those in attendance to read "Once a Marine."

"It's pretty dog-gone inspiring," said Gordon. "It motivated the heck out of me."

Popaditch, who wears a black eye patch due to the loss of his right eye in the Fallujah engagement, still mirrored the image of a squared away Marine with a fresh hair cut, slacks and a tucked-in collared shirt, and was



Retired Gunnery Sgt. Nicholas A. Popaditch speaks to the Marines and sailors of 1st Tank Battalion in the battalion's classroom Monday.

presented with a Tanks football jersey by Gordon before being handed the microphone.

When Popaditch took the floor, he opened his address by asking attendees a question.

"Why do we have a Marine Corps?" asked the Hammond, Ind., native. "Is it for college benefits? Is it for posters? Or is it for parades?"

None of the answers above were what Popaditch was looking for.

"We're here to win our

nation's wars and right now you are very much involved in that," he said.

While he admitted those Marines marching in parades and posing for posters serve an important role in the Corps, he challenged the Marines and sailors of 1st Tanks to be what he referred to as the '04 Marine, the Marine who is still manning a rifle at 4 a.m., even though he is hungry, wet, sweaty, and tired.

"When you go to combat you'll

judge yourself a man based on what you do there," said Popaditch. "Think of the 04 Marine, that's who you want to be."

In addition to challenging those in attendance, Popaditch also spoke about such Marine Corps values as honor, courage and commitment, as well as training and leadership.

When talking about these topics Popaditch turned to personal experiences and advice that had

See TANKER, A14

HOT TOPICS

MMOA TEAM VISIT

The Manpower Management Officer Assignment Team will be aboard the Combat Center Oct. 21-23 to meet with all available and interested officers regarding their careers and future duty assignments. An officer professional military education brief will be given by MMOA at 1 p.m. Oct. 21 for all company grade officers and field grade officers at the Protestant Chapel. Interviews, by appointment, will be conducted in classrooms 1 and 2 at Tactical Training and Exercise Control Group building 1587. The Web-based appointment scheduler can be found and will be available for officers to schedule appointments with the appropriate monitor and career counselor beginning Oct. 7 at <http://www.29palms.usmc.mil>. For more detailed information regarding the MMOA visit, please contact Robin Whitten at 830-7348 or Velvet Dixon at 830-7088.

FIRE PREVENTION CHILI LUNCH

Pre-sale tickets are now on sale for the 11th Annual Chili Lunch at Combat Center Fire Department on Oct. 10. Tickets are discounted at \$2 each (\$3 at the door) and are good for a bowl of firehouse chili or a hot dog -- all proceeds are donated to charity via the annual Combined Federal Campaign. For tickets contact your fire inspector or call the Fire Administration Office at 830-5239.

CG'S INTRAMURAL RIFLE MATCHES

The Combat Center Marksmanship Training Unit would like to invite teams to compete in the Commanding General's Intramural Rifle and Pistol Matches. Teams will consist of four shooters to include at least one staff noncommissioned officer or officer. Classes will begin on Monday at 7 a.m. at the MTU. All participants are required to attend. The opening ceremony first shot will be at 7 a.m. Thursday and the closing ceremony will be held at 1 p.m. Oct. 17 followed by a barbecue for all shooters. All participants are required to use the M16A2/A4/M4 Service Rifle and the M9 Service Pistol and required to attend all marksmanship classes. Military retirees are also invited to compete. For more information please contact MTU at 830-6700.

MEN'S BASKETBALL TRYOUTS

Men's basketball tryouts will be held Tuesday and Wednesday at 7 p.m., at the West Gym. Only active duty personnel are eligible to participate. Call 830-4092/6857 for further information.

The Big One is Coming to 29 Palms Sept. 29th

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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29 Palms

September 29th.

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3/8 attacks MOUT town during Afghan preparation

LANCE CPL. COREY A. BLODGETT

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

More than 200 Marines with Company K, 3rd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, set out from Camp Wilson to Range 215 here Sept. 18 to conduct a week's worth of urban warfare training.

The training is part of their month-long Afghanistan-based Mojave Viper, which fulfills the battalion's pre-deployment requirements for their upcoming tour.

The Marines set up in forward-operating bases, which they lived in and operated out of during the week-long UWT, surrounding the range's mock Afghan village, Sara Kowt — complete with homes, a market area and two mosques.

The training kicked off with classes given by Mojave Viper instructors from Tactical Training Exercise Control Group, known as Coyotes. The classes refresh the Marines on basics of military



LANCE CPL. COREY A. BLODGETT

Seaman Tahlon Johnson, a hospital corpsman with Company K, 3rd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, patrols with the rest of his platoon just outside a mock Afghan town at Range 200 Saturday.



LANCE CPL. COREY A. BLODGETT

Marines with 3rd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, treat role players with simulated injuries from a mock explosion during a first responder drill as part of an Afghanistan-centered Mojave Viper at the Combat Center Saturday.

operations in urban terrain, such as clearing rooms, hallways and stairs, urban movement and reaction to small-arms fire.

