

OBSERVATION POST

MCAGCC TWENTYNINE PALMS



Kids scout for charity



LANCE CPL. LAUREN A. KURKIMILIS

T.K. Shelton, 9, Boy Scout Troop 78, encourages patrons to donate during a food drive outside the Commissary Dec. 17.

Boy, Cub Scouts serve community through can drive

LANCE CPL. LAUREN A. KURKIMILIS

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

As Combat Center Commissary patrons walked up to the store's entrance Dec. 17, they were greeted by boys from Cub Scout Pack 79 and Boy Scout Troop 78.

The children asked shoppers to think of families in need while shopping inside by purchasing food to donate.

"We collect non-perishable food to give to people that need it," said Boy Scout T.K. Shelton, age 9. As the day went on, the donations stacked up.

The scouts donated the food to the Armed Services YMCA. Marines who need this food can go down to the ASYMCA and pick it up.

"We do this every month that has five weekends in it," said Clint K. Blaul, scout master, Boy Scout Troop 78. "It helps out younger Marine families to make ends meet, and this food drive came at a good time with the holiday coming up."

More than two carts of food were filled up and hauled off in the four short hours the boys ran the food drive. Cans of corn, green beans and ravioli were donated as well as pasta, grits and cereal.

The Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts are known for helping the community, especially during the holidays.

"It feels good knowing we can help other families," said T.K., son of Capt. Marc Shelton, Electronic Fundamental Training Section training officer, Company A, Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School.

The Girl Scouts also did something similar this year.

"They held their own food drive called 'Caroling for Cans,'" Blaul said.

The girls went to various commands and houses, singing holiday tunes in exchange for canned goods. Their collection also went to the ASYMCA.

"Events like this give the kids a chance to get out there and learn a sense of community," said Capt. Shelton. "And they really enjoy it."

EARNING THE PURPLE HEART



CPL. ANDREW D. THORBURN

Cpl. Daniel J. Franke, K9 handler, Company A, Headquarters Battalion, smiles with Sgt. Maj. Robert Caldwell, III Marine Headquarters Group, III Marine Expeditionary Force, sergeant major, after Franke was awarded the Purple Heart Medal Dec. 15. Franke's parent command is IIII MHG, III MEF.

Story by Lance Cpl. Ali Azimi
Combat Correspondent

Last October, Cpl. Daniel J. Franke was on a mid-morning patrol in Afghanistan with his battalion. About 30 minutes into the patrol they arrived at a bridge. Engineers swept it and gave the sign for all clear. They were wrong.

Cpl. Daniel J. Franke walked across a bridge in Afghanistan unaware of the pressure plate ahead. There was an explosion, and he lost consciousness for a couple of seconds. When he woke up, he realized what had happened and that's when the pain set in.

Franke, K9 handler, Company A, Headquarters Battalion, lost his leg after stepping on that pressure plate.

"He is the most honest, hardworking guy I've ever met," said Cpl. Gary L. Ellbrecht, K9 handler, Co. A, HQBN. "I was devastated to hear what had happened."

In honor of what he had given in the line of duty, Franke was awarded the Purple Heart Medal in a ceremony Dec. 15 in front of the Combat Center's command deck.

"This denotes sacrifice; an individual that has made a tremendous sacrifice on behalf of our nation and our Corps," said Brig. Gen. George W. Smith, commanding general, Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center. "In this case today, Cpl. Franke"

A formation of Marines stood at the bottom of the flag pole in complete silence.

The Stars and Stripes waved high over the formation of Marines as the ceremony continued beneath it and Smith pinned the Purple Heart onto Franke's left breast pocket.

Afterward, everyone at the ceremony stepped up to Franke to shake his hand. There were no congratulations made, as most medals would encourage. The Purple Heart is a medal that demands honor and thanks, but not congratulations.

"When you wear this from this day forward, you are afforded an unprecedented level of respect," said Smith, addressing Franke directly. "You stand in a unique category."

In stark contrast to the solemn expressions on others' faces, Franke went through the ceremony with a smile. Before it had begun he was smiling and joking with the other Marines and after, he shook hands as if giving a leg for his country was no big deal.

"He's got a real positive outlook on everything," said Ellbrecht, who has known Franke since military police school. "He's probably just excited to get his artificial leg so he can get back on his Harley."



CPL. ANDREW D. THORBURN

Petty Officer 3rd Class Dannel Chozo, hospital corpsman, 23rd Dental Company, dances with an Atria Hacienda Senior Living resident during their Holiday Gala Dec. 16.

Sailors spend holiday party at retiree home

CPL. ANDREW D. THORBURN

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

PALM DESERT, Calif.— Sailors with 23rd Dental Company spread cheer to retirees living at Atria Hacienda Senior Living, in Palm Desert, Calif., during the home's annual Holiday Gala party Dec. 16.

The gala is the staff's gift to the residents. Combat Center sailors have volunteered their time with the residents for years.

"They always get very excited when I tell them we have sailors visiting," said Susan Maderick, engaged life director, Atria Hacienda. Having active duty military members visit means a little extra to a lot of the residents.

Many of them are veterans and they love

"They always get very excited when I tell them we have sailors visiting."

— Susan Maderick, engaged life director, Atria Hacienda Senior Living

sharing stories with the young men and women, said Ronald Bianchi, relative of a Atria Hacienda resident.

For the younger volunteers, this opportunity was more fulfilling than they originally planned.

"I got to eat a lot of good food and meet interesting people. I liked just learning about their different experiences that branch back to World War II," said Petty Officer 3rd Class Justin Cortes, hospital corpsman, 23rd Dental.

One of the residents impressed the service members in the group with stories of her time in the Marine Corps.

Laverne Collins was an active duty Marine from 1943 to 1945 as a chow hall worker. She also served as a bartender for the Women's Officers' Club and sorted some of the chow hall scraps John Wayne purchased to feed his cattle.

As everyone finished their dinners some went into another room and danced to classic holiday songs.

Maderick pointed out residents for the sailors to ask to dance.

As the sailors left the retirement home, the residents and staff reassured them that they are more than welcome to come back anytime.

"I am urging the gentlemen who have come before to continue coming because it is a joy to have them and they are just a great bunch of guys," Maderick said.

Tennis club fills truck with gifts for local children

LANCE CPL. ALI AZIMI

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

PALM DESERT, Calif.— The Toys for Tots annual toy drive has provided holiday cheer to less fortunate and needy children for more than 50 years, collecting donations around the country.

