



New TA policy to take effect

AMERICAN FORCES PRESS SERVICE

When the new policy takes effect, probably this summer, schools will need to have a signed memorandum of understanding to participate in the Department of Defense Tuition Assistance Program, Pentagon, officials said.

A 90-day extension that expired March 30 allowed DOD officials to work with stakeholders to address issues associated with the memorandum, and a revised memorandum now is complete, officials said.

When the new policy takes effect, schools that provide education programs through the DOD Tuition Assistance Program must agree to the new memorandum and have a signed copy on file with the Defense Department for service members receiving tuition assistance approval to attend their institution, officials said. The revised memorandum and the policy implementation date will be announced on the Defense Department's Memorandum of Understanding Web page, <http://www.dod-mou.com>.

The memorandum is meant to ensure service members have the widest variety of choices for their continued education, officials

More than 2,070 institutions of higher learning have already signed the memorandum.

— Robert L. Gordon III

said, explaining that it puts important educational protections for service members and government oversight into writing.

"I am pleased that over the past 90 days we have been able to collaborate with our partners, including the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee; American Council on Education; National Association of Institutions for Military Education Services; and numerous veteran service organizations and military service organizations," said Robert L. Gordon III, deputy assistant secretary of defense for military community and family policy. "As a result, we have a stronger, clearer memorandum."

The revised memorandum contains these key guidelines:

Prior to enrollment, schools must disclose all policies regarding admissions, transfer of credit and residency requirements, as well as costs such as tuition, fees

See ASSISTANCE, A4

3/7 leaves mark on Sangin District



CPL. TIMOTHY LENZO

Lance Cpl. Nicholas Wurst, team leader, Company L, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, smiles while in a local compound Feb. 27.

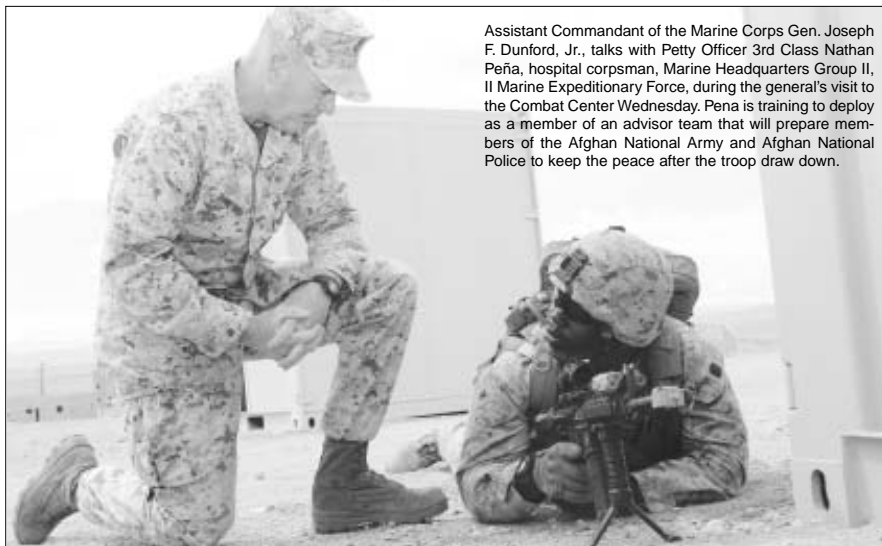
CPL. TIMOTHY LENZO
 REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM 6

FORWARD OPERATING BASE JACKSON, Afghanistan — Marines and sailors with 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, came to Helmand province six months ago, cracking down on insurgents and extending a helping hand to locals.

Whether wading through creeks on patrol, setting check points in dusty heat or drinking chai tea in a classroom of Afghan soldiers, they worked to train the Afghan forces and provide a safer place for their people.

"Our mission, when we came to Sangin in 2011, was to deepen the hold that 1st Battalion, 5th Marines had accomplished during their deployment," said Lt. Col. Seth

See SANGIN, A5



SGT. HEATHER GOLDEN

Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. Joseph F. Dunford, Jr., talks with Petty Officer 3rd Class Nathan Peña, hospital corpsman, Marine Headquarters Group II, II Marine Expeditionary Force, during the general's visit to the Combat Center Wednesday. Peña is training to deploy as a member of an advisor team that will prepare members of the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police to keep the peace after the troop draw down.

Asst. CMC visits, reviews training

SGT. HEATHER GOLDEN
 EDITOR / PRESS CHIEF

The Advisor Training Group got some personal eyes-on time from very high places when Assistant Commandant of the Marine

Corps Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., spent his limited time at the Combat Center, reviewing their training tactics Wednesday.

Dunford, the 32nd ACMC, is making his rounds across the United States to get a firsthand knowledge of what Marines are doing, where resources are needed the most and

how to best prioritize the Corps' assets.

ATG is responsible for making sure Marines and sailors in advisor training teams, from "lance corporals to colonels," know how to train the Afghan National Army and

See ACMC, A3

How to prepare for your Marine's homecoming

Spouses use resources available when preparing for the big day

LANCE CPL.
 LAUREN A. KURKIMILIS
 COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

Military marriages are unique. Often times, Marines and their spouses face obstacles that conventional couples may never have to worry about.

One of the biggest challenges is distance and long deployments. Having your loved one and partner in raising your chil-

dren, on the other side of the world in harm's way, can take a toll on emotions and disrupts the everyday routine.

After so long apart, the time together at home can also negatively impact those relationships if families aren't prepared to handle a combat-hardened version of their loved ones.