"The purpose of all this training is fine tuning," said 1st Lt. Adam Felde, the Weapons Platoon commander with Company K. "It's our final phase of training, our last check in the box before we head to Afghanistan. Our Marines have seen this stuff before, and we have to just stick to the basic skills. Some of these things can become very complex, but we just have to make it as simple as possible, allowing the Marines to establish or just re-affirm the standard operating procedures we've been working on."

Once the classes were finished, the Marines moved on to the practical application portion of the training that relies heavily on realism, utilizing aspects such as firing weapons with blanks, simulated IED explosions and actual Afghan role player interactions.

During the main portion of the training, platoons had to patrol a hostile area of the town with each squad receiving their own Afghan interpreter and Afghan National Army soldier, played by civilian role players, to accompany them on their route. They talked and interacted with community members, elders and Afghan National Police and reacted to hostile fire by mock Taliban forces.

Cpl. Joseph Budrow, a squad leader with Weapons Platoon, said having actual Afghans play their roles during the training makes all the difference in the world in preparing the Marines for their tour.

"It's just outstanding," said Budrow, who has deployed to Iraq three times. "It makes our intent for this range exactly what our intent will be in country, which is to get information from the local populace and treat them with the respect and dignity that they deserve. And



LANCE CPL. COREY A. BLODGETT

Marines with 3rd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, treat role players with simulated injuries from a mock explosion during a first responder drill at Range 200 as part of an Afghanistan-centered Mojave Viper at the Combat Center Saturday.

from there hopefully establish a relationship with them to where they feel trustworthy enough to give us information so we can do our jobs and get rid of the bad guys that are causing them harm."

The Marines also had to conduct a first responder drill in which each squad goes through a scenario of being the first ones on the scene of a mock explosion that has caused several realistic and highly graphic casualties.

"The first responder class was really good, realistic training," Felde said. "We had Marines wounded, one with his legs completely blown off, and a few civilian casualties as well. At that

point we focused on the squad taking tactical control — establishing security, talking to higher command, calling in the casualty evacuation and our senior corpsman took control of the situation. The Marines performed amazingly, despite the intense circumstances."

Capt. Sven Gosnell, the Company K commander, said even though they most likely won't be using these skills as much as they would in the urban density of Iraq, they are still just as important to have.

"It's important that we maintain these key skill sets even for Afghanistan," he said. "We may be fighting through a desert or

mountainous environment and then have to go straight into a village and have to be able to provide security and civil affairs operations. So it is very important to bring all this training together."

Gosnell said his Marines will have no problem utilizing all the skills they've honed and handling any objective thrown at them.

"They've preformed excellently," he explained. "I have no doubt in their capabilities, from the individual Marine's to the collective skills in the platoon and squad level. The Marines have been refining those skills, and they are phenomenal."

3/8 completed their Mojave Viper training this week.

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NMCRS is looking for a few more good volunteers

LANCE CPL. ZACHARY J. NOLA

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

The Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society held an information workshop Sept. 19 at the Combat Center's Community Center in an effort to recruit additional volunteers.

At the workshop, which offered food, games and prizes, Jenny Gonzalez, NMCRS chair volunteer, educated attendees about the NMCRS mission.

"The mission of NMCRS is to lend a helping hand to service members in their time of emergent need through interest-free loans and grants so they can regain control of their finances," said Gonzalez, a native of Stockton, Calif.

In addition to offering financial assistance, volunteers also help with casework, reception, layettes, publicity, educating the volunteer community about the armed services, and helping spouses better understand what their husbands or wives do as members of the military.

The society is currently offering a Budget for Baby class, which helps prepare service

members who are expecting children for the duties that come with having a child.

Gonzalez, who is the wife of Sgt. Valo S. Gonzalez, a forecaster with Marine Wing Support Squadron 374, added the NMCRS volunteer staff is currently comprised of military spouses, mothers, dependents, retirees, and civilians with no military ties.

NMCRS is currently looking to increase its ranks with people who have a genuine interest in helping Marines and sailors, said Gonzalez.

"They must also be dedicated to their area of commitment and compassionate in their willingness to work and be with other volunteers," said Gonzalez.

While the NMCRS is a volunteer organization, the society does offer childcare and mileage reimbursement, additional travel reimbursement, and mostly local training.

Volunteers are encouraged to strive for 20 volunteer hours per week, but some society members volunteer once a week or less, while others volunteer for the entire week.

"Any time requirements are completely controlled by the vol-

unteer," said Gonzalez. "Our goal is to ensure that all our volunteers have a fair share of volunteer time."

One may become a volunteer by simply going to the society's office in the Combat Center's Village Center with an eagerness to volunteer.

"There is an application process for basic background information that allows the society to effectively track all volunteers and the hours they donate," said Gonzalez. "Volunteers also complete orientation on the society and then the appropriate training based on the area they desire to be involved in."

