



OBSERVATION POST

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The Original Steel Knights

FINEX brings SK13 to close

Lance Cpl. D. J. Wu
Combat Correspondent

1st Marine Division has taken over the Combat Center's Training areas with Steel Knight 13, the division's largest annual training exercise, for the past two weeks.

Their final exercise brings together all the skills they refined during their training into one large-scale attack involving the participating units at the same time.

Steel Knight 13 brought together over a dozen units across the division to train in a combined arms live-fire exercise at the Combat Center and Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif.

"We brought all of the different elements of the Marine Corps together for a coordinated live fire training event," Maj. Serge Morosoff, battalion executive officer, 2nd Battalion, 4th

"It's all about the training. That is what makes us so successful when we get into the fight."
— 1st Sgt. Julio Torres



1st Tank Battalion has had a stake in Exercise Steel Knight since the program's inception in 1991. The battalion is still participating to this day.

Lance Cpl. D. J. Wu
Combat Correspondent

Company C of 1st Tanks took part in Steel Knight 13 providing support for 2nd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment during an attack on the Combat Center's Range 210 Dec. 6.

Exercise Steel Knight is a combined arms live fire exercise and is 1st Marine Division's largest annual training exercise. The exercise takes place at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif., and the Combat Center and involves over a dozen units from both installations.

1st Tanks gave 2/4, a unit based out of Camp Pendleton, a taste of what it's like working alongside tanks.

"Today we worked on the mechanized assault course," said Capt. Harry Consaul, company commander, Co. C, 1st Tanks. "Essentially, it is an infantry company reinforced. They do a conventional attack through several objectives."

As one of the tenant commands at the Combat Center, 1st Tanks had a lot to show 2/4 in ways to integrate their Marines with the

armored assets and how to navigate the ranges.

"It's good for 1st Tanks to be out here," Consaul said. "We know the training areas really well. We know the ins-and-outs. We do the mechanized assault course a lot. We operate in these training areas. We play a lot with TTECG. So we're pretty well-versed in the area. That can help influence 2/4, a Camp Pendleton unit with a lot of insight to help conduct their attacks."

The tank company was attached to Regimental Combat Team 5 for the exercise and provided them with armored assets through the training cycle.

"We're here to reinforce them with tank fire and armored mobility to train their Marines in tank-infantry integration," Consaul said.

The units worked side-by-side in the attack. They worked together to accomplish their training objectives.

"We do a little bit of everything," said Cpl. Andrey Sotnik, tanker, C Co., 1st Tanks. "We support grunts here at (Military Operation on

See **TANKS** page A4

Marine Regiment. "We take foot-mobile infantry and having a chance to ride on armored vehicles, employing aviation, artillery and tanks. It's all complicated and a lot of work but we're able to do this here in Twentynine Palms."

The FINEX had the battalion breach an enemy position, clear a Military Operation on Urban Terrain town and move up and establish a defensive position. The operation used all the assets available to SK13.

The Marines practiced getting back to the basics throughout the Steel Knight training events. They focused on a building block approach with their small unit leaders and worked their way up to the division-level FINEX.

"It's always important learning everything about what you're going to put into action," said 1st Sgt. Julio Torres, company first sergeant, Weapons Company, 2/4. "It's all about the training. That is what makes us so

See **FINEX** page A4

3rd LAR dedicate memorial to fallen brothers

Lance Cpl. Ali Azimi
Combat Correspondent

In August of 1990, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. Within two weeks, the Marines of 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion deployed and were on the by the Aug. 16. Once the air war started, the Wolf Pack, as part of Task Force Sheppard, moved immediately up to the border. The first offensive action on the ground in Desert Storm was conducted by the Wolf Pack.

Many Marines and sailors sacrificed their lives as a result of conflicts in the Middle East. On Dec. 7, their brothers in 3rd LAR paid tribute to these fallen heroes with the official opening of Fallen Hero Memorial Park in front of Bldg. 1620.

The park commemorated the 25 fallen heroes of

the 'Wolf Pack' from Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom. The memorials within the park featured many characteristics to reflect the strength of the fallen Marines and their enduring courage.