"With the right resources, knowledge and support, it doesn't have to be overwhelming," said Andrea Tatayon, Family

Readiness Officer, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment. "As a FRO, it's our job to provide Marines and their families with tools to succeed as a family, especially after deployment."

Every unit has a FRO whose responsibility is to ensure families have the tools needed to remain strong and function cohesively. They also direct families to other resources like the chaplains for counseling and family support, and mental health services.

Those groups share key advice with spouses who are going through deployments as the ones left behind.

One of the most important tools a couple can have is communication. The key is to communicate clearly and realistically, Tatayon said.

"Understand that sometimes when you're talking to (your service member) on the

See MARRIAGE, A4



Homecoming 3/7 returns home from Afghanistan

Lance Cpl. Paul Stika, rifleman, Company L, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment kisses his fiancé, Monica Mathews, after his return from a seven-month deployment to Afghanistan April 1, at Del Valle Field.

Before dawn broke on the morning of April 1, Marines and sailors with the advance party, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment returned home to their loved ones during their homecoming celebration.

Story and photos by Cpl. Andrew D. Thorburn

"There is the anticipation that they haven't seen them in seven months," said Andrea Tatayon, Family Readiness Officer, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines. "They are nervous. All those things that you get you see someone you haven't seen in a long time, they are getting right now."

The anticipations was intensified due to the limited contact the families had with their Marines because of the nature of the battalion.

"With our battalion being an infantry unit, we don't always have the access to the communication that other battalions have," Tatayon said. "Because of the area they were in, they didn't have regular contact with them. It was very special when they could get on a cell phone and talk for five minutes or occasionally do the Skype thing"

Tatayon tried to keep those seven months busy for the ones left


behind with events like classes on how to prioritize the time they had to talk with their Marines. There were also monthly events to keep morale up, make new friends or to help them make their Marines' transitions back to normal life easier.

"They did a very good job," said Erin Hussey, wife of Gunnery Sgt. James Hussey, company gunnery sergeant, Co. K. "The children's reunion and wife reunion brief were very informative. The monthly and social events helped the time pass during this deployment. It helped to know that we had the support socially and resources on base available."

After the buses arrived with the long-awaited troops, the waiting

See HOMECOMING, A4

This Week in Combat Center History



Hospital Addition Opens, BGen Fields cuts tape

Reprinted from the Observation Post dated April 5, 1961, Vol. 5, No. 14

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

The Marines and their dependents here have a newly modified hospital¹, complete with in-patient care for new mothers and their offspring.

Brigadier General Lewis J. Fields² opened the hospital when he performed the traditional ribbon-cutting ceremonies last Friday.

Over 500 persons attended the opening ceremonies. Doctor William Ince of the Ince Memorial Hospital in Twentynine Palms was among the honored guests at the dedication ceremonies.

The Base Band played for the guests before the ceremonies began. Captain R. F. Schugmann MC, USN, Senior Medical Officer, welcomed the guests and Chaplain H. J. Beukema gave the dedicatory prayer.

General Fields cut the ribbon after a brief statement of well done to all who labored to complete the modification. The commanding General expressed the gratitude of all for the additional medical facilities now available to the military personnel and their dependents.

After the ribbon cutting ceremonies, the medical and nursing staff conducted the guests on an informative tour of the facilities which included the nursery, x-ray, operating, delivery and administrative rooms. The diet kitchen as well as the six two-bed rooms were viewed by the guests.

Patients were scheduled to be admitted

immediately after the ceremonies and tour had ended.

"A silver cup and spoon to be appropriately engraved has been procured for presentation to the first baby born in the new hospital," said Captain Schugmann.

The Medical Officer in Charge added, "Considerable new equipment such as infant incubators, surgical equipment and furniture has been provided for the new addition."

Before the addition to the hospital, dependents were cared for on an out-patient basis and were required to travel to Camp Pendleton for government hospital care.

Out-patient care will not be changed for dependents because of the modification to the hospital. Military "Sick Call" was moved to Building 1458³ prior to the modification.

FOOTNOTES

(1) This building is now the combat Center Village Center

(2) General Fields was the combat Center commanding general from Sept. 30, 1960 to Aug. 30, 1962.

(3) Building 1458 is now the Battalion Aid Station for 7th Marine Regiment.

Cut your healthcare clutter, go online

BRIAN P. SMITH

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Layout, Design - Cpl. Sarah Dietz

Correspondents
Cpl. William J. Jackson
Cpl. Andrew D. Thorburn
Lance Cpl. D. J. Wu
Lance Cpl. Ali Azimi
Lance Cpl. Lauren Kurkimiris
Diane Durden

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OFF-LIMITS ESTABLISHMENTS

MCIWest off-limits establishments guidance prohibits service members from patronizing the following locations. This order applies to all military personnel.

In Oceanside:

- Angelo's Kars, 222 S. Coast Hwy, Oceanside, Calif., 92054
- Angelo's Kars, 226 S. Coast Hwy, Oceanside, Calif., 92054

In San Diego:

- Club Mustang, 2200 University Ave.
- Club San Diego, 3955 Fourth St.
- Get It On Shoppe, 3219 Mission Blvd.
- Main Street Motel, 3494 Main St.
- Vulcan Baths, 805 W. Cedar St.

In National City:

- Dream Crystal, 15366 Highland Ave.
- Sports Auto Sales, 1112 National City Blvd.

Local off-limits guidance prohibits service members from patronizing the following locations.