In addition to helping Marines and sailors, society members also learn valuable office skills, that make them better qualified for the local job market, said Gonzalez.

Yoshimi Trivino, NMCRS chair of receptions and a native of Argentina who has been a volunteer for six months, said the ability to learn helpful office skills as well as improve her English was why she originally decided to volunteer.

Trivino, who is the wife of Gunnery Sgt. Rafael Trivino, a



LANCE CPL. ZACHARY J. NOLA

Potential volunteers listen as Jenny Gonzalez, Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society chair volunteer, speaks to them about the NMCRS and its mission during an information workshop Sept 19 at the Combat Center's Community Center.

section leader with MWSS-374, said in addition to teaching job skills, NMCRS also offers a friendly and professional but low-stress work environment, where new friends can be made.

Vincent Fimbres, who attended the Sept. 19 workshop and signed up to be a NMCRS volunteer, said his desire to join NMCRS comes from his own personal memories of growing

up in a military family and knowing how challenging the lifestyle and commitment can be.

"I just want to help young Marines and sailors with their needs," said Fimbres, a native of San Pedro, Calif., who just moved to the area three weeks ago. "I have the time and I'm sure it's something I'll enjoy."

For more information about NMCRS call 830-6323.

Commanding General, Sgt. Maj. address Combat Center families

CPL. NICOLE A. LAVINE

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

Brig. Gen. Charles M. Gurganus, and Sgt. Maj. Susan M. Bellis, Combat Center commanding general and sergeant major, spoke to Marines, sailors and their families at the first town hall meeting at the Sunset Cinema Theater Tuesday.

The topic of discussion was quality of life and included comments about:

- The availability of teen recreation centers
- The condition of base housing and property
- Child care
- Road safety
- Enforcement of dress codes at the Marine Corps Exchange
- Upcoming construction projects of new base facilities
- Interactive Customer Evaluation comments

- Energy conservation
- Services for special needs children

Although the meeting was not open to the general public, the intent behind town hall meetings is to draw the community closer by focusing attention on issues brought up by the people themselves, said Gurganus.

"I'm going to make decisions one way or another," said the Wilmington, N.C., native. "I can make better informed decisions if I have our community's input. I think everyone should have a vested interest in the community."

Lt. Col. James W. Frey, Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 3 commanding officer, attended the town hall meeting and sat in the front row.

Frey said he believes since VMU-3 is a new unit aboard the Combat Center, Marines and

sailors of the squadron need to realize their roles in the community. Due to training, Marines and sailors of VMU-3 were unable to attend.

"The topics covered were very pertinent, and with more warning we will ensure that Marines and spouses of VMU-3 will be there," said Frey, a Ridgebury, Pa., native.

Gurganus said any issue impacting quality of life on base may be addressed, and although he may not be able to suit everyone's wants, he aims to gain the necessary resources to meet their needs.

"There are some things here on base that we [the base's command] don't know about," he said. "And that's the stuff we're after. It's not my job to make this place better. It is our job to make this place better. This is our community."

Gurganus added he expects to

attend the annual general officers symposium in Washington, D.C., in October where he plans on networking with other Marine Corps general officers who can offer guidance or support to help improve the Twentynine Palms, Calif., community.

"Every other general officer in the Marine Corps will be there," he said. "All the guys who own programs, who have money

and can help improve our community through resources will be there."

Bellis said she highly encourages families and service members to attend the next meeting scheduled to take place Nov. 3 to offer input and address other issues at the Sunset Cinema Theater.

To learn more about the town hall meetings call 830-7617.



CPL. NICOLE A. LAVINE

Brig. Gen. Charles M. Gurganus, base commanding general, discusses child care options with an audience of base personnel during a town hall meeting at the Sunset Cinema Theater Tuesday.

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LANCE CPL. PAUL TORRES

REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM 5

AL ANBAR PROVINCE, Iraq — The lifeblood that helps rebuild the Iraqi infrastructure is commerce, and Iraq's roads and bridges are the veins through which the lifeblood flows.

This makes the Wahid Bridge, which connects the two towns of Jubbah and Jubbah Ria, extremely important.

"The bridge is basically a shortcut to cross the Euphrates," said Sgt. John A. Esquivel, 22, from Duarte, Calif., who is the utilities chief section head with Support Platoon, Company A, 3rd Combat Engineer Battalion, Regimental Combat Team 5. "The bridge was originally installed back in May and has since developed some problems due to the heavy presence of algae in the river. The algae have caused the anchor and buoy cables to sink below water level and have produced a curve in the bridge."

Iraqi Army engineers assisted the Marines from Company A to dig four extra anchors along the river banks in order to give the floating-panel bridge extra support. The anchors will later be tied to the bridge by another team of engineers.

Having IA engineers assist the Marines showed that the Iraqis

are making progress toward conducting operations such as this without the assistance of Coalition forces.

"By the IA engineers being out there and using their equipment to help us install the anchors, they were able to show that they are capable of supporting their people," said Chief Warrant Officer 3 John H. Walter, 37, from Lake Elsinore, Calif., who is the platoon commander for Support Platoon.