Two large boulders with steel plaques were set symmetrically on both sides of the park. The boulders represent strength and the steel plaques determination. The left plaque was engraved with the names of the fallen brothers from Desert Storm and the right listed those from OIF. Three palm trees stood representing 3rd LAR as well as endurance and life, and finally the gravel landscaping representing the ruggedness of the Marines, said Lt. Col. Kenneth Kassner, Assistant Chief of Staff, Marine Forces Special Operations Command.

See **MEMORIAL** page A4



Marines and sailors with 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion opened Fallen Hero Memorial Park Dec. 7, and dedicated it to the Marines and sailors who fell during Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Georgia native gains new experiences in Afghanistan

Sgt. John Jackson
Regimental Combat Team 7

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan — Growing up in southern Georgia, Cpl. Cameron Reed enjoyed the outdoors. The avid hunter got a job shortly after graduating high school working on a plantation that grew a habitat designed to attract quail.

While Reed enjoyed working on the plantation and still enjoys hunting, the 24-year-old Marine wanted to try his hand at a different career outside the small town of Thomasville.

"I figured I would do something different for a while," said Reed, motor transport operator with Regimental Combat Team 7. "I really enjoyed working on the plantation, but I wanted to try something new."

While his parents, Chuck and Julianne Reed, were hesitant at first of their son's decision to enlist in the Marine Corps, they are supportive of his career move, said Reed.

Compared to small town life in Georgia, Reed now finds himself in

a new situation and environment in southern Afghanistan's Helmand province, the country's most hostile province.

The enemy's weapon of choice has been, and continues to be, improvised explosive devices. Insurgents in Helmand province and throughout Afghanistan make the IEDs. They bury them in dirt roads and paths, targeting U.S., coalition and Afghan forces while they are moving supplies and troops throughout the battlespace.

As a motor transport operator, Reed finds himself driving through the desert of Afghanistan avoiding these deadly obstacles while supporting the infantry battalions that fall under RC-7's command.

"We stay on (Camp) Leatherneck the majority of the time, but we do get out," Reed said. "I am responsible for driving the trucks and making sure the battalions have what they need."

Reed enjoys driving the different type of tactical vehicles in the Marine Corps' arsenal, but most of

"I enjoy being around all the Marines in my unit, and I am glad to have this opportunity to deploy."
— Cpl. Cameron Reed

See **GEORGIA** page A2



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See answers on page A5

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- ACROSS**
- No __, no gain
 - Prefix with physics
 - Rattails, e.g.
 - Patron saint of sailors
 - Like the Sabin vaccine
 - Kelly Clarkson and Carrie Underwood, for two
 - Lucky Lindy's plane
 - In great shape
 - Operation Desert __
 - __ Blo fuse
 - Is mad for
 - Popular charity
 - "Pagliacci," e.g.
 - Several reps, in the gym
 - '54-to-'77 alliance
 - "Glengarry Glen Ross" playwright David
 - "My stars!"
 - Rudely sarcastic
 - Unescorted
 - "Gesundheit!"
 - Make corrections to
 - Sturgeon delicacy
 - City on the Mohawk
 - Helen Reddy chart topper
 - It makes jelly jell
 - Source of iron
 - Actor Max von __
 - Butler's word
 - High school subject
 - Bacall mate, familiarly
 - Beehive State natives
 - Quaker State city
 - Fowl buildings
 - Orange or Rose
 - Thieves' haunts
 - Roach or rat
 - Bowlful for Bowser
 - Chip-?tossers' utterance
 - "__ for the weary"
 - Witty remark
 - Libidinous god
 - Our last mustachioed president
 - "Not to mention ..."
 - Movieland
 - Altar assent
 - Bud's comedy pal
 - Brother of Peyton
 - Draft letters
 - Runs while standing
 - La-la lead-in
 - Keats offerings
 - Australian mine find
 - Shark sucker
 - Heretofore
 - Glossy fabric
 - Exhausts
 - Make invalid
 - Right-leaning
 - Tapered off
 - Grisham's "__ to Kill"
 - Alpine air
 - Tear carrier
 - Prefix meaning "within"
 - Oxeye and others
 - Has the guts
 - In need of body work
 - UN locale
 - Apply crudely
 - Not fooled by
 - "That's a relief!"
 - Barreled along
 - Ms. Brockovich
 - Bar selections
 - Pie equivalent?
 - Guernsey's greeting
 - Freudian topic
 - Saw with the grain
 - Christmas or Easter: Abbr.