In Twentynine Palms:

- Adobe Smoke Shop, 6441 Adobe Rd.
- STC Smoke Shop, 6001 Adobe Rd.

In Yucca Valley:

- Yucca Tobacco Mart, 57602 29 Palms Hwy.
- Puff's Tobacco Mart, 57063 29 Palms Hwy.

In Palm Springs:

- Village Pub, 266 S. Palm Canyon Dr.

For the complete orders, but not off-limits, check out the Combat Center's official website at <http://www.marines.mil/units/29palms>

HOT TOPIC

MAGIC SHOW

Join the Lifelong Learning Library April 26, from 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the West Gym in celebrating the amazing military children of Twentynine Palms with a magic show and goodie bags for the first 300 children. For more information call 830-6875.

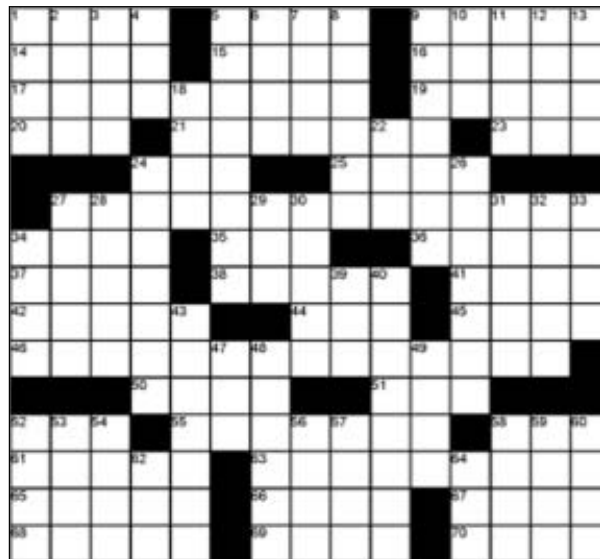
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See answers on page 4

BETWEEN ACTS




ACROSS

- Egotist's concern
- Pull an all-nighter
- Word accompanying a pounding gavel
- It beats nothing
- Turner or Cantrell
- Wet behind the ears
- Slips, spills, and such
- Plumed wader
- Petal-plucker's word
- SDS member, e.g.
- Close down
- An Oscar is mostly this
- Black-bordered bio
- They may needle you
- Essen's valley
- Singer Zadora
- "Are not" response
- Composer Satie
- Bit of parsley
- Numbered work
- Try to buy your own stuff, at an auction
- College Web site suffix
- South Seas staple
- Hickok's last hand
- Icy coating
- Susan of "L.A. Law"
- Sine __ non
- Peppers from the air
- __ NO HOOKS
- Quitter's cry
- Critical hurdles
- European viper
- It's off-limits
- Pilots' guesstimates, for short
- Punishes for lateness, maybe
- Bit of kindling
- Drop for the count

DOWN

- Workout venues
- A pop
- Cooties
- Popular happy-hour day: Abbr.
- Post-party chores
- Author Ayn
- Nay sayer
- Army's mule, e.g.
- Former Italian coin denomination
- Molotov cocktail fuse
- Calamitous
- All tied up
- Emeritus: Abbr.
- Crashing bore
- Egypt's __ Simbel
- __ bath (hot spot)
- Tripper Leary
- Containing gold
- Scold mildly
- Barely beat
- Thoughtful soul
- Mar. honoree
- Promotes a CD, perhaps
- No great shakes
- McEntire of country
- Ox tail?
- Pooch who's a leader
- Makers of hangman's knots
- Industrial tub
- Wide of the mark
- Tale of adventure
- Campus area, briefly
- Press the escape key, say
- Electrical letters
- "Don't have __ man!"
- Artist's "Done!"
- Ashe Stadium inits.
- Collar stiffener
- Old name at US pumps
- Albanian currency unit
- Comics shriek

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WHAT I'VE LEARNED

THE AMERICAN-BY-CHOICE

Jorge "Suave" Alviles

Janitor, Marine Corps Community Services
Morelia, Michoacan, Mexico, 54

INTERVIEWED AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY
LANCE CPL. D. J. WU

April 4, 2012

went to the United States. I came by myself. I only had enough money to buy food.

- > **America was far away.** Sometimes I got a ride, sometimes I didn't.
- > **I still have three sisters and three brothers in Mexico.** I'm the only one in the States. I still call them once or twice a month.
- > **I've been here almost 26 years.** I lived in L.A. almost 20 years, I can't remember. It was a long time ago.
- > **I like my life, I like the people,** and I like my job, and I'm still happy, so it's okay.
- > **When I was in L.A.,** I worked a few different companies. I worked a bottle making company once. I worked the machines making pint and gallons.
- > **When me and my wife came here,** we saw the little house and we bought the house, so we stayed.
- > **I've been married 27 years now.** I have one little boy and one little girl. Well, now they're 26 and 21. My daughter Jackie is actually working right over there.
- > **My wife, she's okay for me, sometimes.** But we love each other. She takes care of me, and I take care of her.
- > **I met my wife at church.** We're Catholic. My grandparents always sent me to church back in Mexico. So I go every Sunday.
- > **My kids always stuck around me** when they were younger. My wife and I would take turns taking care of them because we worked different shifts.
- > **I like my job.** They used to have us work over by the hospital.
- > **I start my day in the parking lot** and just clean the area. Front, back, all around it.
- > **I like to barbeque outside my house.** I had to clean the sand out of my grill. But then the wind picked up, again and then I had to do it again.
- > **I have a 55' Chevy,** I have them running pretty good. But I still have some things to do. I also have a 64' Chevy too.
- > **It's what I used to ride.** When I was younger I had a 1954 Chevy Pick-up, with the high windows and a 1955 Ford Victoria. I always liked oldies. I like keeping the old spirit.
- > **The only thing that I can complain** about is that my eyes aren't too good. I can see far but I can't see close. When I drive, I have to drive slow, and I don't drive at night anymore.
- > **I don't travel too much.** I've been to Texas, it's too hot over there.
- > **I've also been camping in Colorado.** Like it there. You should go there sometime.
- > **We do go camping sometimes.** You know Yucaipa? We go there sometimes. I like to just be outside and barbeque, or go fishing. I like to relax and have no stress.

