

OBSERVATION POST

MCAGCC TWENTYNINE PALMS

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STRENGTHENING BONDS From across the border



LANCE CPL. D. J. WU

Canadian Cpl. Gabriel Dufou, Squadron B, 12th Regiment Blinde du Canada translated as 12th Armored Regiment of Canada, and U. S. Marine Lance Cpl. Daniel Gwiazdowski, 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, await their next orders in their LAV-25 Jan. 14. They were participating in a joint rehearsal exercise known as Desert Fighter/Baroudeur at the Combat Center's training area.

Lance Cpl. D. J. Wu
Combat Correspondent

The Combat Center's unique desert environment and vast training grounds have attracted international military communities around the globe to train with Marines in an environment similar to one they would find in the battlefields of the Middle East.

Squadron B, 12th Regiment Blinde du Canada, or, the 12th Armored Regiment of Canada, is the latest foreign unit to come to the Combat Center for some cross-training.

The Canadian Forces' 12th ARC, based out of Canadian Forces Base Valcartier, Quebec, specializes in their use of light armored vehicles.

The 12th ARC worked with the 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion during the exercise.

Both countries had plenty to gain from the cross training opportunity.

The Marines of 3rd LAR had the chance to work with the country that invented the LAV-25, the battalion's primary vehicle of operation.

The Canadian soldiers trained in an environment that they couldn't replicate in their home country.

When not actively engaging in the exercise, the service members talked about what they had in common—their vehicles.

Trooper Mathieu Lachance, LAV crewman, 12th ARC, enjoyed the change in training venues.

"I really like the heat and the size of the training area," Lachance said. "We don't get either of those things back in Canada."

The unique aspect about these two units is that the few

See **BROTHERS**, A8



LANCE CPL. D. J. WU

Canadian Lt. Jayme Lelerc, 12th ARC, goes over a map with his Marine counterpart during an exercise.

Tax Center to open next week

LANCE CPL. ALI AZIMI

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

The Combat Center offers free tax preparation services for active duty, retirees and military families.

Each base tax preparer completes a two-week course with the IRS. These are the same qualifications commercial tax preparers are required to meet.

Clients need to bring their W-2, social security card and military ID. Those with children also need to bring in the child's social security card. Bring in all other paperwork, like receipts, for miscellaneous claims.

Couples filing jointly need to come in together, or have a power of attorney granting rights to file on behalf of their spouse. Those filing for deployed spouses also need a power of attorney. If opting for an electronic deposit, clients need their bank's routing number and checking account number.

Deadline to file is April 17 this year. April 15 falls on a Sunday. Deployed members have a one-year extension.

The center opens Jan. 24, weekdays from 7:30 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. at Bldg. 1428. There is a plan to open a location at Camp Wilson to make it easier for Marines training in the field to file.

For more information, or to make an appointment, call 830-4TAX.

New online course required for staff NCO promotions

LANCE CPL. ALI AZIMI

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

There is a new prerequisite to the requirements for promotion from gunnery sergeant to first sergeant or master sergeant.

Gunnery sergeants must now complete the Advanced Course Distance Education Program on MarineNet prior to taking the Resident Advanced Course as a requirement for promotion, as stated in MARADMIN 729/11, released Dec. 11, 2011.

The ACDEP replaced the Marine Corps Institute Staff Noncommissioned Officer Academy Distance Education Program as a means to better prepare Marines for the advanced course.

Marines will also be required to complete advanced course within one year of taking the ACDEP. Those who do not complete the ACDEP within the allotted time must retake the online course.

Enrollment is only open to gunnery sergeants and above. Marines must enroll on MarineNet with a proctor present before taking the exam.

The course automatically enrolls Marines into five sub-courses covering 18 lessons. It utilizes computer-based training technology and provides interactive and multimedia support.

The original course was discontinued Jan. 16. Those currently enrolled have until June 30 to complete the course.

For more information, refer to MARADMIN 729/11.

Officers' Spouses' Club gets big boost in scholarship donations

LANCE CPL. D.J. WU

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

With recent cutbacks to military tuition assistance, scholarships and grants are at a premium.