Tips to Help you Safely Decorate your Homes

Story by
Combat Center Safety

Safety checklist for the holidays

- Put any fuel that can catch on fire, in an approved container outside the home.
- Inspect your home fire extinguisher.
- Test your fire alarm/other detectors.
- Install safety gates at the top and bottom of stairs to protect your toddler.
- Put nightlights in the hallways.
- Test the ground fault circuit interrupters both inside and out.

Holiday decorations and tree trimming

- Before buying your live tree, bend a few needles. If they break easily don't buy it.
- At home, put your tree in a non-tip stand filled with water. Cut a few inches off the base of the trunk, so the tree will absorb the water.
- Place your tree at least three feet from any heat source and near an electrical outlet.
- Inspect your lights, making sure there aren't any broken bulbs or sockets. Also check the cord to make sure there isn't any damage.
- String no more than three strands of lights together.

Reach for the star - but don't reach too far!

- Face the ladder while climbing and wear shoes with non-slip soles.
- Keep your body centered on the ladder when placing the top ornament on the tree.
- On the step ladder, don't step beyond the second step from the top.
- When decorating outside, be aware of electrical lines in the immediate area.

Great safety gifts to give and receive

- Smoke alarm
- Cooking thermometer
- Car emergency kit
- Safety glasses and/or goggles
- Escape ladder for those who live on the second story
- Fire extinguisher
- Carbon Monoxide detector

Make sure that you keep these holiday tips in mind so that you have a safe holiday season!

GEORGIA, from A1

all, he enjoys the brotherhood he has found in the Corps.

"I really enjoy what I do," Reed said. "I enjoy being around all the Marines in my unit, and I am glad to have this opportunity to deploy."

Reed's staff noncommissioned officer considers him a standout NCO and a team player for their unit.

"Corporal Reed is one of my top Marines," said Staff Sgt. Johnny Jimenez, RCT-7's motor transport operations chief and licensing SNCO in charge. "He does was

needs to get done. He is not a big talker, but he's a tremendously hard worker, has a great work ethic and never complains about the task at hand."

With approximately two months completed on his scheduled year long deployment, Reed looks forward to the remainder of his time in Afghanistan and the things he will learn.

"I truly do enjoy what I do," he said. "I am happy to be here and get this experience. Although, I do look forward to getting home and doing some hunting once this deployment is over."



Corporal Cameron Reed, motor transport operator with Regimental Combat Team 7 and a native of Thomasville, Ga., left his small, southern town looking for a new experience. Two years after becoming a Marine, Reed is now supporting infantry battalions in Helmand province, Afghanistan.

OBSERVATION POST

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WHAT I'VE LEARNED

THE ACTOR

Jonathan C. Fries

Student, Marine Corps Communications-Electronics School
20, Cincinnati, Ohio

INTERVIEWED AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY

LANCE CPL. ALI AZIMI

December 11, 2012



> **I look at myself as goofy** or funny, I'm always joking. It definitely transfers into the characters I play. I wouldn't say I'm shy at all. I can get on a bus or plane and make friends with anybody.

> **Acting is not for everybody.** It definitely takes practice and some raw talent.

> **It's not the easiest** thing to make somebody laugh. I went into Theater 29 thinking "I'm pretty good, I know this." But I still get taught different things and how to make the audience laugh or be sad for the actors. Acting is an art.

> **I'm currently an actor** at Theater 29. I'm cast in their production "A Don't Hug Me Christmas Carol."

> **During high school** I did a lot of theater. The end of my freshman year, we had auditions for show choir, which is competitive singing and dancing. You travel around, go out and compete. This sort of helped with acting. When you do show choir you got to be on point, you got to have facials, which is acting.

> **You talk with other Marines** about what you did before the Marine Corps. Well, I had talked about what I did in high school and everything. Kyle Schwartz, a private first class, here, said "Hey, there are auditions for this musical." At first I thought it was on base, but he said it's out in town. So we went out and I planned on auditioning and he was just going to watch, but then he ended up auditioning too. We auditioned and they said we've been casted as a part.