The day-long mission took some on-the-site coordination between the Marines and the IA engineers.

To avoid using heavy machinery on a local farm, the Marines used their excavator to dig on one side of the river and the IA engineers used their backhoe on the far side. Marines posted security on both sides of the river until the operation was complete.

"We didn't want to just go on that (farmer's) property and tear up his field," said Walter.

The bridge is still usable by the locals and the IA while they wait for the extra anchors to be attached.

"The only other places to cross the Euphrates are about 50 kilometers in either direction," said Walter. "The bridge has made a huge impact on this area. Both locals and the IA use it, and they are really happy with it."



LANCE CPL. PAUL TORRES

Cpl. Matthew J. Short, a heavy equipment operator with Support Platoon, Company A, 3rd Combat Engineer Battalion, inspects the hole he dug to make sure it is big enough to fit a bridge anchor for the Wahid Bridge in Al Anbar Province, Iraq, Sept. 17.



LANCE CPL. PAUL TORRES

Cpl. Luis Alvarez Jr. and Cpl. Matthew J. Short, both combat engineers with Support Platoon, Company A, 3rd Combat Engineer Battalion, watch as a heavy lifter lowers one of the T-barrier anchors into a freshly dug hole in Al Anbar Province, Iraq.

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VIPER, from A1

arrival, Odom said.

"This training is the capstone event, if you will, for infantry battalions that are getting ready to deploy to Iraq, or in our case, Afghanistan," he explained. "And it is our opportunity to deploy from our home station to conduct combined-arms training on the desert floor with trainers, evaluators and the entire infrastructure to give us some final assessment and some validation to the battalion prior to going on deployment."

Although this Mojave Viper is geared to prepare these Marines for Afghanistan, the training has pretty much the same core elements as previous exercises tailored for units deploying to Iraq, with some minor tweaks, according to Gunnery Sgt. Danny Watts, an instructor and evaluator with Tactical Training Exercise Control Group.

"In Afghanistan, you don't have as much of your patrolling operations inside dense cities as in Iraq, so we've been pushing them into more of the mountainous terrain we have out here, which is exactly what they'll see and have to traverse in Afghanistan," said the Biloxi, Miss., native.

Mojave Viper also recently added

Afghan role players into training scenarios serving as community members, street vendors, and National Police and National Army to interact with and challenge the Marines with the most realistic training available, Watts said.

Throughout Mojave Viper, dozens of instructors and evaluators, known as Coyotes, teach classes, give demonstrations and follow the Marines during scenarios to serve as a kind of referee and give their expert opinions on the Marines' performances, said Watts the TTECG intelligence chief.

"Our job is to watch the scenarios and make sure they're played out correctly and as realistically as possible," he said. "The Coyotes make any changes that need to be done on the spot to the training and help the Marines any way we can."

Odom said since arriving at Camp Wilson, the main operating base for Marines at Mojave Viper, the battalion has been pushed from day one, starting from fire-team all the way to battalion level training.

"It has been the progressive crawl, walk and run approach, but once we got everyone settled in, we immediately went out to the ranges where we were able to

do basic combined-arms integration at the fire team, squad and platoon levels," he said. "We eventually progressed into the deliberate assault course, where the battalion's headquarters commanded and controlled a mechanized task force, utilizing combined-arms from aviation, artillery and then the striking power of the battalion for that decisive affect."

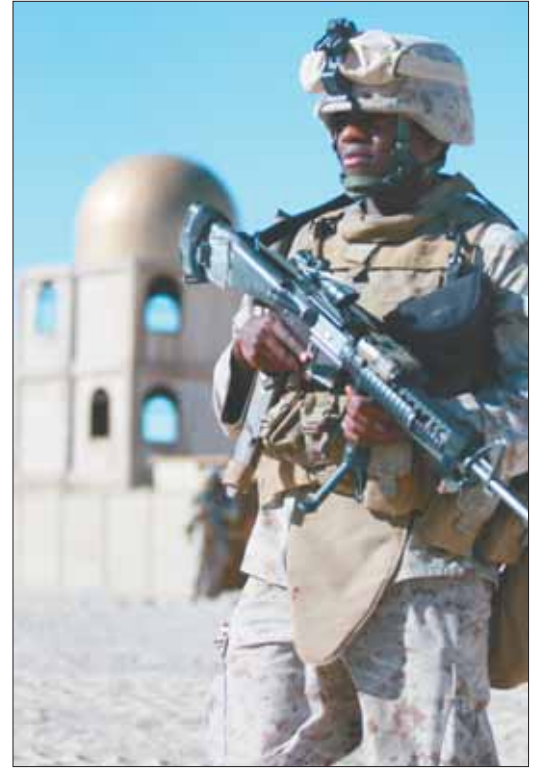
The unique quality and amount of training in the Afghanistan-centered Mojave Viper is exactly what an infantry battalion preparing for a tour needs, Odom explained.