The Officers' Spouses' Club Twentynine Palms awards scholarships to children and spouses of service members in the Morongo Basin every year.

In the past year, donations from charitable organizations gave the club a big boost to their scholarship program.

"We've had recent donations from the War Casualty Family Assistance Fund and the American Friends of our Armed Forces

that have enhanced the number of people we can reach through our scholarships," said Julianne Wilson, president, OSC Twentynine Palms.

The War Casualty Family Assistance Fund is an independent charity organization based out of Indian Wells, Calif., and helps families of military veterans. Their donation of \$25,000 to the OSC has substantially boosted the club's ability to help the community.

"We've had recent donations that have enhanced the number of people we can reach through our scholarship programs,"

— Julianne Wilson
President, Officers' Spouses' Club

The club's mission is to foster goodwill among its members and to support social, educational, community and welfare projects aboard the Combat Center and in the Morongo Basin area.

The AFAF has donated to OSC before and continued their support with a donation of \$10,000 to the OSC. AFAF supports the men and women of the armed services and provides goods and services to immediate family members.

These organizations have supported the OSC and its mission.

"We're a social organization," Wilson said. "We do events for the community and fundraisers for our scholarship programs."

The OSC is scheduled to start accepting applications for these scholarships and grants in mid-January through March 1, with decisions being finalized and released by the end of May.

For more information on the OSC Twentynine Palms and the scholarship program, visit their official website at:

<http://sites.google.com/site/officersspousesclub29palms/>



Marines with Company A, Battalion Landing Team 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, run up the Kin Blue training area beach after leaving their combat rubber raiding craft during a mock boat raid here, Jan. 13. The main objective of the boat raid exercise was to eliminate any hostile presence in the Kin Blue "town" and to secure the surrounding area.

Beach secured with amphibious assault

STORY AND PHOTOS BY CPL. JONATHAN WRIGHT

31ST MARINE EXPEDITIONARY UNIT

OKINAWA, Japan - Sporadic bursts of rifle fire cut through the still air, drawing an immediate response from the Marines staged on the opposite end of the clearing. Call for maneuvers were made as groups of Marines took up defensive positions, returning fire in the direction of the enemy contact. Minutes later, three hostiles were either killed or captured, and a security perimeter was established around the cleared area.

"So far we've encountered rocket-propelled grenades and small-arms fire," said Lance Cpl. Derek Gregory, assaultman with Company A, Battalion Landing Team 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit. "After clearing the immediate area and checking for any [improvised explosive devices], we'll return the town to the Kin government."

Although there is no Kin government on the island of Okinawa, the capturing of Kin town from control of enemy forces is one of the objectives during a training exercise here, Jan. 13. The unit known as Boat Company conducted a raid using Combat Rubber Raiding Craft on the Kin Blue Training Area as part of the MEU's pre-deployment exercise.

"The focus of this training was to properly conduct a boat raid from the beach, locate and eliminate any offensive

forces and patrol the surrounding area," said Sgt. Henry Pulcine, acting range safety officer for the Kin Blue Training Area, 1/4.

A total of 15 craft hit the beach with the Marines quickly moving ashore and setting up defenses around the immediate area. After the boats were camouflaged with sand, the Marines made their way into the simulated Kin town, with cover provided by snipers and mortar teams.