"These toys are helping kids," said Cpl. David A. Bernarl, supply clerk, 3rd Combat Engineer Battalion,

and Toys for Tots volunteer. "Helping one kid really makes a difference to them and their holidays."

As part of the drive held at the Deep Canyon Tennis Club, Sgt. Kevon D. Brown, supply chief, 3rd CEB, and Toys for Tots volunteer, and Bernal set out for the club in Palm Desert Dec. 16 to retrieve more than 100 toys donated by club members.

"The program has been going on here for six years,"

said Margo Munson, who established the Toys for Tots event at the tennis club.

Once the Marines arrived, they played a couple of rounds of tennis with a few members, who donated toys.

After, the Marines changed into dress blue uniforms to meet everyone.

Marines even took some pictures with them in front of the three tables, stacked with toys from end-to-end.

As Brown stood to thank

the club members for all their donations, the crowd of spectators surprised the two Marines as they began to sing the Marines hymn.

By the end of the day, a truck full of new toys was bound for needy children around the area.

"The Christmas spirit is about giving and caring," said Brown. "This program and the people who donated these toys have definitely helped in sharing that spirit."



LANCE CPL. ALI AZIMI

Sgt. Kevon D. Brown [left] and Cpl. David A. Bernarl, volunteers, Toys for Tots program, greet members of the Deep Canyon Tennis Club during the club's toy drive Dec. 16.

This Week in Combat Center History



Reprinted from the Observation Post dated December 16 1958, Vol. 2, No. 51

Vigilant "Sky Sweepers" Man Skies During Air Defense, Firing Problem

One of the Nation's major first line of defense units, the 1st 75mm "Skysweeper" Anti-Aircraft Artillery Gun Battalion, last week conducted a four-day tactical air-defense and firing exercise. Adding to the realism of the problem, the battalions' mission was to provide air defense for the Command Post of the constructive 5th Marine Division in its assault operations against aggressor enemy forces.

The area of operations, topographically similar to our own Mojave Desert, took place in the vicinity of the Sudan, an imaginary nation created for the political aspects of the problem.

Enemy Situation

In the early days of the operation, intelligence of the enemy situation disclosed ground forces consisting of 12 rifle battalions of infantry, supported by one air regiment, one Anti-Aircraft Artillery battalion, one rocket battalion and one medium tank battalion. When last reported, the enemy held the main line of resistance.

The operational situation placed the "Skysweeper" Battalion well within the range of all types of enemy aircraft, with the enemy retaining the ability to deliver both nuclear and general purpose ordinance. With these intelligence estimates on hand the battalion prepared for air defense, expecting to receive considerable air attacks in its area of defense in its routes of supply and communications.

Live Firing

Throughout the four days problem the "Skysweeper" Battalion, commanded by Major E. H. Mackel, tactically conducted air-defense exercises including live firing at drone targets.

The training was accented to include ability of accomplishing staff and maintenance functions under tactical conditions, rapid executions of emplacement and preparation for firing procedures, and establishing of local security.

FOOTNOTES

1. The 5th Marine Division was activated on Armistice Day, Nov. 11, 1943 and located at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif.

2. The division fought on Mount Suribachi Feb. 19 - Mar. 18, 1945, sustaining 1,098 killed in action and 2,974 wounded in action during the battle of Iwo Jima.

3. The division was deactivated Nov. 26, 1969.

Hot Topics

CG'S INTRAMURAL BASKETBALL

Sign up for the Commanding General's Intramural Basketball Competition. The deadline to sign up is Dec. 29. Active duty, family members, MCCS patrons and DoD personnel are eligible to participate. Call 830-4092 for more information.

2012 NEW YEAR BOWLING BASH

Join us at Sandy Hill Lanes for New Years Bash 2012, Dec. 31. Youth and teens are invited to come at 5-7 p.m. and adults 18 and older are welcome to come at 8:30 p.m. to 1 a.m. For the youth event the cost is \$6 per person or \$30 per lane. Adult prices are \$20 per person or \$90 per lane. For more information call 830-6422.

TAX CENTER OPENING

The Tax Center, Building 1428, will open Jan. 24, with extended hours during the tax season. The center provides free Federal and State tax preparation for eligible clients, including active duty and retired service members and their families. The appointment line will be operational Jan 1. Call 830-4TAX(4829).

GOLF SCHOOL BACK BY DEMAND

Starting Jan. 14 take part in adult golf lessons at the Desert Winds Golf Course. The six weeks of instruction are taught by a PGA Pro. The cost is \$100 for use of clubs, range balls and greens fees. For more information call 830-6132 or visit www.mccs29palms.com.



Eagle Eyes

Immediately report any suspicious activity which may be a sign of terrorism, including:

1. Surveillance
2. Suspicious questioning
3. Tests of security
4. Acquiring supplies
5. Suspicious persons
6. Trial runs
7. Deploying assets

830-3937



SEMPERTOONS: CREATED BY GUNNERY SGT. CHARLES WOLF, USMC/RET.

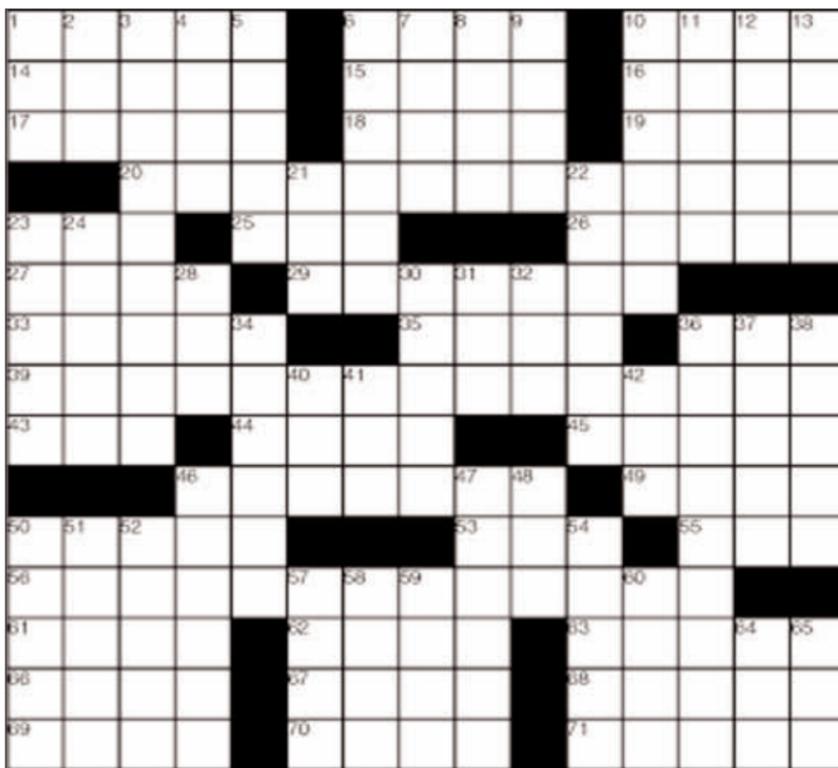
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CROSSWORD AND SUDOKU PUZZLES COURTESY OF © 2011 HOMETOWN CONTENT