> **I don't know why they call me Suave.** That's what my boss called me when I started.

> **When someone needs help,** whether it's my job or not, I can do it I can help.

> **When I was a kid,** I was always helping my grandma and grandpa. They made bread, and I would have to go and sell it.

> **When I was 15 years old, I**

**ACMC, from A1**

the Afghan National Police.

He sat in on a key leader engagement meeting and observed a team of Marines and Afghan role players acting as ANP forces training to be advisors to patrol and react to an attack. Dunford also acrially toured the installation, and took a look at military construction projects.

This is the first time Dunford has had the opportunity to observe ATG training since he assumed the role of the ACMC in October 2010.

As the Corps begins to draw down its forces in Afghanistan, the main effort for Marines will be these advisor training teams. Visits like these help ensure the Corps is poised, from a headquarters perspective, to support Marines going into theater with the

best equipment and training possible.

"The thing we are going to do is focus all of our training on Afghanistan out here now. As we look to rebalance both to the Pacific and elsewhere, we'll modify the training to meet those future challenges," Dunford said.

Dunford also said he was looking for what the units training here are doing well and what may need to change.

"The biggest takeaway is the extraordinary work the team is doing out here to prepare our Marines, not only for Afghanistan, but for all the challenges we are going to have after Afghanistan," Dunford said.

Next on the schedule for Dunford's California tour are visits to Wounded Warriors, a speaking engagement with the Hoover Fellows at Stanford, and to be the guest of honor at an Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom commemoration ceremony at the Marines Memorial Club.

Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., sits in on a key leader engagement meeting during his time here reviewing the Advisor Training Group's training tactics Wednesday. He also toured the installation in a helicopter, observed a training patrol with the ATG students and spoke with Marines and sailors.



SGT. HEATHER GOLDEN

ASSISTANCE, from A1

and other charges to the service member. Prior to enrollment, schools must provide service members access to a financial aid advisor who will provide a clear and complete explanation of available financial aid, including Title IV, and appropriate loan counseling before offering, recommending, or signing up a student for a school loan; and

Schools must have a policy that bans aggressive marketing and inducements, and must refrain from aggressively marketing to military students or use inducements to encourage military students to enroll in their school.

Once internal coordination of the revised memorandum is complete, schools will have ample opportunity to review and sign the memorandum before the policy goes into effect, officials said.

Academic institutions participating in the Tuition Assistance Program will continue to receive tuition assistance, regardless of whether they have signed the original memorandum with the department. Once the new policy goes into effect, only those schools that have signed a memorandum of understanding with the department will be able to receive tuition assistance.

Institutions that have signed or are in the process of signing the original memorandum will not have to re-sign or make changes to the document, officials noted.

"More than 2,070 institutions of higher learning have already signed the memorandum," Gordon said.

MARRIAGE, from A1

phone, they may not express themselves the way they normally would," Tatayon said.

"You also have to make sure you are communicating the things that you find important and not hold it in until they get back," she added.

Managing expectations of when a Marine or sailor returns from deployment is important as well, said Tatayon.

"Sometimes when a Marine comes home, almost everyone has this picture in their head of how their reunion will go," said Perry Ford, Marine Corps Family Team Building director, Readiness Deployment Support Training "It's ok if it doesn't go as planned."

"Not everyone is going to want to go to Disneyland the day after they come back," Tatayon said.

"That's why we try to talk about what should realistically be expected when he returns," she added.

Time and unique circumstances of war make people grow in different ways. Adjusting to changes takes time and patience. The responsibilities in the household also change when spouses return home.

"The family dynamic changed for an extended period of time and will need to adjust when husbands come home," Tatayon said. "Maybe he wants to take back the responsibilities when he returns, or maybe he doesn't. Maybe he won't be ready to step into that parental role right away. It's important to understand that this is completely normal."

"Deployment can change people, both overseas and at home," Ford said.

Being in a combat zone for an extended period of time is physically,

mentally and emotionally taxing.

Taking lives, protecting the people you're with, and the constant threat of enemy contact and death are all things that, in one way or another, will impact a man.

It's the family members who know the individual Marine better than anyone else. They are the first line of defense when detecting if a Marine is mentally and emotionally in need.

Marines often have to put away their emotions in order to think clearly in the fog of war and survive. Often, they will not seek help on their own.

"With the right mindset and understanding, people can come out of deployment very successfully," said Tatayon. "It can even make you stronger as a family."

Every unit's main concern for Marines and sailors returning home is their mental well being and how they will adjust to their return to society.