> **The reaction I get from** my MCCES instructors is like "Yeah, that's cool."

> **The 'guys' call it ballet.** They say, "Oh Fries is going to ballet practice." I laugh and joke. It is what it is. I enjoy doing it and they can think whatever they want.

> **I guess it really started** doing theater for my church, a Christmas pageant every

year. Just a goofy little play when I was seven or eight years old that we put on in front of the entire congregation.

> **The spring musical** my junior year was Oklahoma, where I was Ali Akeem, a street peddler. I had to put on a middle eastern accent to do this part, which was hilarious.

> **One of my biggest screw ups** that I can remember was when I was playing Jesus. I was talking practically the entire time. I skipped an entire section of the production, a good three of four pages of lines. It's live theater, anything can happen. That's what makes it fun and appealing.

> **I gave getting into acting** as a career a thought, well more than a thought. I could go to Nashville, New York, Florida, there are some big acting colleges there and I could try that. But the amount of references and work experience in the acting field to make it a career is a lot. You have people going to Hollywood, thinking "I want to be an actor," and become a server trying to get discovered. It's not a for-sure job field.

> **My dad was in the National Guard.** Joining the Marine Corps, I kind of wanted to one-up my father.

> **I had said to myself,** "I don't want to go to college; I am totally done with school." A year and a half into the Marine Corps and I'm still in school.

> **My favorite part** about acting is getting to know the people you do it with. Here at Twentynine Palms, we practice for eight weeks and we opened for five. Rob Wanless, who plays Gunner in our current production, is a retired master sergeant that I've gotten to know very well. I had Thanksgiving with him. He and I play golf pretty regularly.

> **I became a part of the** Twentynine Palms community which I really enjoy. People call me crazy because I want to get stationed here.



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<http://www.youtube.com/user/CombatCenterPAO>

<http://www.flickr.com/thecombatcenter>

TANKS, from A1

Urban Terrain) town. They get used to working with us once we go to Afghanistan or deploy to another country.”

SK 13 integrates many different assets. The exercise used all elements of the whole spectrum of a Marine Air Ground Task Force. 1st Tanks and 2/4 were helped by artillery and air assets during this part of the exercise.

All of the units are working toward Steel Knight's final exercise, where they will put together what they learned and combine it all in the three-day finale.

“The tanks here allow us to show the capabilities of what a tank brings to the infantry,” Consaul said. “A lot of infantry don't get to work with tanks. So this is a great opportunity to see the tanks in action and how we can help them in achieving their objectives and accomplishing their mission.”



PHOTOS BY LANCE CPL. D. J. WU

[Above] Marines with Company C, 2nd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, clear the town as they assault Range 210 Dec. 11, during Steel Knight 13.

[Right] Marines with Co. C, 1/4, run through Range 210 Dec. 11, during Steel Knight 13.



FINEX, from A1

successful when we get into the fight.”

Steel Knight also did something new this year and integrated the Tactical Training Exercise Control Group's new pre-deployment training standard, the Integrated Training Exercise.

Units in Steel Knight took part in training segments of ITX to train their Marines for the exercise.

“Our basic training goals were the basics themselves,” Morosff said. “ITX is going to be very similar to this. We can look at this exercise as a rehearsal. Our goal is to get it right and perfect the first time. We'll have a chance to come out and the same things we did here.”

Steel Knight brought back a focus of getting Marines back to the basics. The integration and logistics aspects of the exercise pushed the limits to have the largest Steel Knight to date.

The Marines on the ground stressed small unit leadership and got the troops to do what needed to be done and what they do best.

“What we gain from coming here is a chance to do blocking and tackling basics and just shoot, move and communicate,” Morosoff said. “Our job is to locate, close with and destroy the enemy. To do that, we have to be able to employ our weapons with accuracy, efficiency and effectiveness.”

MEMORIAL, from A1

“Everyone who knows the Wolf Pack knows the battalion's motto: ‘The strength of the pack is the wolf and the strength of the wolf is the pack,’” said Lt. Col. Mark H. Clingan, commanding officer, 3rd LAR. “With this motto, it's only fitting that we take time to remember those members of the pack that are no longer.”

