Marines come home from NATO Training Mission Afghanistan

Cpl. Sarah Dietz
Combat Correspondent

Marines and sailors from Company B, 1st Tank Battalion, were welcomed home Saturday by hundreds of excited family members and friends from their recent seven-month deployment to Afghanistan.

The company marched into the 1st Tanks compound to a sea of smiling faces and loud cheers.

One of the first marines meeting their families, he was born during their time away.

As hard as it must have been for the deceased, but also for the families who have been waiting for their loved ones to come home, it is a time for celebration.

Memorial Day and Labor Day was less than a month away, with Heat and Golden.

While deployed with the MEU, the battery provided artillery support for the infantrymen of Battalion Landing Team 3/11 returns from sea

Sgt. Heather Golden
Combat Correspondent

When Cpl. Don Robinson left to join the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit with the rest of Lima Battery, 3rd Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment, in November, his daughter Samira was a tiny 2-month-old.

On Monday, six months later, Robinson and the other 111 Marines who left with the Oahu-based MEU, stopped off the longналошдоо лоо to Dal Vade Field to happy, tearful reunions with the families and friends they left behind.

For some, it was like they never left. For others, like Robinson, coming home meant adjusting to what’s changed.

“Amazing,” Robinson said about how much his now 8-month-old daughter has grown. “It’s the same, but not the same thing.”

While deployed with the MEU, the battery provided artillery support for the infantrymen of Battalion Landing Team 3/11.

During the summer, people are changing their diets, exercising more, and enjoying outdoor activities.

Fatal summertime accidents are a frequent occurrence, with each year seeing a significant number of deaths.

Whether taking a road trip, swimming, or participating in other summer activities, it’s important to be aware of risks associated with such activities.

Civilians to be aware of risks associated with such activities.

Summer fun done safely

Trent Moon Crunk
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, May 22, 2012 – As summer approaches, Defense Department officials want military members and civilian employees to think about safety during their recreational pursuits.

Col. Phillip W. Chandler, the department’s director of operational safety, said “Outside of combat, I don’t know that you can out and fight and win the nation’s battles,” Chandler said. “This is what we’re doing here. We are conducting an aerial training mission Tuesday to transport Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 167 out of Marine Corps Air Station New River, N.C., conducted an aerial training mission Tuesday using their UH-1Y ‘Y ankee’ in EMV back to the technical skills needed at the root of the change from the last decade of combat operations as well as during one of the center’s darkest hours.

The training center to Lt. Col. John J. Carroll after two years of leadership through periods of development as well as during one of the center’s darker hours.

Under his guidance, Chandler chucked a service change from the last decade of combat operations back to the technical skills needed at the root of the center’s mission, fighting and winning the nation’s battles in alpine environments. Instructor teams trained extensively in skiing, assault climbing, and backcountry travel.

The battalion’s mission overseas, the scenario was setting up for a large scale attack from notional enemy forces in the north.

Later, the Marines transported Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 167 out of Marine Corps Air Station New River, NC, conducted an aerial training mission Tuesday using their UH-1Y ‘Y ankee’ in EMV back to the technical skills needed at the root of the change from the last decade of combat operations as well as during one of the center’s darkest hours.

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While transitioning from combat to an advisor role, the task was dubbed an extremely successful deployment, according to the Commandant.

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I am not just a piece of brightly colored cloth, or a decoration for your porch. I am much more than that. I am a symbol of something great. "Old Glory," I am called. But my glory?... My glory lies in those hearts that yearn for freedom. Freedom to love and to laugh. And most importantly, to live.

I was there when my country was born. She was then a small orphan, with nothing but wilderness at her back, and too few neighbors she could call friends.

I watched as we survived and grew strong. I have been there. Everywhere America's warriors have been, I've been tight there alongside them in the fight. Through all the trials we've had, my colors have never faded. Even in our nation's darkest hours, when the sun rose, I'm still there urging my countrymen to soldier on.

I never forget those who died for me. My memory is bright with the stories of those heroes whose lives, though sometimes cut too short, championed America.

I guess you could call me one of the first true Americans.

I am considered a living symbol of the U.S., even though I don't breathe or eat or sleep. American pride and ideals are what give me life. A million lives, or more, even, were willingly given to give me voice.

With that voice, I called out to the world, "Come to my shores, all who are tired, poor, oppressed, and yearning to breathe freely. Come and I will be your guarantee of liberty."

I didn't look like this at first after we claimed our independence. On New Year's Day 1776, George Washington had the Grand Union flag hoisted over his base at Prospect Hill outside the siege of Boston. There were 13 red and white alternating stripes, and the British Union Jack in the upper left-hand corner.