HOMECOMING, from A1

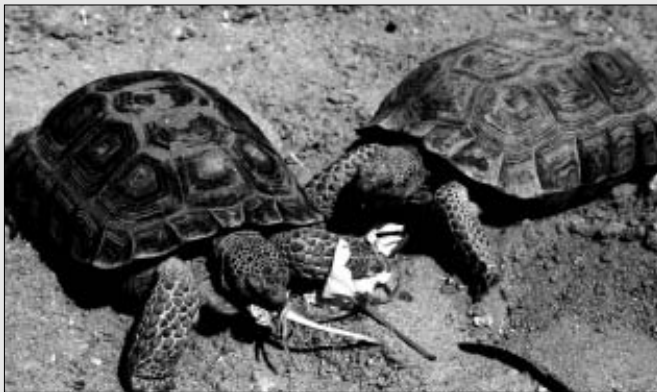
crowd took only enough time peering through the limited 3 a.m. lighting to figure out which Marine out of the blur of uniforms was theirs before rushing into hugs and heading home.

"When we get home, we will get right back into the routine," Hussy said. "We have been through eight deployments, and even though each one has had its challenges, dealing with it has gotten easier."



Whatever you're looking for, you can find it in the **Observation Post Classified section**

Thelma and Louise



PHOTOS BY DIANE DURDEN

[Left] Thelma and Louise, the Combat Center's resident captive Desert Tortoises, share a desert primrose for lunch while hanging out in the Tortoise Garden, next to the Archeological and Paleontology Curation Center. Combat Center personnel are invited to eat lunch with them 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., every Wednesday until April 25.

[Above] Louise pokes her head out of her burrow to see who's visiting the Tortoise Garden.

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TACTICS & OPERATIONS

MCTOG-The school that creates the 'heartbeat of the unit'

Story and photo by
Lance Cpl. D. J. Wu

Select officers and staff noncommissioned officers come to the Combat Center's Marine Corps Tactics and Operations Group to learn the ins and outs of operations in an expeditionary environment.

The most recent graduates of MCTOG's Ground Operators Chief Course and the Tactical Marine Corps Air Ground Task Force Integration Course are the newest set of Marines certified in those standards of operations.

Maj. Edward Nevglowski, battalion team faculty advisor, MCTOG, helps the officers work through the long-term Marine Corps planning process. In some scenarios, Nevglowski acts as battalion commander with the students acting as his battalion staff, working their way through a plan for operations.

"MCTOG creates a standard for the ground combat element with operations officers and operations chiefs," said Nevglowski. "It ensures that every operations officer has a baseline of training, whether it's going forward to Afghanistan or training back here for an upcoming (Marine

Expeditionary Unit) deployment."

"When it comes to the Ground Operations Chief Course, what we try to do is introduce the students to a standardized approach to information management and effective command and control," said Master Sgt. Erick Hodge, GOCC faculty advisor.

"MCTOG gives the Marine Corps standardized training in MAGTF operations, combined arms training and unit readiness planning at the battalion and regiment levels, and synchronizes doctrine and training standards," he said.

Lt. Gen. Richard Mills, deputy commandant, Combat Development and Integration, was also on hand at the graduation to give the students a few words on what to expect for the future.

"The [command operations center] is the heartbeat of every unit," Mills said. "We send all you here to this course so that you can make your units better, and I think you've done that."

MCTOG is always trying to improve themselves. The first group of GOCC and TMIC



Master Sgt. Robert Pine takes a look at his certificate from his completion of the Ground Operations Chief Course at the Marine Corps Tactics and Operations Group graduation April 6.

students graduated from the class last year. This most recent iteration is the fourth class to go through since the course has started.

"Overall the course was effective," said Nevglowski. "It could have been more streamlined to the audience though."

"The course has a lot of potential and is on the right track," added Master Sgt. Robert Pine, GOCC student. "The course has a lot of

information. It's getting tweaked right now to speak to the audience it was designed for."

MCTOG looks for those kinds of comments in the students' after course critiques to make improvements for the next upcoming class.

"We still have to be lethal," Mills said. "You have to know and adapt to the changing environment."

SANGIN, from A1

Folsom, commanding officer, 3/7. "We recognized up front that this was going to be the pivotal year, the pivotal point in time that we would be able to push the (Afghan National Security Forces) in the lead."

The battalion arrived in October, and as temperatures cooled, fighting began to wane. This break gave the Marines the opportunity to train their Afghan counterparts for the next fighting season.

Advisor team Marines with the battalion trained ANSF through various courses including an ANSF medic course, a squad leader course, and an officer training course.

The advisor team also trained ANSF to conduct local shuras as a way to interact with local Afghans. These meetings have allowed ANSF to maintain trust and open communication with the local leaders.

Afghan National Army Staff Sgt. Sherhassans, senior medic, 2nd Kandak, 2nd Brigade, 215th Corps, said he learned a lot from the ANSF medic course and was thankful for the Marine instructors.

"We love working with the Marines," said Sherhassans. "They helped us become more independent and we always welcome them here."

As the deployment progressed, the Marines began transitioning responsibility to Afghan forces. Folsom said 3rd Bn., 7th Marines, is leaving Helmand province with Afghans patrolling on their own, and planning and conducting their own counter-insurgency operations.

"Our primary mission was ANSF development, and I believe we accomplished that mission," said Sgt. Maj. Rafael Rodriguez, 3/7 sergeant major.

As part of their mission, 3/7, oversaw the construction of seven new schools, three clinics, several training sites, and hundreds of miles of road throughout Helmand province.

"The Marines have helped the people (of Afghanistan)," said Sherhassans. "Their help with schools and medical independence will last for a long time."

Folsom said the Marines worked closely with their Afghan counterparts to develop a district security plan, which ANSF executed.

"The plan involved mutually deciding between our forces and ANSF which positions we would tear down and which positions we would transfer over," said Folsom.