The opening of the memorial was distinguished with a dedication ceremony bringing together Wolf Pack Marines, past and present, and the families of the Marines who had made the ultimate sacrifice in battle. Although the park was completed more than 18 months ago, the battalion postponed the ceremony until a time when the families could attend.

The battalion formed up in their Service Bravo uniforms behind the honored guests, who were seated in chairs set directly in front of the memorial. Twenty-five battlefield crosses, representing the 25 who were lost, were aligned across the gravel.

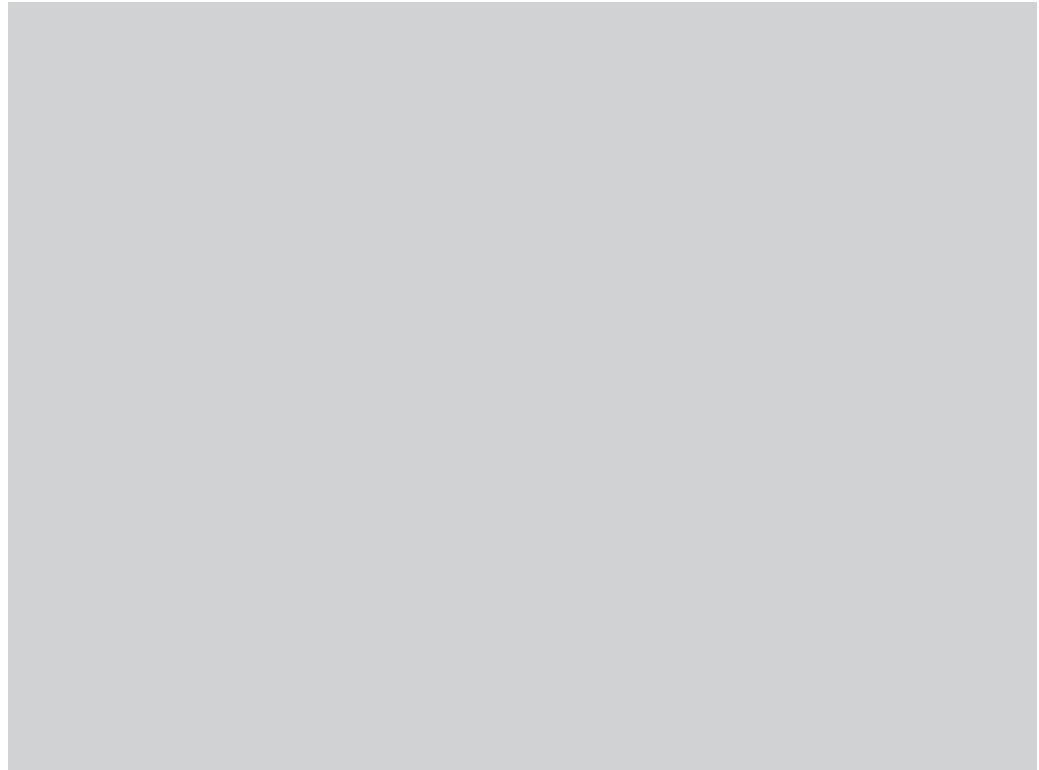
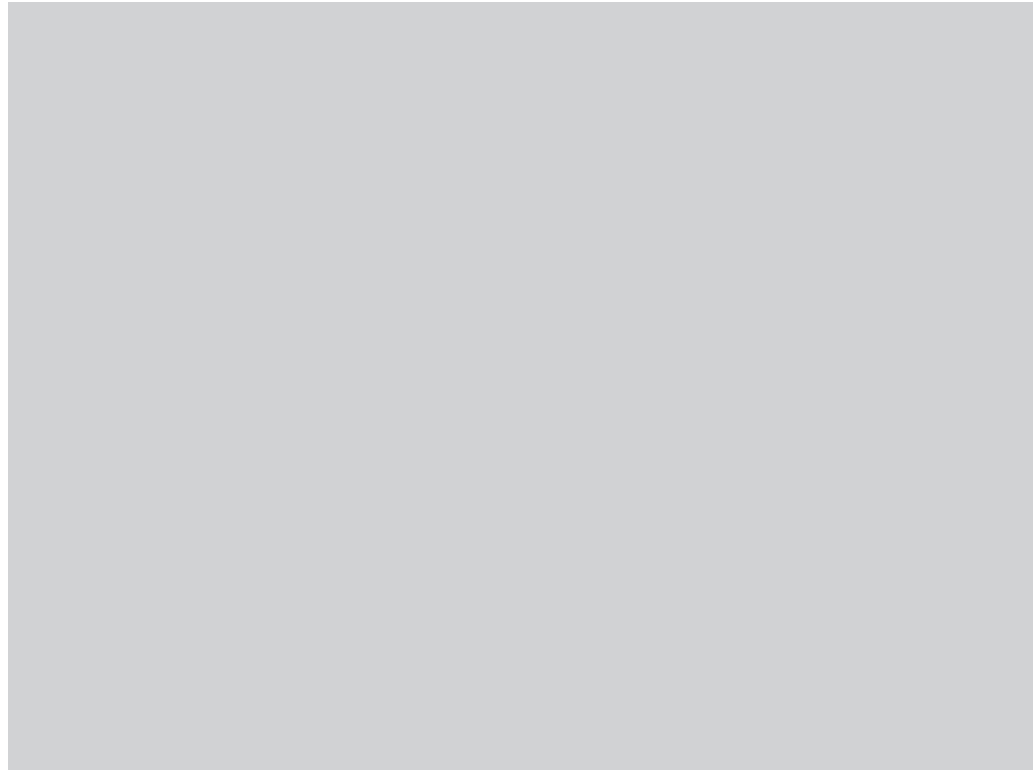
As each name of the 25 was called, a Marine stepped out of a formation at the side of the memorial to finish the battlefield cross by hanging dog tags adorning the name of the fallen hero.