"Simply put, I think the training is right where it needs to be for a unit about to head out to Afghanistan," he said.

With all he has observed so far, Odom said that he is confident about how his Marines will perform once in theater.

"They're doing magnificent, every day I see them, they're learning, they're focused, they're ready and they're taking care of each other," he said. "There is no doubt in my mind that they're absolutely ready to accomplish their mission of assisting and helping the Afghan populace."

3/8's next step after completing Mojave Viper is to return home to North Carolina and finalize administrative and logistical details prior to their deployment in the coming weeks.



LANCE CPL. COREY A. BLODGETT
Pfc. Marvin Smoot, a mortarman with Weapons Platoon, Company K, 3rd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, patrols a mock Afghan town during an Afghanistan-centered Mojave Viper at the Combat Center Sept. 17.

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Vehicle upgrades give Wolfpack bigger bite

LANCE CPL. MICHAEL NERL

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

The Wolfpack is now armed with a bigger bite thanks to an upgraded main gun turret system for their light armored vehicles.

The Marines of Company D, 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, trained with new turrets and sights in their light armored vehicles Saturday at the Combat Center's Range 500.

The new Electric Drive Turrets and Improved Thermal Sight System provide more precise fire capability for Light Armored Recon Marines.

The old LAV hydraulic system for maneuvering the turret is being replaced Corpwide after approximately 25 years of use, and the new sights can see much farther than before, along with improved thermal imaging capabilities, said Sgt. Rolando Magdaleno, the Company D master gunner and a native of Santa Ana, Calif.

"We have the same weapon used in the turrets, but the turret itself is upgraded," said Magdaleno. "What I like about the new system is that it is much quieter and a whole lot smoother than the old hydraulic system. From the learning I've had on the subject, it looks like a much better system. It was time to get rid of the old system. It worked well but it was starting to get old."

3rd LAR received classroom instruction on the new equipment last week, and they went one company at a time for approximately five hours a day to the range to test out the equipment Sept. 19 and Saturday. They will be qualifying with it beginning Monday through Oct 3.

"Right now it's a live-fire training exercise meant as familiarization training for the Marines," said 2nd Lt. Blake Rice, a platoon commander with Company D and a

native of Bethesda, Md. "1st LAR trained with them first in the U.S., 2nd LAR got the upgrades when they were overseas, but I'm glad we did this now."

Getting the upgrades back in the States is much better because the battalion has time to get out in the field and handle the equipment and learn with it, where they can sit down afterwards and iron out any kinks or wrinkles in their performances.

The Marines fired 55 25mm dummy rounds to zero out the weapon and introduce themselves to the new system, said Rice. It takes five rounds to properly zero the sights with this new system. Each vehicle went through the zeroing process multiple times while monitored by civilian contractors who taught the classes to the Marines.

The contractors were Raytheon employees that were instructors and the actual developers of the new systems. The company has been here for the past month and a half working with 3rd LAR making the upgrades and supervising Marines learning about the system.

3rd LAR is just snapping in with the new turrets, but they are already being put to use in Iraq by 2nd LAR.

"The upgrades began back in November of 2006," said Loren Demers, an electrical engineer and a native of McKinney, Texas.

The laser can target things at approximately 8,000 meters and gives access to many new features that weren't available on the old system. The new system makes firing much easier than before. The improved thermals are really clear. You can even see where people are sweating, as well as clearly inside a house, you can see a person moving.

"The ITSS is much more advanced than before," said Rice. "It has the capabilities to do all



LANCE CPL. MICHAEL NERL

Marines with Company D, 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, await their chance to shoot on the firing line and test out their new sights and turret system Saturday at Range 500. 3rd LAR recently received Improved Thermal Sight Systems and Electric Drive Turrets in their light armored vehicles.

the calculations for the gunner. There's a device that looks like a smokestack on the back part of the turret, that's used to calculate the wind variable for shooting. Also, the new laser reticle you aim with calculates distance to the target, and gives you a grid location for where the vehicle is and where

the target is, in case you need to call in for artillery fire, which I think is phenomenal. The range on the laser also is incredible. You can magnify up to 40 times, and that's quite a distance."

The new sights and electrical turret were looked at favorably by the Marines, and they were all

very much impressed with the system's capabilities.

The Wolfpack heads back to the field in October to sharpen their new teeth on their first gunnery qualification range with the new turrets and sights. They are scheduled to deploy next spring.



CPL. MICHAEL S. CIFUENTES

Marines with Company D, 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, stand in a school circle around one of the civilian contractors as he briefs them on their mission for the day's training.

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POW/MIA, from A1

rank of lieutenant during his imprisonment, spent six years as a prisoner in the Hanoi prison system until his release on Feb. 18, 1973.

As part of the ceremony, guest of honor Rear Adm. Christine S. Hunter, commander of Navy

Medicine West, Naval Medical Center San Diego, paid tribute to Bailey and all other service members who are or have been prisoners of war or missing in action.