"We also were able to mutually decide how to divide the battle space between the four major forces that were here in Sangin: the Marines, the Afghan National Army, the Afghan Uniformed Police, and the Afghan National Civil Order Police," he added.

3/7, followed the district security plan, downsizing from 25 positions, to 5 independent Marine positions. The remaining 20 position were transferred to ANSF or torn down.

Fewer positions did not mean Marines stopped working in the area. Operations varied from daily presence patrols, to larger company- and battalion-level missions.

"I think the security in Sangin is in a great state," said Rodriguez. "Evidence of this is the elections that were held in Sangin (March 28)."

More than 2,000 people voted in the elections, an indication that Afghans feel they can vote without the threat of insurgents, said Rodriguez.

"I am glad the elections went (well)," said Sherhassans. "It shows the people are happy and (feel) safe."

In 2010, the last time 3/7, was here, insurgents used violence during the elections to discourage people from voting.

"Instead, on March 28, there was absolutely no incident of violence, or intimidation among the locals," Folsom said.

The battalion's hard work to maintain security has developed strong bonds of trust with the Afghan locals.

"In certain areas, the local population embraces the Marines, and they continuously praise Marines for their efforts and the security we provide them," said Rodriguez. "In some areas, they let the squad leaders know where possible (improvised explosive devices) are placed, or they extract them from the ground and bring them to the local patrol bases."

At the end of the deployment, 3/7, packed their bags and waited for their flight. When it arrived, their replacements, 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, came off first. As they passed, Marines from each battalion exchanged "good lucks" and "good jobs" with each other.

Third Battalion left knowing they handed over a more secure and independent Sangin.



Cpl. Randy Cripe, squad leader, Company L, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, provides security with the rest of his squad while on patrol Feb. 27.

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Journey ^(Part2) through Snow

AS TOLD BY

Lance Cpl. Ali Azimi, combat correspondent

A trek to the top of the mountain, helo evacuation, and snow survival

Editors note: This is the second of a three-part series written from the perspective of a combat correspondent new to cold weather and high altitude training

Our first few days were spent acclimating to the elevation. I had a really bad headache the entire first day. I talked to a hospital corpsman, also known as "doc," about it. Apparently my brain was expanding because of the decrease in air pressure.

The third day here, it snowed. Everything was covered in a thick blanket of white powder.

The snow melted by the next day. It showed us how quickly the weather can change up here.

I thought I would be hearing Marines complaining about it left and right, but instead most were laughing about it or making jokes. Talk about Marine Corps spirit.

We spent our acclimation period doing hikes and taking environmental training classes up in the mountains. All this led up to our first day in the field.

I hiked up to Summit Meadows with Golf Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, the hardest hike I have ever been on. We carried a full combat load, plus snow gear and weapons.

At first, everyone was excited to get to the snowy hilltops. The beginning was all dirt and actually hot.

We were climbing 9,300 ft above sea level. We didn't hit snow until 8,000 ft.

By that point I was exhausted. All that went through my head was "right foot, left foot, right foot..." This was worse than the Reaper at recruit training. West Coast Marines always brag about the Reaper. Well now 2/7 Marines can brag about Bridgeport. And so can I.

After the 8,000-ft. mark, the surrounding area was snowy and the trail a combination of mud and ice. Each step held the potential of a fall.

Thankfully we stopped to put our snow shoes on. With the teeth at the bottom of the shoe gripping the slick surface beneath us, the only thing we had to worry about was making it to the top.

Eventually, we made it to Summit Meadows.

I spent the night with Golf Company before I was transferred to Fox Company at Grouse Meadows.

The Marines of Fox Company had developed an intricate system of trenches in between

their tent areas for faster movement through the deep snow.

Their defensive positions were set behind a treeline. When I first arrived, I didn't see it right away. It took me a minute before I spotted a tent hiding behind the towering trees.

My first day with Co. F, I went out to see a medical evacuation. In the middle of the untouched snow stood a helicopter with Army written on the side. Surrounding it was a crowd of Marines, some from Fox Company, the majority from Weapons Company.

The soldiers gave a quick run-through of the procedures before letting some of the Marines do it themselves.

The helo blasted particles of ice from the ground into my face. It was hard to keep watching, but we all did. How often do you get a chance to see a helo lift off with a hurricane of snow beneath it?

Most days in the field consisted of skiing and melting snow for water, with class on anchoring or avalanche training in between. But everything was taught in the snow.

Melting snow made me appreciate the ready supply of water at Twentynine Palms. It took a long time to melt a small amount. And even when you did, there were small particles in there that gave the water a piney taste.

I tried to get use to the taste. That didn't work. I looked around and saw Marines using t-shirts to filter out the particles as they poured the boiled water into their Nalgene bottles. The particles were gone, but the taste was still there.

The skiing sounded like fun. I went out thinking it would be an easy day. I didn't know how hard it was to ski. I ate snow on a daily basis. I guess that's faster than trying to melt it.

The weather was always cold. In the mornings, I didn't want to leave my tent. At night I couldn't wait to get in my happy suit.

There were a couple of hours of warmth in the afternoon, but as it passed, the chill set in.

Four days after arriving at Grouse Meadows, we packed backup and headed back up to Summit Meadows.

Word from the lance corporal underground said that we would have our tents taken away and forced to make ice shelters. I am convinced I will freeze to death.