Betsy Ross sewed the first of my kind in May 1776. But I wasn't an official symbol of our nation until 1777 when Congress passed the first Flag Act. I was to have 13 stripes of red and white, and 13 stars.

They said my original 13 stars were to represent "a new constellation."

As America grew, so did I. I changed my look more than once. My shape and design changed five times between 1777 and 1960. My proportions changed, the number of stripes and stars changed. Even how the stars are placed on their field of blue changed. What never changed is what I represent.

Today, and since 1960, I have 13 horizontal stripes, seven red and six white. These are for the original 13 colonies. I have 50 stars, one each for every state in the Union.

Even my colors are symbolic, and not simply just leftover from the familiarity of the Union Jack flown during British rule. Red is for hardiness and valor. White is for purity and innocence. Blue is for vigilance, perseverance and justice.

I never really retire. You can actually fly any of my predecessors. According to the Flag Code, any official American flag, even if it is a former official one, is still an active and living symbol of this country.

Contrary to popular belief, you are not duty-bound to destroy me. Just immediately fix the situation and move on. I'm willing to forgive and forget.

Did you know you don't have to be a veteran to have me draped on your coffin? The Flag Code doesn't specifically prohibit anyone from having this honor, although it is more commonly reserved for service members.

When the day comes that I am too worn or tattered, beyond repair, and I can no longer properly represent America I need to be disposed of in a dignified manner, like ceremonial burning.

First my stripes are separated. Red burned, then white. Then go my stars, one by one. It may seem odd, but that's my tradition.
Story and photo by Cpl. Timothy Lenzo
1st Marine Division

1st Marine Division

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan—Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Maribel Valdez, adjutant with the 1st Marine Division (Forward) at Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, poses with photos of her five children, May 15. Valdez, who deployed to Afghanistan in January, tries to communicate with her family every day.

Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Maribel Valdez, the adjutant with the 1st Marine Division (Forward) at Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, poses with photos of her five children, May 15, 2012.

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A Mother’s Day in Afghanistan

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan—Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Maribel Valdez, adjutant, 1st Marine Division (Forward), sits quietly at her desk. She sits straight with dark eyes, her M-9 pistol holstered tight against her uniform, and pictures of her family on the board behind her, showcasing the two different lives she lives.

She’s a mother and a Marine. It’s a balancing act that’s more difficult since she deployed to Afghanistan in January. She’s thousands of miles from her children, having traded the sunny Southern California lifestyle for the heat and dust of Afghanistan.

“It’s very hard, I’m not going to say it’s easy,” Valdez said. “I think it’s harder being a mom, it’s hard to know that a big part of your life is not here with you.”

A large part of her life is at her home in Temecula. Valdez has five children: Breanna, 12; Jose, 10; Issac, 9; Jason, 5; and Jacob, 4. Valdez said it’s hard for her younger children to understand why she can’t be home.

“No matter how you tell them you are working, they don’t understand,” Valdez said. “To them, it’s ‘Mommy’s gone’ or ‘Mommy left me.’”

Valdez prepared her family as best she could before she deployed. She told them why she had to leave and how her job as an adjutant helps Marines.

“I explained to my [children] that my purpose was to make sure that everyone that was doing great things was being recognized for it,” Valdez said.

Mother’s Day on May 13 came and went much like any other day for Valdez, with the exception of a few well wishes via email. She woke up and went to work like she does every Sunday.

“Mother’s Day was just a typical day until night when I got to talk to [the kids],” Valdez said.

Afghanistan is 12 hours and 30 minutes ahead of Temecula, so when Valdez called her family, Mother’s Day was almost over. It was bittersweet for Valdez. Her children wished her a Happy Mother’s Day, but also expressed how much they missed her and wished she was home.

“It was heartbreaking because it was the first time my children said ‘Mom you left me’ or ‘I’m lonely,’” Valdez said. “It’s hard to comfort them over the phone, knowing I can’t hug them to make them feel better.”

The pain of not being able to be there for her children is difficult for Valdez, a proud Marine and even prouder parent.

“When they hurt, you hurt, when they’re happy, you’re happy,” she explained.

When Valdez married her husband Jose, a former Marine, he had three children from a previous marriage, forcing her to learn quickly how to be a mother.

“It was like instant family when I got married — just add water, and all of a sudden you have children,” Valdez explained.

Valdez said being a mother was difficult and stressful, but it has made her a better person and a better Marine. She wouldn’t change it for the world.

Valdez said she’d balanced being a mother and taking care of her junior Marines by taking the lessons learned from motherhood and applying them to her military career.