“The way we are going to honor these men is by doing events like we have here today,” said retired Col. Jeffrey A. Powers, a former wolf pack Marine. “By bringing their names up, by telling their story.”



LANCE CPL. ALI AZIMI

A Marine with 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion salutes military crosses dedicated to the Marines and sailors who fell during Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom Dec. 7, during the opening of Fallen Hero Memorial Park. There were 25 Marines honored at the opening ceremony with battlefield crosses representing them.





MAJOR MCCLUNG

Marine officer's legacy lives through mind, body, spirit

Sgt. Megan Angel
Headquarters Marine Corps

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Six years ago, Marine Corps Maj. Megan McClung was in the final month of her second, year-long deployment to Iraq when, while escorting journalists from Newsweek into Ramadi, her humvee struck a massive improvised explosive device, instantly killing her and two U.S. Army soldiers, Dec. 6, 2006.

McClung was serving as the public affairs officer for the Army's 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

She was the first female Marine Corps officer to be killed in Iraq, and the first female graduate of the United States Naval Academy to be killed in action since the school was founded in 1845.

It wasn't until after she was killed that her parents, Drs. Michael and Re McClung, really began to learn about who their daughter really was, as a woman and a Marine.

"Megan did not let Re and I know that she was planning to attend the Naval Academy," said Michael. "In retrospect, that was not sur-

prising, as she was a focused and hardworking child early in her life."

When Michael, a Vietnam veteran and former Marine Corps infantry officer, found out that Megan planned to be an infantry officer in the Marine Corps, he discussed it with her, pointing out that the "law of the land" did not allow women in the infantry. After she finished The Basic School at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va., Megan reported back to her parents that she was going to be a public affairs officer.

Michael thought to himself that her choice was wonderful. Public Affairs would reward his daughter with career opportunities when she gets out of the Corps. But that wasn't Megan's logic in choosing the specialty.

"Megan said to me, 'Nope. This way I can go anywhere the infantry does and I don't have to worry about the law,'" Michael said.

During her second tour in Iraq, then Capt. McClung, was the embed coordinator for I Marine Expeditionary Force. She knew everyone of importance after her first tour and was the go-to person for news stories, Michael said.

She was committed to athletics. Megan

organized the first Marine Corps Marathon held outside of the United States. It was also the first marathon of its type held in Iraq.