**Looking for local entertainment?
See page B2 for our Liberty Call section**



A PORTFOLIO

The adventures of Scuba Dave

STORY BY LANCE CPL. D. J. WU

PHOTOS BY SGT. HEATHER GOLDEN

Let me start off by saying, I'm not a strong swimmer. So when I got pegged to go try out a new scuba program on base, I went into the assignment with apprehension. I think scuba is a neat idea, but the idea of spending an extended amount of time not only in the water, but underwater didn't sit well with me.

This was a first for me, though, and I'm usually up to try new things.

The class was taught by instructors from Get Wet Scuba, a company based out of Palm Springs. The class I participated in was one of their free Discovery Scuba classes.

As safe as it sounded, it did nothing to quell the nervous ball in the pit of my stomach. So, I decided to spy a bit. I went to an earlier class to just watch, and decide if I was going to do this thing.

To my relief, no one came remotely close to drowning. I actually got a bit excited to get into the water when I saw how basic it was.

Weird.

The classes were small. Mine had three, which is a good thing I guess. That way it'd be more noticeable if I started to die. My instructor was a pretty cool old dude named Wayne. He's been scuba diving since, like the 70s.

"Safety is our number one concern," Wayne told us.

At this point, I was feeling pretty good. That and we were "diving" in the shallow end of the Training Tank.

Yeah, we were scuba diving in the shallow end of a pool. Like, the kiddie end. There were some points where I was still uncomfortable though. I was still in the water, after all. Fish belong in water. Not people.

So we go over the basics of what scuba is and the gear. It was just a short sit down class, just to make sure we knew what the parts were called and what the underwater safety signals were.

The point of the class was for us to experience what scuba was and learning the feeling of "breathing underwater."

It was warmer in the pool than outside, so at least I didn't have to worry about freezing to death on top of drowning.

Everything was straightforward though. Wayne taught us how to our regulators (that's the part that you use to breathe), and our buoyancy compensator devices to make us "neutrally buoyant."



Wayne described it like being in being in space.

I've never been to space, but now I understand why astronauts use pools to simulate zero gravity. We just sort of bobbed halfway between the water's break and the pool's floor.

The main thing I had to remember was to be a mouth-breather. No really. Try breathing through your nose as see how successful your scuba trip is.

I was learning a good bit out there. With this little foray into scuba I think, I'm starting to like it.

Once we got the hang of this alien world, Wayne let us just drift around the pool for a while. I enjoyed it more than I thought I would.

I took the time to pose for a few snapshots. It wasn't hard to convince me, though. This mug belongs on a front page. We all know this. But, it's hard to take photos when you're in four feet of water and all your photographer wants to do is float around. It was fun all the same.

The day was over all too quickly. I've never been in the position where I wanted to swim more.

But, that was the idea behind Discovery Scuba. They give you a little taste on what it's like, hopping to reel you in for some real classes.

They win. I am actually giving some thought to scuba diving, like real scuba diving. Like in the ocean where the real danger is, scuba diving.

It's one of those cool, worldly sounding hobbies. Like saying I'm a cigar aficionado (which I say), or drinking good scotch (which I do.)

I tried to walk out of the pool, scuba gear and all, for another photo op. That was easier said than done. I always thought all those bad 70s beach movies where people with scuba gear walk like impaired penguins exaggerated that point. They don't. There's no way to not look absolutely ridiculous walking around with a heavy oxygen tank and flippers longer than your femur.

We had the option to sign up for the full class right after.

I'm not quite ready for that yet. Consider me more of a scuba fledgling. Maybe even still a nestling. I'm going work my way up to. We'll see. Next time, next time.





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.
Thursday: Social Hour, 7:30 - 9:30 p.m.

Bloodstripes NCO Club

Friday: Social Hour with food, 5 - 7 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: All-hands lunch from 10:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.
Monday: Steak night and full menu, 4:30 - 8 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: Taco Night, 5 - 7 p.m.

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

Local Events

A Little Murder Never Hurt Anybody

When: Every Friday & Saturday from May 4 to June 2
Where: Theatre 29
736377 Sullivan Rd., Twentynine Palms, Calif.
For tickets and information call 316-4151
or visit <http://www.theatre29.org>

Mini Mansions

Baroque, gothic, psychedelic, and cinematic live music
When: 9 p.m., Friday, April 20.
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

Vince Neil of Motley Crue

Heavy metal, hard rock
When: 8 p.m., Saturday, April 21
Where: Spotlight 29 Casino Resort
46-200 Harrison Place, Coachella, Calif.
For more information call 866-377-6829 or visit
<http://www.spotlight29.com>.

Tony Bennett

Legendary entertainer sings live
When: 9 p.m., Friday, May 11
Where: Morongo Casino Resort and Spa
49500 Seminole Drive, Cabazon, Calif.
For more information call 800-252-4499 or visit
<http://www.morongocasinosort.com>.

Sugarland

Country group live in concert
When: 9 p.m., Saturday, May 25
Where: Agua Caliente
32-250 Bob Hope Dr., Rancho Mirage
For more information call 888-999-1995 or visit
<http://hotwatercasino.com>.

Joan Sebastian

Grammy Award-winning Mexican singer, songwriter
When: 8 p.m., Saturday, June 16
Where: Fantasy Springs Resort Casino
84-245 Indio Springs Parkway, Indio
For more information call 800-827-2946 or visit
<http://www.fantasyspringsresort.com>.