SILLY STATES

[Puzzle solutions on A4]



- | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| ACROSS | DOWN | DOWN | DOWN |
| 1. Carbo-loader's fare | 45. Clutch, for one | 1. Mouse's milieu | 34. Gromyko or Sakharov |
| 6. Essen's region | 46. Rap sheet data | 2. Greeting to Galba | 36. Pillow filler |
| 10. Carbo-loader's fare, slangily | 49. "As you ___" | 3. Hymnals and such | 37. Rubberneck |
| 14. Steer clear of | 50. Pitch the ninth inning, maybe | 4. Yugoslav patriot | 38. Paparazzo's quarry |
| 15. Twin to Jacob | 53. Rubber-stamped | 5. Expert | 40. Astor's line |
| 16. Pitchfork prong | 55. Vicksburg fighter | 6. April 18, 1775 | 41. Sawbuck fraction |
| 17. Al ___ (1-Across order) | 56. Inquiry regarding a cute Indiana companion? | 7. ___-friendly | 42. Just out |
| 18. Three-piece suit part | 61. Singer Stuarti | 8. Biblical verb form | 46. Classify |
| 19. "___ bitten ..." | 62. Goneril's father | 9. Pitcher-turned-sluggler | 47. Steamy |
| 20. Try for first place in Minnesota? | 63. Oslo is located on one: Var. | 10. Cheap cigar | 48. Enjoy Vail |
| 23. Slap the cuffs on | 66. Antiquing agent | 11. Assign, as blame | 50. Tight-fisted |
| 25. "High ___" (Anderson play) | 67. Presidential daughter ___ Baines Johnson | 12. Fester or Wiggily | 51. "Ars __, vita brevis" |
| 26. Golf course halves | 68. Broncos great John | 13. Owners' papers | 52. Moves like the Blob |
| 27. Lotion additive | 69. Historian's interest | 21. Bricklayer's burden | 54. Put off |
| 29. Cold War follower | 70. Made like | 22. Lure into crime | 57. Cinders of the comics |
| 33. Plants | 71. Monopoly collections | 23. Gore/Perot debate topic | 58. Do another hitch |
| 35. Stereotypical lab assistant | | 24. Detective Pinkerton | 59. It's sometimes hard to keep a straight one |
| 36. "Go back!" on a PC | | 28. Before, to bards | 60. Aswan Dam river |
| 39. Considered true in New Hampshire? | | 30. Rubber, so to speak | 64. No-goodnik |
| 43. Ques. response | | 31. Heckler's missile | 65. Bad start? |
| 44. Sahara sight | | 32. Easter lead-in | |

Off-Limits Establishments

Combat Center personnel and their families are reminded that the off-limits establishments are:

IN TWENTYNINE PALMS:

STC Smoke Shop
6001 Adobe Road

Adobe Smoke Shop
6441 Adobe Road

IN PALM SPRINGS:

Village Pub
266 S. Palm Canyon Drive

IN YUCCA VALLEY:

Puff's Tobacco Mart
57063 29 Palms Highway

Yucca Tobacco Mart
57602 29 Palms Highway

For updated information on local and regional off-limits areas, visit:

<http://www.marines.mil/unit/29palms>

OBSERVATION POST

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WHAT I'VE LEARNED

THE LEGEND

ST. NICHOLAS
AKA SANTA CLAUS
AKA JOLLY OLD ST. NICK
 1,000 YEARS OLD, NORTH POLE

INTERVIEWED BY
SGT. HEATHER GOLDEN
 DEC. 20, 2011

PHOTOGRAPHED BY
CPL. ANDREW D. THORBURN

> **My favorite part of Christmas**, why I love it, is seeing the joy in children's faces as they open their gifts.
 > **I even leave** toys for the "naughty" children. Nobody is ever all bad.
 > **I would never actually** leave coal in someone's stocking. This is Christmas, a time for love and giving and forgiveness.
 > **I'm actually 1,000** years old. But I've celebrated my 300th birthday 700

times. 1,000 just seems so old.

> **It's all about magic.** I take fairy dust with me, sprinkle it around, and it's like the world stops. Everything is quiet.

> **I can bang around all I want, arranging the gifts** and getting down the chimney. I've even knocked over a tree. But nobody wakes up. It's all because of the magic I sprinkle around beforehand.

> **My sleigh** has gotten a little wider over the years. There are more kids in the world now.

> **I still fit everything** I need to into my bag. It's magic, like the one Mary Poppins has.

> **She got** that idea from me.

> **People who don't believe** in the magic of Santa anymore are just unhappy people. You have to be happy to really see all the wonder and joy of the season.

> **Time works differently** for me and the reindeer.

> **Everything happens all at once, like time stops** and goes really fast all at the same time. It's the magic of Christmas.

> **We never get lost** anymore.

> **We installed a GPS** in Rudolf's nose the day it was in stores.

> **The GPS** actually made his nose glow even redder.

> **Technology has made** my life so much easier. I don't even use a computer to organize all my lists anymore. I use my iPad.

> **I still couldn't get** everything done without the help of elves.

> **They are a mischievous little bunch**, always playing pranks and jokes on each other.

> **Building toys** really just keeps them out of trouble.

> **When the reindeer join in**, then it's a real mess.

> **Everybody here** is hundreds of years old, and they all act like children who've had too much sugar.

> **I get help** from all those mall Santas, too. They send me letters and text messages about what kids ask them for.

> **Even some grown-ups** sit on the mall Santas' knees.

> **Kids don't ask** for the old classics anymore. Firetrucks, dolls.

> **They all want** gadgets and gizmos.

> **The most popular gift request** this year was the Kindle Fire.

> **The other 364 days** of the year, I'm usually online shopping.

> **For vacations after the Christmas rush**, I go to places like mountains in Canada. I don't do well in warm places.