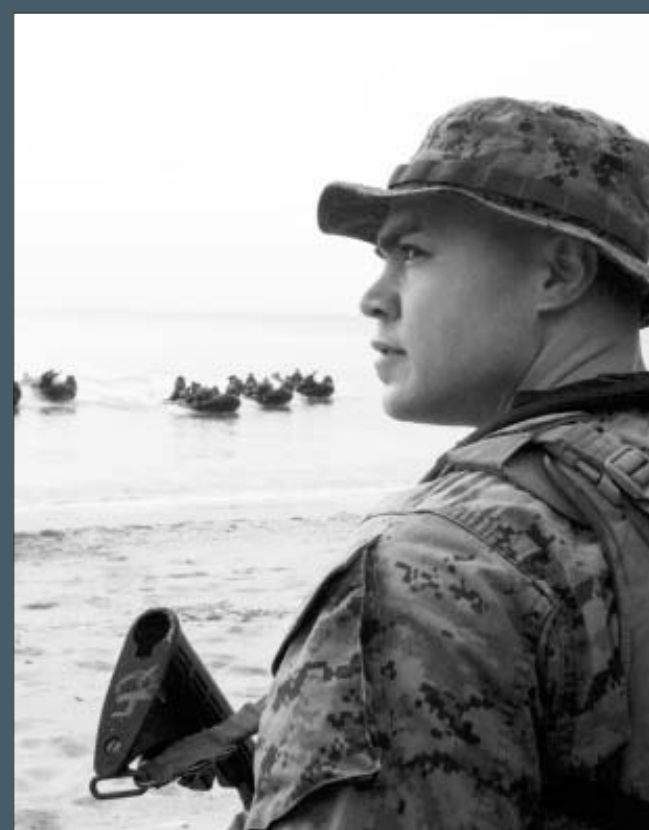
"It may be fake, but it's one of the best ways to keep our skills fresh and ensure we don't forget any beneficial training," Gregory said. "We're going to keep doing it so we're ready when we deploy."

After securing the town, the Marines continued patrolling the rest of the area, discovering and properly clearing mock IEDs along the way.

Another patch of resistance was met when hostiles concealed in the foliage attempted to repel the Marines from securing a landing zone, but were eventually overcome. Those Marines with simulated injuries from the firefights were evacuated by way of helicopter from the secured landing zone.

When the rest of the area was determined to be free of remaining enemy forces, the Marines made their way back to the beach to leave in the craft that brought them in.

"This training combined different elements of the [Marine Air-Ground Task Force] and further taught them how to work as a cohesive whole," Pulcine said. "It was a good learning exercise, and I think it helped the Marines work on any areas that might have needed attention."



A Marine with Co. A, BLT 1/4, 31st MEU, provides security for the incoming combat rubber raiding craft.

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PHOTOS BY: LANCE CPL. ROBERT R. CARRASCO

WeekINPhotos

Air Operations



[Far Left] Lance Cpl. Madison DeLoach, crew chief, Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 363, observes the terrain during a routine flight operation, Helmand River Valley, Helmand province, Afghanistan Jan. 5. HMH-363 conducted flight operations in support of troops throughout the Helmand Province.

[Left] Marines with 1st Radio Battalion, II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward), load onto a CH-53D Sea Stallion helicopter from Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 363 during a routine flight operation, Forward Operating Base Edinburgh, Helmand province, Afghanistan, Jan. 5.



Flares are discharged from a CH-53D Sea Stallion helicopter with HMH-363 during a routine flight operation, Helmand River Valley, Helmand province, Afghanistan, Jan. 5. Marine pilots of HMH-363 utilize flares ensuring the safety of the crew onboard and safe guarding the aircraft while in flight during poor visibility weather.

3rd CEB engineers keep Marine, ANA comrades fighting in Afghanistan

CPL. MARCO MANCHA

2ND MARINE DIVISION

HELMAND PROVINCE, Afghanistan — These Marines are trained to lead patrols as point men and sweep for any improvised explosive devices, the enemy's favored weapon. They are also trained in construction and demolitions, making them a versatile force multiplier on the battlefield.

Their skills as combat engineers make them vital to any team of Marines, but when they work together, these Marines bring a unique element to the units they support. One fire team of combat engineers with 3rd Combat Engineer Battalion came together to support the Marines and sailors of Border Advisor Team 1 during Operation Eagle Hunt.

The Afghan-led operation was a small shaping operation to clear the Taghaz area of southern Helmand in preparation for future counterinsurgency operations to expand Afghan-led security. Marines are providing support to the Afghans throughout these operations in order to assist their efforts to expand security, stability and development in the province.

It was a day before the operation when Apple Valley, Calif., native, Sgt. Joshua Malok arrived with his fire team of combat engineers to Combat Outpost Castle. The 3rd CEB squad leader knew little about the operation, but knew what his team was sent there to do.

"As combat engineers we were there to ensure that the Border Advisor Team was able to maneuver wherever they needed to in a safe manner," explained the 2003 Apple Valley High School graduate. "As a squad leader, I was there to ensure my Marines did that properly."