Sunset Cinema

Friday, April 13

6 p.m. - Gone, Rated PG-13
9 p.m. - Tyler Perry's Good Deeds, Rated PG-13
Midnight - Act of Valor, Rated R

Saturday, April 14

11 a.m. - Free Matinee Rio, Rated G
12:30 p.m. - This Means War, Rated PG-13
3 p.m. - Smurfs 3D, Rated PG
6 p.m. - Ghost Rider: Spirit of Vengeance, Rated PG-13
9 p.m. - Gone, Rated PG-13
Midnight - Wanderlust, Rated R

Sunday, April 15

12:30 p.m. - Dr. Seuss' The Lorax, Rated PG
3 p.m. - The Vow, Rated PG-13
6 p.m. - Free Sneak Peak The Lucky One, Rated PG-13
9 p.m. - Act of Valor, Rated R

Monday, April 16

7 p.m. - Gone, Rated PG-13

Tuesday, April 17

7 p.m. - Ghost Rider: Spirit of Vengeance 3D, Rated PG-13

Wednesday, April 18

5:30 p.m. - Tyler Perry's Good Deeds, Rated PG-13
8:30 p.m. - Wanderlust, Rated R

Thursday, April 19

5:30 p.m. - This Means War, Rated PG-13
8:30 p.m. - Ghost Rider: Spirit of Vengeance, Rated PG-13

Smash novel becomes Hollywood hit movie about freaky future



Jennifer Lawrence anchors the action as Katniss Everdeen, the 16-year-old heroine who uses her Appalachian woodland skills to compete in the Hunger Games, a perverse combination of TV reality show, gladiatorial match, popularity contest and survival-of-the-fittest kill-fest.

NEIL POND

"The Hunger Games"

Starring Jennifer Lawrence, Woody Harrelson and Josh Hutcherson
Directed by Gary Ross
142 min., PG-13

Fans of author Suzanne Collins' smash 2008 novel "The Hunger Games," the first in a trilogy about a freaky future in which kids are forced into a fight to the death, scarfed down the movie over its box-office-busting, \$152 million opening weekend.

Jennifer Lawrence, who generated a buzz last year in "Winter's Bone," anchors the action as Katniss Everdeen, the resourceful 16-year-old heroine who uses her Appalachian woodland skills to compete in the games, a perverse combination of TV reality show, gladiatorial match, popularity contest and survival-of-the-fittest kill-fest.

Woody Harrelson is Haymitch Abernathy, a former games "victor" now serving as mentor to new competitors. Stanley Tucci, Elizabeth Banks, Donald Sutherland and Wes Bentley put their acting stamps onto other characters central to the story. Rocker Lenny Kravitz appears as Cinna, a stylist who primps contestants for their parade of frenzied public appearances that precede the games.

Looking ahead to a second movie and beyond, the film also sets up the framework for a romantic triangle between Katniss and Peeta (Josh Hutcherson), the boy from her district who's also chosen to compete, and Gale (Liam Hemsworth), her guy pal from back home.

Like "Harry Potter" and "Twilight," the two book-to-movie franchise high-water marks to which it will be measured, "The Hunger Games" serves young audiences a potent cocktail of teen spirit, fantasy, oppression and suppression,

and a looming specter of death that snuffs out young lives too soon. But far beyond anything offered by those two movies, Lawrence is a strong role model for young girls with her character's traits of sacrifice, courage, moral grounding in a world that's lost its own, and a fierce will to fight for what's right, even if it means bucking the system, sacrificing her own life, or sparking a revolution.

But while everything may be seasoned to taste for many of the 23.5 million people who made Collins' books bestsellers, it doesn't quite measure up to an epic feast, especially for viewers without a love connection to its literary roots. Director Gary Ross seems to have trouble finding the right tone to meld the saga's media satire and blood-curdling sci-fi shudders.

The production values are serviceable, but rarely anything above pedestrian. The camera work, dominated by extreme close-ups and shaky hand-held shots, is often hard on the eye-

balls. The sets and special effects look cheap, sometimes even cheesy.

And there's something troubling about a movie asking audiences to cheer for a young character, a child, really, whose survival depends on other children being slaughtered even in a "tasteful," PG-13 kind of way. An edgier movie, in stronger hands, could have (and perhaps should have) drilled down much deeper, and harder, into the troubling, brave-new-world nightmare of that horrifyingly dysfunctional futuristic scenario and what it says about our modern-day appetite for destruction.

But it's pointless to be too picky about the meal when "The Hunger Games" is the hottest dish to come out of the kitchen in months, if not years, and people can't seem to get enough. The games have begun, and there's more to come. If you don't care to join in the feast and festivities, well, at least now you know what all the gobbling is about.

The starting PITCH

Photos by
Lance Cpl. Lauren A. Kurkimilis

Twenty-nine Palms Little League Baseball season began Saturday when Brig. Gen. George W. Smith Jr., installation commanding general, threw the first pitch. Each team was introduced as they walked out on to the field, and they lined up around the pitcher's mound from youngest to oldest. They watched Marines march on the colors and listened to a fellow little league player sing the National Anthem.

Coaches and facilitators of Twenty-nine Palms Little League Baseball were recognized, and every team played their first game that day.



[Top, Right] Twenty-nine Palms Little League teams are introduced during the league's opening ceremony Saturday. **[Left]** Keshan Rowe, 12, son of Staff Sgt. Amelia M Rowe, career planner, Headquarters Battalion, and Kirby Cooper, 12, son of Sgt. Maj. Scott E. Cooper, battalion sergeant major, HQBN, showed their excitement just before their game started. **[Right]** Brig. Gen. George W. Smith Jr., installation commanding general, salutes the colors before throwing the first pitch of the season.