> **I update** my Excel spreadsheets of naughty and nice kids. But that's so much faster than using the ol' quill and parchment.

> **Even though I'm 10 centuries old**, I'm in the best shape of my life. There's more time to exercise now.

> **Mrs. Claus mostly makes** me casseroles, because they stay warm and sometimes I am home as the sun rises.

> **You know that commercial** with me drinking cans of Coca-Cola? It's funny, because I really prefer Pepsi.

> **The polar bears** up here don't drink Coke either. It's all just advertising.

> **Why red?** Same thing. You have to market yourself. It's all about branding. Red is kind of my thing now.

> **I love how holly berries** are bright red, even in the dead of winter. Maybe that's why I picked red.

> **My favorite cookies** are, of course, chocolate chip.

> **I love when** I can tell kids helped make the cookies. There's always a mess of frosting and sprinkles.

> **I never share my cookies.** I'm a generous spirit at heart, but I won't share cookies, not even with the reindeer.

> **Some houses even** leave snacks for the reindeer. They love that. Carrots and celery sticks. They'll eat all of it.

> **Their favorite treat is** celery with peanut butter and little raisins on top.

> **We grow all the reindeer's food** at the North Pole. I just use a little magic to keep it healthy, but no chemicals or pesticides. It's all organic.

> **All I want for Christmas** is a few days of rest and relaxation. I think that's the only thing I ever ask for myself.



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YouTube
 The Combat Center has its own YouTube channel. Find it at
<http://www.youtube.com/user/CombatCenterPAO>

flickr
 The Combat Center has its own Flickr photo and video streams. Find them at
<http://www.flickr.com/thecombatcenter>



Marines from 2nd Platoon, Lima Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment stand atop Patrol Base Barcha following a security patrol, Dec. 12. The Marines pictured (left to right) are Lance Cpl. James Blomstran and his improvised explosive device detection dog, Sage, Sgt. Matt Garst and Lance Cpls. Ryan Gerrity and Nicholas Dumke. The four Marines saved nine Afghans from a canal during a Dec. 2 night patrol. Near the end of their patrol, a vehicle carrying an Afghan family struck an Afghan National Army soldier and sent both plunging into the frigid canal. The ANA soldiers provided security while the 2nd Platoon Marines braved the swiftly moving current to recover the accident victims.



[Above] Sgt. Matt Garst, a 23-year-old squad leader with 2nd Plt., Co. L, 3/3, pauses during a security patrol Dec. 12, along the canal from which he and his Marines previously rescued nine Afghans.

[Below] Sgt. Matt Garst, speaks with a local man about irrigation during a security patrol Dec. 12.



Marines plunge into frigid canal to save nine Afghans

**STORY AND PHOTOS BY
CPL. REECE LODDER**

REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM-5, 1ST MARINE DIVISION

LOYA DARVISHAN, HELMAND PROVINCE, Afghanistan — Dimly illuminated by a sliver of moonlight, eight shadowy figures quietly patrolled a gravel road set against a swiftly flowing canal.

At the front of the squad, Afghan National Army soldier, Zaheed, deliberately moved a metal detector from side to side, cautiously sweeping the road for improvised explosive devices. Fellow ANA soldiers and Marines from 2nd Platoon, Lima Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, followed closely behind.

As daylight fell into dusk Dec. 2, they had departed Patrol Base Barcha to resupply Marines at a nearby observation post. With their mission complete, the partnered patrol trekked through the chilly night back toward the PB.

A vehicle approached, and its once-distant headlights rapidly became larger. Zaheed stopped sweeping and stepped into the middle of the road. He waved his arms and yelled for it to stop, but the driver seemed to be unaware.

The vehicle barreled toward the patrol and became uncomfortably close, so Zaheed stepped to the left and reached for his weapon. The speeding driver panicked, swerved the same way and smashed into him. Both plunged into the canal.

“When the vehicle hit Zaheed, I thought briefly, ‘What if this was one of my

Marines?’” said Sgt. Matt Garst, a 23-year-old squad leader from Charlotte, N.C.

Garst shouted for his Marines to drop their gear. He instructed three ANA soldiers to provide security and jumped into the frigid, murky water as the vehicle rapidly submerged beneath it.

“I saw the problem, saw the security we needed and sent everyone else into the canal,” Garst said.

Lance Cpl. James Blomstran wanted to jump in, but accompanied by his IED detection dog, Sage, decided to stay and provide security. Lance Cpls. Ryan Gerrity and Nicholas Dumke jumped in behind Garst.

“It took a split second to realize what happened,” said Dumke, a 20-year-old rifleman from Huron, S.D. “We train for firefights, not for a vehicle going into a canal ... we just snapped into reacting to a high-stress situation and did what we had to do.”

Gerrity grabbed the ANA soldier and swam to shore. To no avail, Dumke fought against the wild, sweeping current. He returned to the shore, grabbed a four-foot piece of cloth and began pulling a child in, and then a man.

Garst reached the vehicle as passengers struggled to exit the shattered windshield. He saw two women and an infant drowning. He dove beneath the surface to push them above water, wrapped them in his arms and kicked toward shore.

Gerrity and Blomstran used a sickle stick, a bamboo pole used to detect IED wires, to bring in another woman and child. Garst quickly returned to the vehicle, grabbed a

man and dragged him to safety. He pulled himself onto the shore and then drew out Gerrity and Dumke.

Protected by Blomstran and the ANA security, Gerrity treated the injured Zaheed.

“The vehicle’s windshield had shattered from his head,” Gerrity, a 21-year-old fire team leader and native of Cranford, N.J., said. “I didn’t know what injuries he might’ve had, so I wanted to help him right away.”

Gerrity grabbed a heavy, boxy electronic countermeasure device the Marines had been carrying and elevated Zaheed’s shattered left ankle. He then dug a gauze wrap out of his first aid kit, using it to cover several lacerations on the soldier’s head.

Out of the canal, the Marines quickly donned their gear. In the absence of an interpreter, Garst used hand signals and his limited Pashto vocabulary to ask the driver if his entire family was now safe. They counted two men, three women, two children and an infant. The man nodded ‘yes’.

“Once we got the family out and on the shore, I felt good ... like I hadn’t let anybody down,” Garst said.

Zaheed was badly injured, so Garst aided Gerrity in treating him. Using what was available, Garst removed two antennas from a communication device. He fashioned a makeshift splint by setting them alongside Zaheed’s shattered ankle and wrapping it with gauze.