Hunter, a native of Worcester, Mass., explained to the crowd that the National League of Families POW/MIA flag, which is flown

atop the Naval Hospital's flag pole, would also be flown over the Capital, the White House, the World War II Memorial, the Korean War Veterans Memorial, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and other locations across the country Sept. 19.

Hunter said the flag is a constant reminder of those service members who remain missing and a way to honor those who have been imprisoned while serving their country.

"We're grateful to those who continue to serve and wear the cloth of our nation," said Hunter. "In the words of the commander in chief, 'we remain in their debt.'"

After Hunter and Abblitt had finished, Bailey addressed the crowd and began by expressing his appreciation to all of those in atten-

dance, stating what an honor it was to be recognized before summarizing the events of June 28, 1967.

"I was on top of the world, and then it all came crashing down on that June day," said Bailey, a native of Kosciusko, Miss.

Bailey then expressed his relief that he was a bachelor at the time of his imprisonment and therefore did not put a wife and children through the mental pain of not knowing whether their loved one was alive or dead.

Bailey's message to the crowd was the importance of one's family and it's priority over most other things.

"Your family is probably the most precious thing you have, other than your service to your country," said Bailey. "I can think of nothing better you can do today

then kiss and hug your family." While Bailey lost six years of his life and freedom, he did not express regret or anger.

Instead he ended his speech not by asking for pity or compassion, but by reminding those in attendance about the honor and privilege in serving one's country.

"It's a calling to be in the military and to serve your country," said Bailey. "Remember that."



LANCE CPL. ZACHARY J. NOLA

Brig. Gen. Charles M. Gurganus salutes the Sideboys, who are part of Naval tradition, during the Robert E. Bush Naval Hospital Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Remembrance Ceremony Sept. 19 underneath the Naval Hospital's flag pole.

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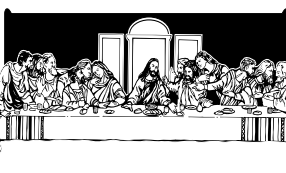
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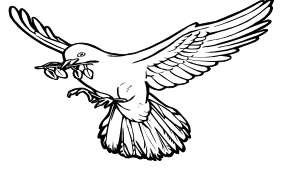
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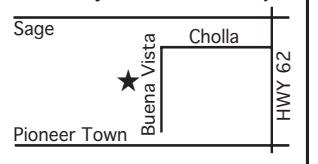
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Marines host 'shura' to address Afghan needs

CPL. STEVE CUSHMAN

2ND BATTALION, 7TH MARINE REGIMENT

HELMAND PROVINCE, Forward Operating Base Sangin, Afghanistan – At a patrol base near the Sangin District Center here, a group of Marines joined a “shura,” or meeting, held by local village leaders Sept. 3.

By participating in the shura, which is similar to a town hall meeting, the Marines can determine what the villagers need and identify the best ways to improve quality of life for local residents.

Since deploying here in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, Task Force 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, Combined Joint Task Force Phoenix, has focused its efforts on bringing peace and prosperity to the Afghan people. Organizing and working with local Afghans on various civil military operations projects is one of many tools used by civil affairs Marines to strengthen relations with local residents.

“The people think highly of the Afghan National Army; they want to support the government, and they want the Taliban out,” said Maj. Mark DeVito, team leader, 3rd Civil Affairs Group, TF 2/7, and a San Diego native. “As a community, they need to determine what affects the most people. They sometimes have a hard time working on the prioritization for the projects they want completed. Their biggest con-

cerns are improvements to irrigation and the renovation of several mosques.”

While the primary focus of the shura was to meet with Afghan leaders and adult males in the community, civil affairs Marines are also engaging young adult men in separate shuras. CAG Marines have found that trying to influence the young men is important because they feel they are more likely to be negatively influenced by the Taliban.

“We had around 20 young adults show up for the first teenage shura. One of the biggest things they all wanted was jobs. They were all willing to work,” said Cpl. Eric E. Cuevas, a civil affairs noncommissioned officer and Corona, Calif., native.

“When we asked them what they needed to benefit their community, they responded by saying a mosque. No matter how we tried to get around it, they kept saying they wanted more mosques,” Cuevas explained. “They also said they needed a water pump, because they haven’t had power for almost a month. We asked what other things they wanted, and they said they wanted a school.”

Helping the Afghans rebuild their schools is one of the Marines’ top initiatives, as education is very important to the local people. The parents all seem to understand the importance of education, and they want their children to go to school. Likewise, the teens and younger

children have also expressed a desire to return to school.

“The teens all said they wanted a school. They said they haven’t been going to school since the Taliban destroyed their school,” said Cuevas. “Out of the 20 kids that showed up for the teenage shura, only one was attending school.”

Another tool the CAG Marines have at their disposal is the Civil Affairs Transition Training Team, which teaches civil affairs practices to the

See SHURA, A14



CPL. STEVE CUSHMAN

Maj. Mark DeVito, team leader, 3rd Civil Affairs Group, TF 2/7, and a San Diego native, talks to local village leaders at Patrol Base Nabi during a shura held Sept. 3.