Malok and his Marines focused their efforts in leading the many security patrols the Marines conducted.

Cpl. Andrew Eisen of Seattle is another combat engineer with the team and took point on almost every patrol the Marines conducted. The duties placed on a pointman to scan the path for dangers can mean the difference between life and death.

The 21-year-old Eisen was always on the lookout for suspicious activity or signs of possible IEDs. He applied his training and remained vigilant with every step he took.

"You get used to the feeling of always being in front and accept the fact that it's a part of the job," said Eisen. "But you always have to be on the lookout for stuff no matter what the situation is or where you're patrolling."

Both Malok and Eisen observed their two younger Marines throughout the operation and mentored them as they worked. Malok said it was a good opportunity for his untried Marines to get a little experience under their belts.

The four-man team aided the BAT-1 Marines in clearing compounds and inspecting them before they entered. One Marine said it wasn't at all what he expected out of the operation, but it was a learning experience nonetheless.

"It was a very good learning experience. This is my first deployment, so a lot of this is new to me," said Lance Cpl. Stanton Cromer of Fort Myers, Fla. "It was great to be a



CPL. MARCO MANCHA

Lance Cpl. Stanton Cromer, combat engineer, 3rd Combat Engineer Battalion, provides security during an evening patrol with the Afghan Border Police. The 25-year-old was part of Operation Eagle Hunt, a small shaping operation led by Afghan security forces to clear the Taghaz area of southern Helmand in preparation for future counterinsurgency operations to expand Afghan-led security.

part of this successful operation, and it gives me something to pass on to my junior Marines when I pick up rank."

The 25-year-old combat engineer aided in inspecting any suspicious wires or other objects hidden in the ground. He also helped sweep inside compounds using a compact metal detector to check for improvised explosive devices.

Some of the things they were able to point out on patrols were terrain models and small caches of batteries and wires, which are typically used in making IEDs. Malok said he was proud of the job his Marines did during the operation.

"I have full confidence in my Marines; they performed well," said Malok. "They did what was expected of them and more."

Editor's Note: Border Advisor Team 1 is currently assigned in support of 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, Regimental Combat Team 5 in 2nd Marine Division (Forward), which heads Task Force Leatherneck. The task force serves as the ground combat element of Regional Command (Southwest) and works in partnership with the Afghan National Security Forces and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to conduct counterinsurgency operations.



CPL. MARCO MANCHA

Lance Cpl. Kyle Harbour, combat engineer, 3rd CEB, digs a hole to sleep in for the night during Operation Eagle Hunt. The operation, led completely by Afghan National Security Forces, was a small shaping operation to clear the Taghaz area of southern Helmand.

FIREBASE DESTROYED

■ 9th ESB demilitarizes Afghanistan firebase

*Photo and Story by Cpl. Bryan Nygaard
II Marine Logistics Group (Forward)*



Cpl. James Hernandez, combat engineer with Company A, 9th Engineer Support Battalion, uses an electric saw to dismantle a dirt-filled barrier at Firebase Saenz Dec. 13.

Firebase Saenz, Afghanistan — Firebase Saenz, Afghanistan, has been destroyed. Its defenses have been torn down, and its walls completely leveled. This destruction was not caused by insurgents — it was the handiwork of Marines with 9th Engineer Support Battalion.

With the recent reduction and reorganization of troops, Saenz is the first of several forward operating bases being demilitarized in Helmand province, Afghanistan.

The firebase, which covered a little more than 11 acres of Afghan desert, was built more than a year ago and named after Sgt. Jose Saenz III, who was killed in action Aug. 9, 2010. During its existence, Saenz housed Marine artillery units that provided indirect fire support for coalition ground forces operating in the northern half of Helmand province.

After convoying north from Camp Leatherneck, the Marines of 9th ESB, 3rd Marine Logistics Group, III Marine Expeditionary Force, currently attached to 2nd Marine Logistics Group (Forward), worked diligently Dec. 13-15 to properly dismantle the base and ensure there was little, if any, footprint left by the Marines.

“The Marines have been doing a good job taking everything down and making sure to keep it neat so it fits on the trucks,” said 1st Lt. Andrew Fassett, commander, 1st platoon, Company A, 9th ESB. “We did the right job in terms of cleaning up after ourselves in Afghanistan.”