As Garst radioed in the casualty report to PB Barcha, Gerrity stopped a passing vehicle and asked the driver to take Zaheed there, escorted by fellow ANA soldier Zakirullah.

The patrol returned to the PB with the driver of the submerged vehicle to speak with an interpreter and ensure all the passengers had gotten out. Meanwhile, Garst had the rest of the family stay with a neighbor in a compound close to the canal.

Only an hour after the accident, a helicopter arrived to evacuate Zaheed to Camp Dwyer’s Combat Support Hospital.

Though the people they helped didn’t wear the Marine uniform, all that mattered was that lives needed to be saved, Garst said. The Marines were ready to do “whatever it takes.”

“We don’t really train for a situation like this, besides doing vehicle rollover drills,” Garst said. “Even so, we weren’t the ones trapped ... it was other people. The Marines didn’t hesitate for their own safety at all. They helped those who needed it at the time.”

Upon mention of the word ‘hero,’ the Marines of 2nd Plt., Co. L, smile and shake their heads. They say they’re just Marines, men “ingrained with a willingness to help people and who think on their feet under high stress,” said Blomstran, a 22-year-old native of Cortland, Ohio.

“If any one of the Marines from our platoon was put in that situation, they would’ve done the same thing,” his friend Gerrity added. Their confidence is echoed by the rest of the platoon, and the Afghan soldiers they’re working hard to mentor are noticing.

“We’re proud to serve with the 2nd Platoon Marines,” Zakirullah said. “They’re training us well but we’re also improving because of their example. The Marines are warriors and heroes for saving those lives.”

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WeekINPhotos

Regimental Combat Team 8



CPL. TOMMY BELLEGARDE

[Above] Cpl. Jeffery Rice, squad leader with 3rd Plt., C Co., 1/6, enjoys a lighter moment during a security patrol. Rice, who previously participated in 2010's Operation Moshtarak, said he has noticed tremendous improvements in the security and development of Marjah district since the operation's completion.



CPL. TOMMY BELLEGARDE

Marines with 3rd Platoon, Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, patrol through a cotton field. The platoon conducts frequent patrols to maintain security in the area of Marjah.

[Below] 1st Lt. Edward Yoo, platoon commander with 1/6, speaks to a gathering of village elders during a shura at Patrol Base Florida, Dec. 1. The Marines of Co. A, 1/6, hold routine shuras, encouraging the local citizens to attend and voice their concerns over a wide range of issues, from education to security.



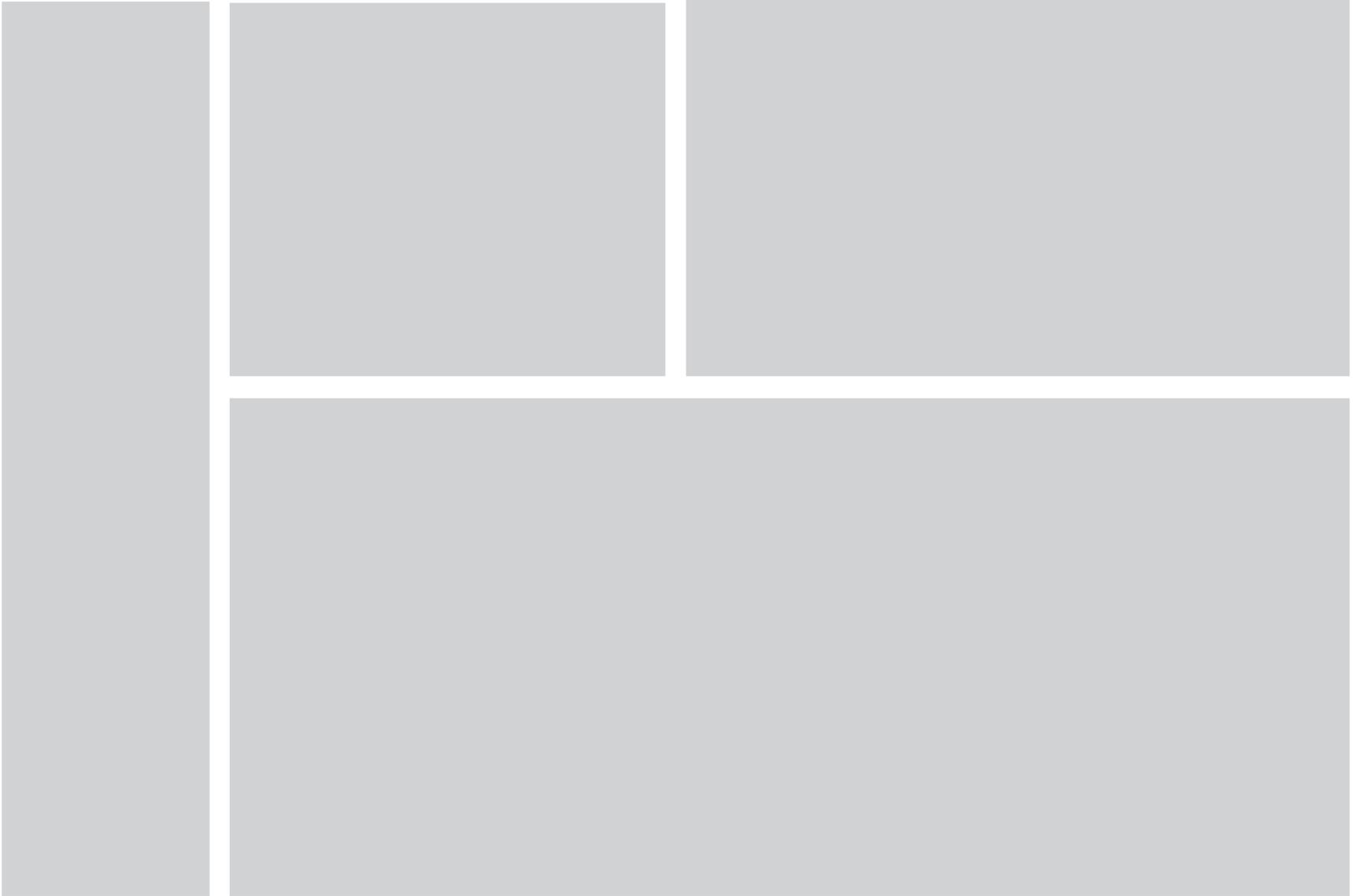
CPL. JAMES CLARK



CPL. JAMES CLARK

A group of children take part in a hygiene class at Patrol Base Florida, Dec. 1. The Marines of Co. A, 1/6, hold routine shuras, encouraging the local citizens to attend and voice their concerns over a wide range of issues, from education to security.