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SHURA, from A13

Afghan National Army, Nation Civil Order Police, which are all invited to accompany the CAG team during its patrols – a concept that proved effective in Iraq.

“We need to teach and mentor civil affairs operations to Afghan National Security Forces,” said Staff Sgt. Kelly R. Hughes, the CAG team chief and Carlsbad, Calif., native. “If we can teach them how we conduct business, they can monitor the projects, gather information from the villagers, and handle humanitarian aid. It’s just a process of teaching them the right way to do it.

“It’s working out here,” Hughes continued. “We’ve got our ANP officers with us. They’re going through the same motions as we are. Everything we do, they’re doing along with us – patrol briefs, debriefs and humanitarian aid. We just hope that it catches on. They’re starting to pick it up pretty well.”

The CAG team gets plenty of opportunities to host shuras and

train ANSF in civil affairs operations, as they are constantly meeting with local residents and checking on projects.

While shuras and other engagements with the local populace have resulted in a more meaningful relationship, the Marines have embarked on a host of other civil affairs projects aimed at educating the people, teaching and equipping doctors, and building roads to provide jobs and aid commerce. Showing its commitment to helping the Afghan people, TF 2/7 has conducted countless operations that are centered on creating a stronger foundation for Afghanistan’s future.

“The biggest thing is that we hit the ground constantly,” said Sgt. Brian A. Blumenthal, a civil affairs NCO and Corona, Calif., native. “We’re seeing a lot of success. It’s slow, but we can definitely see it. These people are trying to survive, because there is a heavy Taliban influence in the area. But, because we’re constantly going out, we’re getting the ‘fence sitters’ to turn to our side.”

TANKER, from A4

been handed down to him.

Popaditch explained that the Marine Corps promotes leadership as way of ensuring mission accomplishment and troop welfare.

While he made it clear mission accomplishment should be put above troop welfare, he also referred to the advice he was once given by a senior Marine who told him “the nation gives you their youth, but they want them back.”

“We take care of them by training them and bringing them back alive,” said Popaditch.

One piece of advice Popaditch, who was medically retired in May 2005 after 15 years of service, offered the junior Marines advice on handling the fear of making mistakes.

“Marines fear making a mistake more than anything else,” said Popaditch. “If you go through training and don’t make mistakes, you’re training was too easy.”

Popaditch stressed this piece of advice because in combat

situations Marines and sailors will be faced with hundreds of decision-making opportunities.

“Don’t be afraid to make decisions, don’t be afraid to make mistakes, don’t be afraid to act,” said Popaditch. “If you are completely confused and don’t know what to do, go straight at the enemy.”

Before closing his address, Popaditch spoke about the current insurgency in Iraq and what he believes will be key in undermining the insurgency’s ability to blend in with the local population.

“How do you fight this?” asked Popaditch. “By keeping your honor clean.”

Popaditch said by staying true to the Corps values and honor system, the civilian population can be won over and the insurgency will therefore be dealt a major blow.

“Once you win that civilian population over, that camouflage goes away,” said Popaditch. “Once you make contact with the enemy do not let him go, do

not let him get away.”

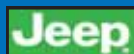
After a short question and answer session with Popaditch, Cpl. Nathan Fenton, a motor vehicle operator with Headquarters and Service Company, reflected on the war hero’s remarks.

Fenton, a Columbus, Ohio, native, said Popaditch’s speech was good for the junior Marines in the audience because he touched on such important things as combat mindset, preparation and making mistakes.

Cpl. Ryan Chambers, a tank commander with Headquarters and Service Company who served with Popaditch in Iraq said the message Popaditch spreads is not just important for him personally but for the newest generation of Marines.

“He makes me motivated; just the way he talks about the Marine Corps gives me a whole new look on it,” said Chambers, a native of Paso Robles, Calif. “He talks to the MTV generation and makes us realize how good we have it.”

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LANCE CPL. MONICA C. ERICKSON

Marines pay homage to in honor of Pfc. Ernie Villarreal during a memorial service Sept. 18 at the Combat Center's Catholic Chapel. Villarreal died Sept. 16 at Robert E. Bush Naval Hospital. He is survived by his wife, Wendy, and his three children, Haley, Maverick and Makayla.

MOURNS, from A1

and every one of us," said Prince. "We remember who they were and how they were, and we strive to become better because of them."

Tears ran down the faces of Villarreal's friends and family as Staff Sgt. Joel Daniel, Company B gunnery sergeant, Headquarters Battalion, played "Amazing Grace" on the bagpipes. The music echoed through the chapel.

As the music faded away, Lt. Col. Thomas Gordon, battalion commander, 1st Tanks, spoke to the congregation about Villarreal's life and his family.

"Each of us, in our own words and thoughts, are aware of the enormity of Ernie's life and death," said Gordon. "We can't take away the pain and trials but we can celebrate Ernie's life."