Doing the right job included emptying sandbags, pushing down berms and coiling up hundreds of yards of razor-sharp concertina wire surrounding Saenz.

One of the more challenging tasks was dismantling the

numerous dirt-filled barriers that made up the guard posts at each corner of the base. Dirt-filled barriers, also known as HESCO barriers, are military fortifications that have seen extensive use in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

A typical dirt-filled barrier is 4-feet tall and 3-feet wide and is made of a collapsible wire-mesh container with a heavy-duty fabric liner usually filled with sand.

The Marines used tractors, forklifts, electric saws, shovels, pick axes, bolt cutters, knives and their bare hands to rip apart the barriers that once protected the Marines at Saenz from explosive blasts and small-arms fire.

“It’s pretty tedious work for myself and the other Marines,” said Lance Cpl. Zachary Couch, combat engineer, Co. A., 9th ESB.

The Marines who were equipped with the electric saws were able to cut through the wire-mesh with relative ease compared to those with bolt cutters.

As the Marines labored, sparks lit up the evening sky and resembled fireworks that could be seen on the Fourth of July.

When darkness fell, the Marines used the headlights from the front end loaders to aid them in their disassembly of the barriers.

As they continued working deep into the night, the temperature dropped below 20 degrees, forcing them to put on several layers to keep warm. A little before midnight, the Marines called it a day. There were no tents to house them, so they slept inside of the armored vehicles that brought them up to the secluded base. Several Marines crammed into one vehicle and slept in some very awkward and uncomfortable positions on top of their packs and body armor.

The more Marines that crammed into a vehicle, the warmer it became inside.

The Marines woke up the next morning, the sun shone on their weather-beaten faces that were still covered with sand from the day before. They grabbed their tools and slowly made their way back to where they had left off.

During the night, the bulldozers had pushed over and flattened the berms that made up the walls of the base, thereby reducing protection from any possible insurgent fire. Cpl. James Hernandez, fire team leader, Co. A, 9th ESB, was still sore from the day before and recovering from small burns inflicted by the sparks created by electric saw.

With fatigue wearing on the Marines in his charge, he frequently gathered them, offering words of encouragement and motivation.

“I hate the cold,” Hernandez said. “It just gets to you after a while. That’s when all the morale starts going down.”

Lance Cpl. Tameka Demps, combat engineer, Co. A, 9th ESB, finds her motivation in the work that she does.

“I just like to work, I like to be busy,” she said. “If I stop, I just, I don’t know — I feel like I’m not doing anything, I like doing this. It’s exhausting, but it’s fun.”

Standing at barely five-feet tall, Demps constantly worked, picking up pieces of the barriers that probably weighed as much as she did. Once all the work was completed, she grabbed a trash bag and began picking up small pieces of trash off the ground.

“It’s just helping out with the main mission,” said Demps. “We finish this base, we go on to the next one — we can get this deployment over with and go home.”

367-3577 For Advertising



Scout transformation

■ Boys graduate from cubs to boy scouts

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
CPL. ANDREW THORBURN

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

Every culture has a rite of passage that signals to a kid that he is ready to act less childish and begin to work and grow into an adult.

For six former Cub Scouts of Pack 78, their passage was marked by their crossing over ceremony where they joined the young adults of Boy Scout Troops 77 and 78.

When boys are in Cub Scouts, their parents plan all the events and the boys are not allowed to attend them without their parent or legal guardian. Once the boys reach the rank of Boy Scout, the parents step back and let the boys lead their own troop and attend events unchaperoned by their guardians.

“My son has been in Cub Scouts since he was a Tiger, about five years ago,” said Melissa Burke, mother of Boy Scout Matthew Burke. “It’s definitely emotional for me to see him in a new uniform and starting a new journey.”

Before they crossed the ceremonial bridge, Thomas Unger, 10; Frankie Newton Jr., 10; Adrian Rios, 11; Ryan Storer, 10; DJ Deselms, 10; and Matthew Burke, 10, were presented their final Cub Scout award, the Arrow of Light, from members of the Local Order of the Arrow Lodge, a group within the Boy Scouts.