	<p>The Combat Center has its own YouTube channel Find it at http://www.youtube.com/user/CombatCenterPAO.</p>
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CPL ALFRED LOPEZ

NAWA DISTRICT, Helmand province, Afghanistan – An Afghan National Army soldier with Route Clearance Company, 1st ANA Brigade, sweeps a road for improvised explosive devices during a route clearance mission, Dec. 12. Marines of Alpha Company, 3rd Combat Engineer Battalion, train the ANA on proper route clearance tactics.

Platoon keeps Nawa roads IED-free

CPL ALFRED V. LOPEZ

REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM-5, 1
ST MARINE DIVISION

NAWA DISTRICT, HELMAND PROVINCE, Afghanistan— Beneath dusty roads lies a silent danger that is, perhaps, the last remaining threat posed by a decidedly weak insurgency in southern Helmand.

Afghan National Army soldiers with 1st Brigade, 215th Corps Route Clearance Company are currently working to keep southern Helmand roads clear of improvised explosive devices with the help of Marines and sailors of Alpha Company, 3rd Combat Engineer Battalion.

IEDs have become ingrained in the American and Afghan consciousness over a decade of conflict. During this time, coalition and Afghan forces have become increasingly adept at defeating this device.

“This is mainly their

show,” said Sgt. Mark Mirarchi, squad leader with Co. A, 3rd CEB and 24-year-old native of Philadelphia. “We’re just here to support them from an overwatch position.”

The ANA have taken the lead in route clearance operations throughout southern Helmand, running over 200 partnered missions and sweeping around 1000 kilometers of road with their Marine mentors.

“We have worked in various districts with them,” said Gunnery Sgt. James L. Peebles, platoon sergeant with Co. A, 3rd CEB and native of St. Louis, Mo. “We run missions from here in Nawa, Garmsir and Marjah.”

During route clearance missions, Afghan boots are first to hit the ground, moving to the front, and employ the IED detection, examination and disposal tactics they’ve learned from their Marine counterparts.

“They take the lead on

the most dangerous portion of the job,” said Sgt. Coby Bendig, squad leader with Co. A, 3rd CEB and 23-year-old native of Fremont, Neb. “We have one or two Marines go out with them just to guide them and provide security for them.”

During a dismounted patrol, an ANA soldier takes on the role of a point man; he sweeps the potentially dangerous path with a combat metal detector, staying alert for other telltale signs of IEDs.

If the CMD beeps, indicating a metallic hit, the point man backs away and another soldier comes forward and uses a sickle to carefully examine the threat.

“They’re very tactical and they employ what we teach them,” said Mirarchi. “Their sweeps are slow and deliberate, and they don’t rush through the process.”

Through Marine guidance and training, ANA soldiers have become proficient and, perhaps more impor-

tant, self-assured in their route clearance capabilities.

“We’re happy to have the Marines here,” said 1st Lt. Ghulam Ali, platoon commander with the ANA 1st Brigade, 215th Corps Route Clearance Company. “They’ve trained us on how to find the IEDs, and what to do once we’ve found them.”

With every sweep of the CMD, the confidence of Marines in the abilities of their Afghan counterparts grows.

“At first, they weren’t too confident with their own abilities,” said Bendig. “Now, they’re a lot more poised, they’re very familiar with IED indicators, and they know how to sweep an area properly.”

The confidence of Afghan soldiers is the key to their success.

“Our job is very dangerous,” said Ali. “But we’re happy to be able to do our job and we feel really good doing it because we know it saves people’s lives.”

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Incoming



CPL ANDREW D. THORBURN

1st Marine Division staff land on the Combat Center's Lance Cpl. Torrey L. Gray Field Dec. 16, 2011, for a conference with battalion commanding officers and sergeants major within the 7th Marine Regiment. Maj. Gen. Ronald L. Bailey, commanding general, 1st MarDiv, was also present. The field, located outside the command deck on base, was chosen for its ease of access to and from the meeting's location.

Marines bring Santa to isolated village

**LANCE CPL. MARTIN
PLATEK**

MARINE FORCES RESERVE

GRAND CANYON, Ariz.— As the red Arizona soil cloud cleared from the sky, the Havasupai tribe people turned around and looked toward the loud swooshing sounds.

They had been protecting themselves from the dust stirred up by the CH-46E Sea Knight helicopters flying into the center of their village. The children cheered not only for the Marines, but the very special guest they had been waiting for.

When one of the crewmen lowered the stairs to the helicopter, a big jolly man, in a red suit and white beard, made his way down. The kids and adults started to wave at a friend they knew very well.

With the help of the Reserve Marines from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 764, veterans from the Flagstaff Marine League Charities, Flagstaff Toys for Tots organization and different civilian charities, St. Nick traveled to the bottom of the Grand Canyon Dec. 14 to deliver toys during Operation Havasupai.

“The operation would never happen if the Marines would not do this for us,” said Christine McGee, coordinator, Northern Arizona Marine Corps League. “Supai is such a remote location and the only access to Supai is by foot, mule or helicopter.” McGee is the one responsible for coordinating with the squadron for this operation.

The trail to the village is not easy. For the Marines flying in, the canyon poses its own unique challenges.

During an earlier delivery attempt Dec. 12, HMM-764 “Moonlighter” Marines had to turn back due to bad weather. A two-day storm made it impossible for them to fly in as it dropped more than a foot of snow.

“With all the fog and clouds, they said it was unsafe to fly so we turned around and flew home,”

said Sgt. Christopher Morris, airframes mechanic, HMM-764.

Finally, on a third attempt, four helicopters flew back with hopes of helping Santa deliver toys to about 150 Havasupai children in the village.

“It’s just awesome to come out here and see what this is all this is about,” Morris said.

The Supai village is home to more than 400 permanent Havasupai tribesmen, women and children.

The Havasupai people are the most remote and isolated tribe in the United States.

This is the sixteenth year the Flagstaff Toys for Tots organization and the Marines have flown in to visit them.

In addition to toys, Marines also flew in Christmas trees, crates of food, firewood and other supplies provided by two charities, the St. Mary’s Food Bank and The Friends from Utah.

“The amount that we provide to the tribe has grown in size and quantity when we realized that we could provide them with more than just a Christmas tree and toys,” said McGee, who has been doing the event for 13 years with her husband, retired Lt. Col. James McGee, who passed away last year.

“We evolved to providing them other necessities,” she said.