“I commonly refer to her as ‘Mommy Valdez’ because she’s like the ‘Mom’ of the office,” said Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Andres Lente, the division’s adjutant chief. “Momma Valdez earned her nickname, Smith said, by being an understanding and caring staff noncommissioned officer. She also has the ability to get her Marines’ attention if they mess up, he said.

“Somebody does something wrong and she gives them an eye, like you know you messed up,” Smith explained.

Valdez learned the look from having four boys and one pre-teen daughter in the house. She also learned to be more understanding when people make mistakes, a valuable lesson for any mom.

With Mother’s Day fresh in her mind and a recent package delivered with a DVD, filled with music and photos of her family, Valdez can’t help but think of what it’ll be like when she returns home.

“I want to spend more time with them, do more of that family bonding,” Valdez said. “She plans to take her children to amusement parks, Washington, D.C., and national parks. There are certain things that I think my children need to experience — like traveling,” she said.

Valdez knows it’s difficult for her family while she’s deployed, and noted she will be happy to return home to them.

“The first thing I’m going to do, is hug them because I miss that feeling,” Valdez said with a grin.
Capt. Sung Kim speaks with Republic of Korea Marines visiting USS New Orleans and embarked members of the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit June 2.

Grenadier Kwon Woo Kim of the Republic of Korea Marine, arrives aboard USS New Orleans June 1 during flight operations with the ship and the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit.

Cpl. Matthew Shrader demonstrates speed reloading a rifle to Republic of Korea Marines visiting USS New Orleans and embarked members of the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit during a weapons class June 3.

Republic of Korea Marines and embarked members of the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit participate in a weapons class June 3.
Marines reach out

Post

Marines reach out

"Combat Center Marines adopt Yucca Mesa Elementary School" is the headline of the article. The article mentions that Marines from Combat Logistics Battalion 7 helped out at Yucca Mesa Elementary School as part of the Combat Center's Adopt-a-School program. Six Marines volunteered their time at Yucca Mesa to help the school kids with their field day activities.

One of the Marines, Cpl. Shawn Asencio, administrative clerk, Headquarters and Services Company, CLB-7, brings his "Orange Dinos" team in for some chants at Yucca Mesa Elementary School's field day June 1. Asencio and six other Marines volunteered at the school as part of the Combat Center's Adopt-a-School program.

The morning of kick-ball was fun. The afternoon turned into a scorcher, getting up to 106 degrees. That afternoon, the kids cooled off by playing water games.

"Alcohol influences you, slows you down, your balance and your senses," said Cpl. Lucas Williams, optics technician, CLB-7. "It's never volunteered like this," said Cpl. Shawn Asencio, administrative clerk, Headquarters and Services Company, CLB-7. "I didn't even know we adopted a school until someone asked me if I wanted to volunteer."

Asencio was one of the six enthusiastic Marines who led the kids through their activities and encouraged them to do their best.

"These kids are enthusiastic," Asencio said. "They're really pumped up and really love the competition."

"Making smart responsible decisions helps to prevent personal tragedy and grief to loved ones," he said. "You've got responsibilities in life to those you love, and to this nation … to defend it for your family and for yourself," Angello said. "This is something I totally want to do again."

"Seat belts — even when driving on short trips — and wearing proper attire, including helmets and protective gear, when operating a motorcycle or an all-terrain vehicle. Other summer safety basics include going swimming with a friend, and only when lifeguards are on duty, he said. "Everyone should know how to swim," he said, adding that the military services had 13 swimming deaths last year.

"If we're watching out for each other and your buddy is [about to drive], take away his keys," Angello said. "We've got to remember that. He's your co-pilot, your battle buddy. You've got to take care of each other, plan ahead, and take responsibility."

"You've got to have the foresight to say, 'If I don't say no, I might not get the opportunity again because I might be dead,'" Angello said.
Tanks, from Al

According to Maj. Jared Duff, executive officer, 1st Tank Co., “Working with the Army was different, that way of doing things was very different than the Marines.”

“We had 10 days doing different missions,” said Lt. Col. Timothy Barrick, commanding officer, 1st Tanks. “I’m proud of the Marines and the work they’ve been doing.”

Fellow tankers were among the families and friends waiting at the compound.

“We are happy to have them back home,” said Capt. Dwight Bundy, commanding officer, 1st Tanks. “I’m proud of the Marines, the way they did it. They did some really amazing things out there.”

Fellow tankers were among the families and friends waiting at the compound.

“The crowd quickly dispersed minutes after they arrived,” said Meeks, wife of Staff Sgt. Michael Meeks, Services Co., 1st Tank Battalion. “They did a great job of what we do, and they trained hard to get here. They did a great job of what we do.”

“Twenty-four hours a day for five weeks,” said Capt. Robbie Jegousson, pilot, HMLA-167. “We train constantly. It simulates a combat environment.”