“The Arrow of Light represents their career as a Cub Scout with colors for every Cub Scout rank,” Storer said. “The Scouts have to complete multiple activity badges and prove they live according to the Law of the Pack and Promise.”

All six boys also earned the superior achiever award for completing all 20 activity badges within the year and half as Webelos Scouts.

Growing into the world of Boy Scouts and young men took the boys from the trail of the Cub Scout to the Trail of the Eagle.

“They have begun the Trail of the Eagle today,” said Ronald E. Storer, Pack Master, Pack 78. “This trail will help them grow as citizens, improve their knowledge and gain experience and skills as an outdoorsman. The trail is one where fewer than five percent of the population even attempt this path.”



[Above] Clint Baul, Scout Master, Boy Scout Troop 78, leads two new scouts from Cub Scout Pack 78 over the ceremonial bridge signifying their change from Cub Scout to Boy Scout. The ceremony took place at Heritage Park Jan 6.

[Left] Ryan Storer, 10, is given his red Boy Scout neckerchief for Boy Scout Troop 77 during Cub Scout Pack 78’s crossing over ceremony.

CG’s Basketball League season opens

PHOTOS AND STORY BY
LANCE CPL. ALI AZIMI

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

The Commanding General’s Intramural Basketball League began with the first game of the season at the East Gym Tuesday. The game pitted IPAC against 7th Marines.

Both teams hit the court with victory in mind. But as the game progressed, it became obvious that IPAC was better focused and more on the ball.

7th Marines did, however, maintain better possession of the ball. This may be attributed to their skills in rebounding, stealing or just holding onto the ball. But, this was time the team could have used shooting for more points instead.

7th Marines was down six points at halftime, 31-25. They had a shot at a comeback, but their opponents had other ideas.

IPAC used the time they had with the ball wisely, running the ball down court for easy layups or getting in three-point shots. Their defense kept 7th Marines from scoring points and getting an edge on the scoreboard.

Although 7th Marines tied it up a few times in the beginning of the game, once IPAC was warmed up, they took the lead and kept it until the final buzzer. The game ended with a score of 54-46, IPAC.

Following the defeat of 7th Marines, the gym hosted two more basketball games that night. CLD defeated CLB-7, 68-45; and 23rd Dental defeated Headquarters ESD, 42-36.



A 7th Marines point guard rushes down the court during the first game of the Commanding General’s Intramural Basketball League game against IPAC Tuesday. IPAC won the game, 54-46.



[Above] 7th Marines forward Brad Swafford shoots a jump shot during a game against IPAC.



[Left] 7th Marines Eddie M. Prince (left), fights for a rebound during the first game of the season.

LANCE CPL. ALI AZIMI



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

Monday: Steak night, 5 - 7:30 p.m.
Monday-Friday: All-hands lunch, from 11 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.
Thursday: Happy Hour, 5 - 7 p.m.

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

Local Events

Jake's Women

When: Every Friday & Saturday until February 11 at 7 p.m., and a Sunday Matinee Feb. 5
Where: Theatre 29
736377 Sullivan Rd., Twentynine Palms, Calif.
For tickets and information call 316-4151 or visit <http://www.theatre29.org>

Ritmo Loco

Afro-Cuban Jazz
When: Friday, Jan. 20 7:30 p.m.
Where: Pappy and Harriet's
53688 Pioneer Town Road, Pioneer Town, Calif.
For more information visit <http://www.pappyandharriets.com>

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

Easton Corbin

Live music performance from the country music star
When: 9 p.m., Friday, Jan. 27
Where: Agua Caliente
32-250 Bob Hope Dr., Rancho Mirage
For more information call 888-999-1995 or visit <http://hotwatercasino.com>.

Joss Stone & Dave Stewart

Live music performance
When: 8 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 11
Where: Fantasy Springs Resort Casino
84-245 Indio Springs Parkway, Indio
For more information call 800-827-2946 or visit <http://www.fantasyspringsresort.com>.

Hiroshima

Live music performance of jazz fusion
When: 8p.m., Saturday, Jan. 28
Where: Morongo Casino Resort and Spa
49500 Seminole Drive, Cabazon, Calif.
For more information call 800-252-4499 or visit <http://www.morongocasinoresort.com>.