The operation had brought much needed help and Christmas spirit to the children here as they have next to nothing, said Roland Manakaja, the tribe’s wisdom keeper. This year the children were growing especially impatient as the event faced possible cancellation due to weather. The operation has grown into somewhat of a Christmas tradition for the tribe.

“The warrior birds, eagles, were flying around this morning, and that was a good sign,” he said “They told us you guys were coming, the warriors.”

Despite all the obstacles, the warriors did arrive this year, bringing with them happy holidays to the most isolated tribe in America.



PHOTOS BY SGT. ALVIN D. PARSON

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 764, 4th Marine Aircraft Wing, delivered Santa Claus, Richard E. McCallum, and toys to the children of the Havasupai tribe. HMM-764 joined the Flagstaff Community Toys For Tots organization to complete Operation Havasupai.



A young boy of the Havasupai tribe wrestles with his father for a gift bag flown into the Grand Canyon by HMM-764.



HMM-764 flew CH-46E helicopters into the Grand Canyon during Operation Havasupai. HMM-764’s mission was to join the Flagstaff Community Toys For Tots organization in delivering Santa Claus and toys to children of the Havasupai tribe, as well as conduct training operations throughout the Grand Canyon.



Golfing around the palm tree



Connor Aucoin drives the ball onto the green during the Commanding General's Holiday Four-Person Golf Tournament Dec. 13 at the Desert Winds Golf Course.

■ Holiday golf brings friends together

STORY AND PHOTOS BY CPL ANDREW D. THORBURN
COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

Golfers combined their love of the game with their sense of giving during the Commanding General's Holiday Four-Person Golf Tournament Dec. 13 at the Desert Winds Golf Course. Along with their entrance fee, participants could also bring along a donation for the Toys for Tots collection box. Although bringing a gift was optional, the golfers filled two of the golf course's barrels with toys for the children.

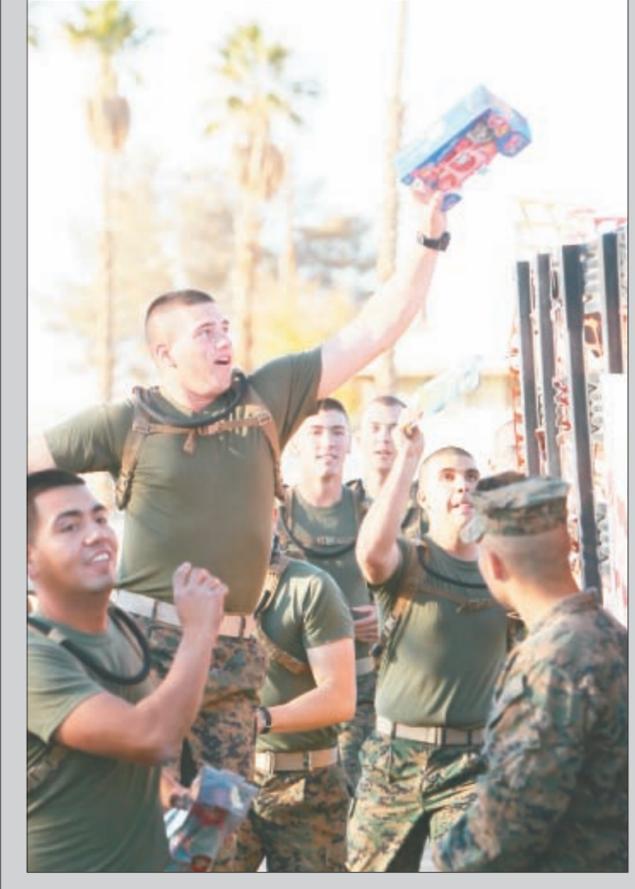
The outpour of generosity is not uncommon for the annual event, said Todd Wade, course pro, Desert Winds Golf Course. "This is a great event that I also played in last year," said golfer Jeremy Putasu. "It is a great time to come out with friends and enjoy a day of golf." The holiday tournament was a four-person scramble, allowing participants of all skill levels to participate and have a good time. "You don't have to have a good golfer on the team," Wade said. "As long as you have one or two it is fun for everyone." Even a constant chilly drizzle could

not suppress the festive spirit. "It's a light rain and not that heavy so if they move around it's not so bad, and we have not had any complaints," Wade said. "It didn't affect them too much and they could still have a good time." After the golfers completed the course, they waited in the lobby for scores to be counted and the winners to be announced. Once all the scores had been calculated the winning team was Jim Sanderson, George Schadegg, Patrick Steeve and Scott Stanley with a total score of 63.



Ron Genet shows off his skill by successfully putting the ball with an umbrella in his other hand at the Desert Winds Golf Course.

Charity fun run



PHOTOS BY DIANE DURDEN

[Above] Santa Claus salutes a long formation of students with the Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School as they run to drop off Toys for Tots donations in front of the Combat Center's command deck Dec. 9. **[Left]** A MCCES student jumps to dunk his gift into the back of a collection truck.



Liberty Call

Combat Center Clubs

Excursions Enlisted Club

Friday: Social Hour with food, 5 - 7 p.m. followed by DJ Gjettblaque, 8 - 11 p.m., Ladies Night
 Saturday: Variety Night, DJ Gjettblaque 8 - 11 p.m.
 Sunday: Football coverage, 10 a.m. - 10 p.m.
 Monday: Monday Night Football coverage, 5:30 p.m.
 Thursday: Social Hour, 7:30 - 9:30 p.m.

Bloodstripes NCO Club

Friday: Social Hour with food, 5 - 7 p.m.
 Monday: Monday Night Football coverage, 5:30 p.m.
 Wednesday: Free gourmet bar food, 5 to 7 p.m.
 Thursday: Social Hour, 7 - 9 p.m.

Hashmarks 29 SNCO Club

Friday: Social Hour, 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.
 Monday-Friday: Lunch from 10:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.
 Monday: Steak night and full menu, 4:30 - 7:30 p.m.
 Tuesday: Social Hour, 5 - 7 p.m.
 Thursday: Social Hour, 5 - 7 p.m.

Combat Center Officers' Club

The Combat Center's Officer's Club will be closed from Dec. 21 to Jan. 12 for repairs and upgrades.

For complete calendars visit <http://www.mccs29palms.com>.

Local Events

Rock - Roll New Years Hoe-Down with The Farmers!

Live Music and New Year's Eve celebrations
 When: Saturday, Dec. 31
 Where: Pappy & Harriet's Pioneertown Palace
 53688 Pioneertown Rd., Pioneertown
 for more information visit:
<http://www.pappyandharriets.com> or call 365-5956.