Megan completed the race second among women, on a foot that was nearly broken.

Shortly after that, Megan was promoted to the rank of major and jumped at the opportunity to be transferred to the U.S. Army's "Ready First," combat brigade as their public affairs officer.

"She felt that her assignment in Fallujah was too far from the fight and she was running toward the sounds of guns," Michael said. "The commanding officer, now Brig. Gen. Sean MacFarland, said that Megan had a major impact on the morale of the soldiers and felt that she was the best PAO in Iraq. I personally feel that he was understated."

Since the loss of their daughter, Michael and Re have been devoted to carry on their daughter's legacy, which revolved around the three things she lived by: mind, body and spirit.

Mind.

Scholarships in Megan's name at three high schools on Whidbey Island, Wash.; Boston University Metropolitan College, Mass.; the Naval Academy; and the Women Marines Association honor the mind.

"When Megan left the Naval Academy, she never thought of herself as a good student and felt she should've done better while she was there," said Re, a retired school administrator. "She wanted to prove to herself that she was as better student and that's why she went back to school and earned her master's degree in criminology."

Body.

While growing up, Megan was an avid gymnast. And she loved running because it was good for the mind and body.

"Megan wanted to recognize even the very last person to finish the marathon," said Re. "She called us from Iraq and asked me to send a stuffed-toy penguin to give to the last person who finishes. Megan believed it's not how fast you run, it's that you finish. She believed that you never leave anyone behind."

In 2007, the Penguin Award was presented by Michael and Re at the Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, D.C., to the last official finisher. The Penguin Award continues to be an official award of the Marine Corps Marathon.

Megan's commitment of the body did not stop at athletics. She was also active in the Marine for Life and Wounded Warriors programs.

"I remember Meg saying, 'Mom, you have no idea how badly wounded some of these folks are, coming back from Iraq.'"

In her honor, Michael and Re also organize and sponsor a race on Whidbey Island where all proceeds go to the Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund.

Spirit.

Megan's spirit touched the lives of so many. To carry on that spirit, Michael and Re organize an annual Toys for Tots drive which provides more than 1,000 children on Whidbey Island with a toy for Christmas.

"We have really unique opportunities to interact with so many people about Megan," said Michael. "It takes people a long time to step up with their stories."

"It's a very small world and if you wait long enough, the pieces all start to come together," Re said. "One of the nicest things that have been said, these past six years, was said by male Marines. It was that Megan was a Marine's Marine. That's what she would've been most proud of."

As a young girl, Megan collected quotes, Re said. She'd write them on a piece of scrap paper, a napkin or whatever she could find, and then she'd then re-write them in a book.

"As I read them now, I see how Megan's character developed as she became an adult because of the things she chose to keep with her," she said. "When she was killed, we got her things back and it was interesting to see, as (her) mom, what was really important to her.

"She always said, 'If I own it, it's got to fit in my car because I'm going places.'"

Megan's energy and spirit continues to live on through the people who knew her, served with her and loved her.

"We've read dozens of stories sent by people who knew Megan and we have eight little girls and three service dogs running around with her name," Re said. "She had a gift, a presence. She had the ability to singularly focus with a person or on an event and make that the most important thing for that period of time."

Michael was a guest speaker at the ceremonial groundbreaking for the Education Center at The Wall Nov. 28. The Education Center will be a new addition to the National Mall, to connect future generations to the lasting impact, the profound insights, and the individual heroes of the Vietnam War.

His message was about the commitments American service members have made, to our country — to serve at any time, in any location and at any level of sacrifice — and how their legacy of service must be remembered.

"Megan had written that if she had to die, she wished it would be in a spectacular manner and while on a magnificent adventure," he said. "She was living that adventure in the Marine Corps."

"When I was asked once if I would change Megan's life, I answered I would not change a thing. Megan wanted a life of challenge, service and sacrifice, and I would not deny her that."