Frank Caliendao

Live comedy
When: 9 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 28
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, Jan. 20

6 p.m. - Alvin & the Chipmunks: Chipwrecked, Rated G
9 p.m. - Hugo, Rated PG
Midnight - Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows, Rated PG-13

Saturday, Jan. 21

11 a.m. - **Free Matinee** Rio, Rated G
2 p.m. - The Muppets, Rated PG
6 p.m. - Arthur Christmas, Rated PG
9 p.m. - New Years Eve PG-13
Midnight - The Sitter, Rated R

Sunday, Jan. 22

2 p.m. - Alvin & the Chipmunks: Chipwrecked, Rated G,
6 p.m. - Hugo, Rated PG
9 p.m. - Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows, Rated PG-13

Monday, Jan. 23

7 p.m. - Arthur Christmas, Rated PG

Tuesday, Jan. 24

7 p.m. - New Years Eve, Rated PG-13

Wednesday, Jan. 25

7 p.m. - Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows, Rated PG-13

Thursday, Jan. 26

7 p.m. - Alvin & the Chipmunks: Chipwrecked, Rated G

Tom Cruise returns for more action-packed spy-jinks

NEIL POND

AMERICAN PROFILE

"Mission: Impossible—Ghost Protocol"

Starring Tom Cruise, Jeremy Renner & Paula Patton
Directed by Brad Bird
PG-13, 133 min.

Tom Cruise returns as Ethan Hunt, the leader of the super-elite Impossible Missions Force team, for the fourth installment of the popular movie franchise built on the spy-jinks 1960s TV series of the same name.

In "Ghost Protocol," Hunt and his squad of globe-trotting, deep-cover espionage agents are once again called into top-secret service, this time to avert a nuclear war. When things go wrong, creating an international incident at the Kremlin that looks like an intentional act of American aggression, it drives the mission completely off the grid under "ghost protocol," a state of complete disavowal by the United States.

Working without a government safety net makes it a bit more challenging to deploy an arsenal of high-tech, cloak-and-dagger doodads and double-cross the Eastern Euro thugs who want to create a mushroom cloud in the sunny skies over California. And you can forget about getting Uncle Sam to sign that expense report.

It's often been hard for moviegoers to separate their feelings for Tom Cruise, the actor, from the roles he plays, especially after he jumped up and down like a delirious monkey on Oprah's couch, ventured far out on the



COURTESY PHOTO

Tom Cruise returns as Ethan Hunt, the leader of the Impossible Missions Force team, for the fourth installment of the popular movie franchise built on the 1960s TV series.

Scientology limb, and found himself fighting to de-fuse some nasty Hollywood rumors about his love life.

But the guy's still a formidable movie star, especially for roles like this one that call on his buff physique, his considerable leading-man charisma and his willingness to throw himself whole-heartedly into the toss-and-tumble fray of action scenes.

And, believe me, there are some real action-packed doozies in "Ghost Protocol," including an absolutely spectacular sequence filmed outside the world's tallest hotel. Cruise did his own stunts for the scene, in which his char-

acter has to scale vertical glass some 2,000 feet above the Persian Gulf, break into a higher floor, then leap back out into the air tethered only by a fire hose.

It's easily one of the most breathtaking five minutes in any movie of 2011, and it leaves you wondering, slack-jawed: How DID they film that?

This "Mission" has a few new faces, including Jeremy Renner, Josh Holloway and Paula Patton. Simon Pegg returns to provide comic relief as IMF tech nerd Benjie Dunn, who finally earns his stripes as a full member of the team.

But the real stripes should

go to director Brad Bird, who makes an outstanding live-action debut after a string of successful, critically acclaimed animated hits, including "The Iron Giant," "The Incredibles" and "Ratatouille." Bird juices and geoses the whole affair with edge and excitement, new energy, just the right seasoning of humor and heartbeat, and a terrific feel for big, bold, daring sequences that beg for the biggest screen available.

Your mission: See this "Mission" in an IMAX theater if at all possible. It's a visual treat well worth the extra box-office buckaroos, and your eyes will thank you for the thrill.