“The squadron is taking advantage of the Combat Center training area not only to train for combat, but also to get a better feel for their newest helicopter, the Yankee, which they received late last year.”

The UH-1Y is an upgraded version of the original UH-1 “Huey,” which has been in use in the U.S. military since the Vietnam War. The Yankee has incorporated the safety features of the public, having spent some cold and hot climates. But, it has upgraded its avionics and space technology, including aural and visual improvements and cockpit upgrades, making the helicopter safer and faster.

“The squadron is scheduled to deploy anytime in June, but is preparing for Afghanistan while becoming experts with their Yankee helicopters.”

MCWTC, from Al

“We served together. This is a team. I’m truly going to miss all the folks around here. I just think it’s a great group of professionals and that’s probably the biggest thing I’m going to miss.”

Carroll has spent 20 of his 22 years of service in either the Fleet or in various elements of Training and Education Command, giving him a strong foundation in leading and training Marines. Additionally, his time spent “up on the hill” at MCWTC during six training exercises gives him the familiarity with and appreciation for the Corps’ unique mission.

“Thanks to no other place like this in the Marine Corps, no other place like this in DOD, let alone other countries. We do a damn good job of what we do,” Carroll said.

“If you’ve got an infantry battalion, just want to get some tough, men physically challenging training that’s going to develop your small unit leaders, you need to come here.”

——-By Mary Chern

“Tanks, from Al” 06/14/12

Rear Adm. Steven Wible, artilleryman, Lima Battery, 3rd Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment, slips an engagement ring on Vanessa Lee’s hand after she accepted his proposal to marry him June 4, at the 3/11 homecoming event.
Summer's official start, June 21, is rapidly approaching, and that means an increase in activities such as barbeques, parties, travelling, swimming, boating, cycling, hiking, and camping, to name a few. The onset of summer also brings with it the 101 Critical Days of Summer Campaign, which runs from Memorial Day, May 28, to Labor Day, Sept. 30. During the 101 Critical Days of Summer Campaign, units and organizations are asked to provide their Marines and sailors with the tools and training necessary to help them participate in their summer recreational activities in a safe and responsible manner.

**TIPS**

**For Water Safety**

- Learn to swim.
- Swim where lifeguards are present.
- Keep a close eye on the kids.
- Obey signs about water conditions.
- Watch for rip currents at the beach.
- Don’t panic.

If you are trapped in a rip current, swim parallel to the shore until you are out of the current, then head for shore.

**Boating Safety**

- Take a Coast Guard approved boating class.
- Ensure everyone aboard has a personal floatation device.
June 8, 2012

Story and photos by Kelly O’Sullivan

Since 1957

Vol. 56 B SECTION

Choice Award, and he placed first in the 5- to 8-year-old Stock Division. Elijah Arzola, 8, relaxes between races. His replica of a USMC Willy’s Jeep won the General's Choice Award, and he placed first in the 5- to 8-year-old Stock Division.

And the winners are...

General's Choice: Elijah Arzola, USMC Willy's Jeep
Mayor's Choice: Nathan Pratt, Sharkmobile
Chairman's Choice: Brock Loechler, Super Mario Car

1st: Elijah Arzola
2nd: Nathan Pratt
3rd: Brock Loechler

5 to 8-year-old Super Stock Division
1st: Carson Estrada
2nd: Connor Andrews
3rd: Rachel Roybal

5 to 8-year-old Stock Division
1st: Jake Cameron
2nd: Kevin Dougherty
3rd: Austin Evans

9 to 14-year old Stock Division
1st: Brannan Dougherty
2nd: Brennan Dougherty
3rd: Austin Evans

9 to 14-year old Super Stock Division
1st: Connor Andrews
2nd: Carson Estrada
3rd: Rachel Roybal

“Man down, man down!” Jared Brase shouted when the back of his racecar popped loose as his dad jockeyed him into position for his first heat in the 2012 Armed Services YMCA Soapbox Derby on June 2.
F. F. P. Two days later, the film’s first screening took place in Los Angeles, followed by a worldwide release on Friday, June 14.
Marines get involved in 12th Annual Street Fair

More than 50 cars, trucks and motorcycles were displayed in the 12th Annual Street Fair and Car Show. The vehicles were judged in 11 categories to include People’s choice and Mayor’s Choice. Marines from 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion set up a static display of military vehicles for the public to see. For more photos, check out the Twentynine Palms Car Show album at facebook.com/usarmyembassyiraq.

Cpl Sean Smith, gunner, 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, shows John-john Housnick, age 12, an M-240 machine gun at the Twentynine Palms Car Show in downtown Twentynine Palms June 2.