Christmas Light Show

Fun for the whole family
 When: Daily from 5 - 10 p.m., until Jan. 3, 2012
 Where: Sunnyvale Garden Suites Hotel
 73843 Sunnyvale Drive, Twentynine Palms, Calif.
 Tune your radio to FM 88.7 and watch more than 22,000 lights dance to the music.

Free Line Dance Lessons

Learn to dance to traditional country music
 When: 5 - 9 p.m., every Sunday
 Where: Willie Boy's Saloon and Dance Hall
 50048 29 Palms Hwy, Morongo Valley, Calif.
 For more information, call 363-3343.

Lower Desert

Patti Labelle

Live performance of holiday music
 When: 9 p.m., Fri, Dec. 30
 Where: Agua Caliente
 32-250 Bob Hope Dr., Rancho Mirage
 For more information call 888-999-1995 or visit
<http://hotwatercasino.com>.

Golden Boy Boxing

Live boxing put on by Oscar de la Hoya's Golden Boy promotions
 When: 6:30 p.m., Fri, Jan. 6th
 Where: Fantasy Springs Resort Casino
 84-245 Indio Springs Parkway, Indio
 For more information call 800-827-2946 or visit
<http://www.fantasyspringsresort.com>.

Tower of Power

Live performance of the funk & soul group.
 When: 8 p.m., Sun, Jan. 1
 Where: Morongo Casino Resort and Spa
 49500 Seminole Drive, Cabazon, Calif.
 For more information call 800-252-4499 or visit
<http://www.morongocasinosort.com>.

Smokey Robinson

Live classic R&B and soul performance
 When: 9 p.m., Friday, Jan. 14
 Where: Spotlight 29 Casino Resort
 46-200 Harrison Place, Coachella, Calif.
 For more information call 866-377-6829 or visit
<http://www.spotlight29.com>.

Sunset Cinema

Friday, Dec. 23
 2 p.m. - **Free Matinee** The Grinch Rated PG
 6 p.m. - Johnny English, Rated PG
 9 p.m. - 3 Musketeers, Rated PG-13
 Midnight - Paranormal Activities, Rated R
Saturday, Dec. 24
 11 a.m. - **Free Matinee** Home Alone, Rated PG
 2 p.m. - Jack and Jill, Rated PG
 6 p.m. - Tower Heist, Rated PG-13
 9 p.m. - In Time, Rated PG-13
 Midnight - Immortals, Rated R
Sunday, Dec. 25
 2 p.m. - Puss in Boots, Rated PG
 6 p.m. - Jack and Jill, Rated PG-13
 9 p.m. - Immortals, Rated R

Sunset Cinema will open weekends Dec. 14 - Jan 6.

YouTube The Combat Center has its own YouTube channel Find it at <http://www.youtube.com/user/CombatCenterPAO>.

Director Martin Scorsese creates a dazzling dreamscape of mesmerizing movie magic



COURTESY PHOTO

The story unfolds inside a massive train terminal teeming with characters, including a bitter shopkeeper played by Ben Kingsley, who turns out to be someone far more interesting, an overly officious station inspector played by Sasha Baron Cohen, and the shopkeeper's mystery-loving stepdaughter played by Chloë Grace Moretz, who unknowingly holds the key, quite literally to unlocking the movie's central puzzle.

NEIL POND

AMERICAN PROFILE

"Hugo"

Starring Asa Butterfield & Chloë Grace Moretz
 Directed by Martin Scorsese
 126 min., PG

Historical fiction is a literary format that combines something that happened with something that didn't.

The award-winning 2007 children's book on which the new movie "Hugo" is based is a fanciful fictional tale of an orphan boy in 1930s Paris whose life fatefully intersects with a real-life person, pioneering filmmaker Georges Méliès.

The family-friendly "Hugo" might seem like a bit of a departure for director Martin Scorsese, a masterful moviemaker known for the grown-up grit and gristle of mean-street crime dramas like "Goodfellas," "The Departed" and "Casino." But Scorsese clearly has found a story close to his own film-loving, storytelling heart, a soaring, imaginative yarn about an intertwined mystery, a life-changing

discovery, and the enduring, mesmerizing marvel of the movies.

The story unfolds inside a massive train terminal teeming with characters, including a bitter shopkeeper (Ben Kingsley) who turns out to be someone far more interesting, an overly officious station inspector (Sasha Baron Cohen), and the shopkeeper's mystery-loving stepdaughter (Chloë Grace Moretz), who unknowingly holds the key---quite literally---to unlocking the movie's central puzzle.

The station is also home to Hugo (Asa Butterfield), who hides from the inspector in the labyrinth of unseen workspaces behind the walls. There he's learned how to maintain the terminals' many clocks, keeping their gigantic gear wheels turning.

Hugo's also been working on restoring an automaton, a wind-up mechanical man once used in magic shows, but it's missing a crucial part. The automaton becomes essential to bringing the fragmented pieces of Hugo's hard-scrabble childhood wondrously together---like the interworking cogs that once made the mechanized man spring

to precise, clockwork life.

"Hugo" is a visual knockout, with some of the most dazzling, perfectly integrated, audience-engaging 3-D effects of any movie in recent years. Snowflakes seem to waft off the screen and into the theater. Foot chases through the terminal become exhilarating, virtually interactive adventures. In one scene, the station inspector leans ever closer to the camera, seemingly probing deeper into the audience with each thrust of his head.

Film buffs will love the movie's exuberant homage to the work of Georges Méliès, an early filmmaking innovator who staged wildly imaginative flights of fancy---trips to the moon, voyages to undersea kingdoms---and filmed them on a homemade set with cameras of his own invention.

"If you ever wondered where your dreams come from," he tells one wide-eyed character as he prepares a scene, "this is where they're made."

"Hugo" is a lovely, lavishly constructed dreamscape of long-ago movie magic, told with a spectacular flourish of modern-day movie magic all its own.

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12/20 - 7:00 PM MISSION IMPOSSIBLE (PG-13) 1:30, 4:00, 6:30, 9:00	12/21 - 12/29 THE ADVENTURES OF TIN TIN (PG) 1:30, 4:00, 6:30, 9:00	12/21 - 12/29 SHERLOCK HOLMES (PG-13) 1:30, 4:00, 6:30, 9:00	12/21 - 12/29 ALVIN & THE CHIPMUNKS (G) 1:30, 4:00, 6:30, 9:00	

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