Gordon continued to speak about how Villarreal constantly looked out for his fellow Marines, regardless of their rank. He opened his house to the Marines and sailors of 1st Tanks if they wanted to do laundry or just relax

and watch football.

"I remember waking up at Ernie's house and his entire living room floor would be covered by sleeping Marines," said Lance Cpl. Edward Ramirez, weapons repairman, 1st Tanks.

Close friends of Villarreal were also asked to speak on behalf of his life and how he positively affected those who knew him.

"I feel bad for the people who will never have the privilege of meeting him," said Lance Cpl. Kyle Jackson, an infantry weapons repairer with Headquarters and Service Company. "He had the ability to talk to you and make all your problems and pains go away."

"We need more people like Ernie in this world," continued Jackson. Following the last speech, taps was played and everyone was given an opportunity to approach Villarreal's memorial stand for one last goodbye.

After the memorial service, 20 Marines traveled to El Paso for Villarreal's funeral and to support the family he left behind.

NCO, from A3

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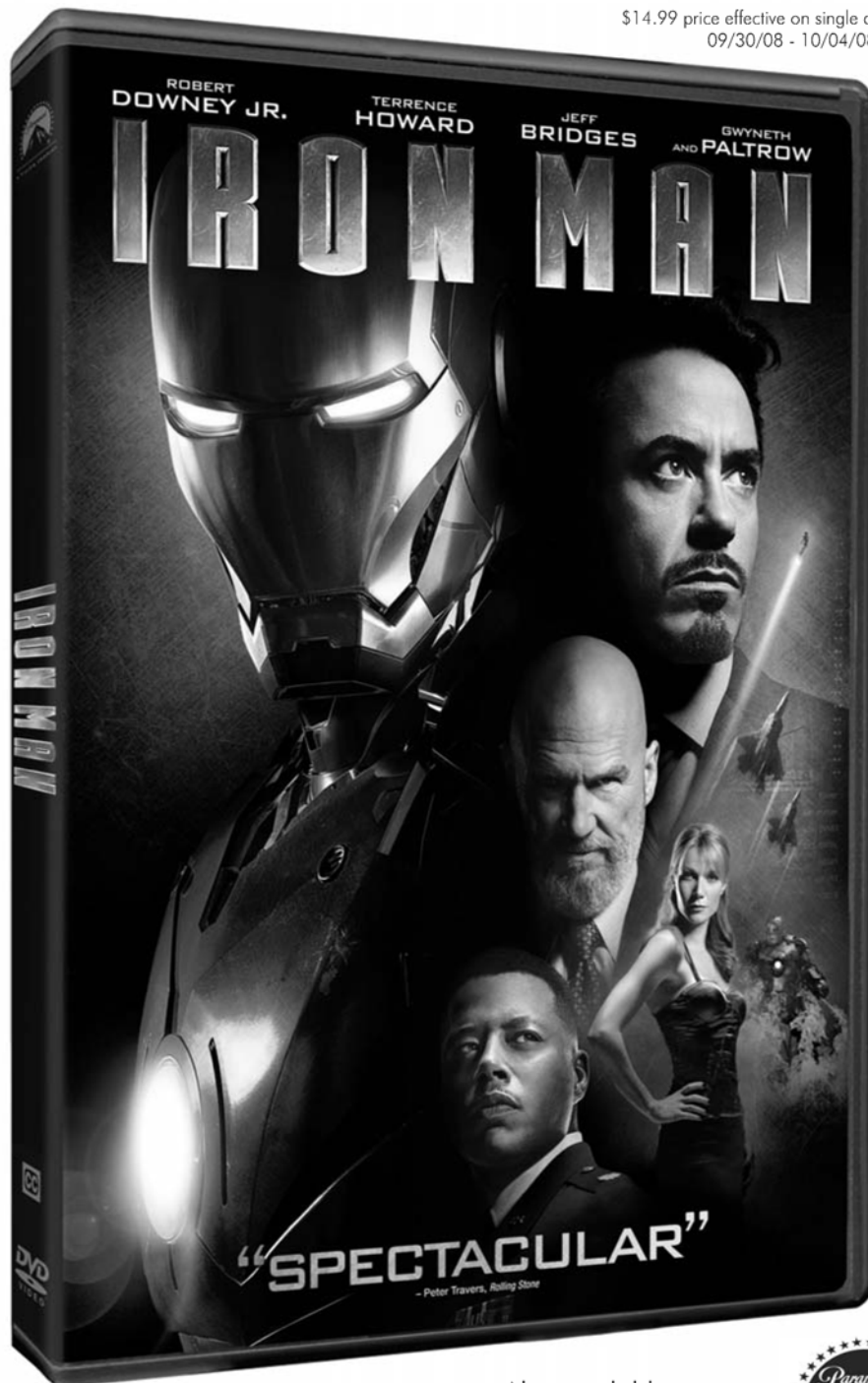
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