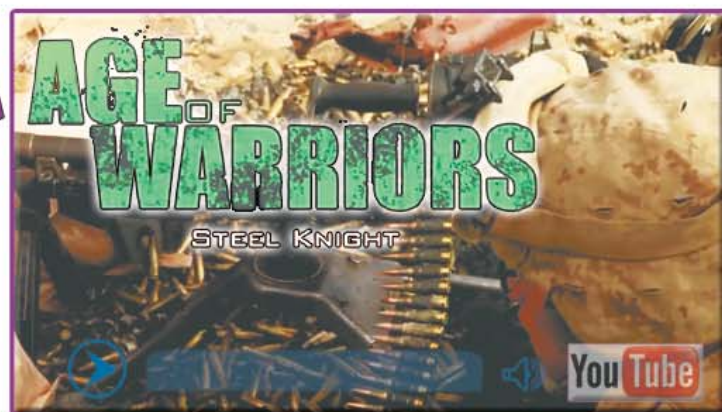
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THE FIGHTER

Story and photos by Cpl. Sarah Dietz

an Lawler is a fighter.

On the mats, in a ring, or in a cage, Lawler fought for his purple belt in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu.

To gain a new experience with life and to find new challenges, Lawler left his home in Summerset, Ky., and joined the Navy.

Lawler is a family man. His wife, Tasha, and his daughter Aaliyah, are something he fights for at home. His wife is pregnant again. Lawler might be in for a couple of more rounds soon.

Lawler's father introduced him to fighting at the age of 12 to stand up to bullies; to stand up for himself. He was always smaller than the average kid.

He has been fighting ever since.

Fighting for Work

Lawler always wanted to be a professional fighter. He achieved that at the age of 19 by winning two fights.

He joined the Navy when he was 20 when he realized he needed a change.

"I was in a dark time in my life and I thought the military would be a fresh start," he said.

He had to put his pro fighting career on hold, but that didn't mean he stopped fighting.

At Naval Hospital Corps School, Great Lakes, Illinois, he started teaching his classmates Jiu Jitsu in the lobby of his barracks. The commanding officer gave Lawler an allotted time in the gym to teach when the class got very popular among the students.

Lawler knew how to fight, but he didn't really know how to instruct others in this martial art.

"I was looking at YouTube videos to help me teach," he said. "When I left the school, I left the class in the hands of a guy who was a blue belt and had a knack for teaching."

As Lawler progressed in the military, his fight career took a heavy blow, and a series of injuries left him in a seemingly downward spiral.

He attended the Basic Reconnaissance Course at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif., but had to drop out of the course due to a hip injury.

Later, Lawler was attached to 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment. Weeks before the unit's deployment to Afghanistan, Lawler suffered an ulcer burst in his intestine, fighting for his life during pre-deployment training. He was air-lifted to the hospital and placed in surgery.

He recently received shoulder surgery due to multiple tears in his right shoulder.

Lawler looks at his injuries as a hindrance, not a deal breaker.

"It helps me be hungry to fight," he said. "The military aspect at this point with being injured doesn't really pose any threat to my passion. But, when I'm ready to compete, I'm sure it will aggravate to some degree but no one put a gun to my head and said sign. My goal is to be back in the gym."

Fighting for Family

Balancing family and his passion for fighting is important to Lawler.

"Balance is a challenge. People who are not martial artists, cannot understand. We strive to train as long and as hard as we can. The only way to counteract that is simply make the most of your time at home. Do your best to incorporate your family into your passion so they don't feel left out of what can quickly become a major part of your life," Lawler said.

"Fighting has always been a huge impact on our lives," Tasha said. "He has always found some way to integrate it into the conversation. He talks about it all the time."

Lawler met his wife Tasha while attending McCreary Central High School. They were married in 2008.

"We are from the middle of nowhere; we really didn't go on dates," Tasha said. "The first time we hung out, we sang karaoke."

Lawler's wife also knows a thing or two about fighting. Tasha enlisted in the National Guard in 2009 but couldn't continue when she fell off a 20 foot obstacle and broke her right foot and leg.

"I always wanted to go into the military, my plan was to go active duty after I got my nursing degree," she said. "We were having issues at the time. I was going to be put in the next training cycle, but my grandpa told me that my family was more important so I chose not to."

Though the experience didn't go the way she thought it would, she can see the impact it had on her life, even today.

"I think God used the military to mold me into a better person," Tasha said. "I made a 180. I became very strong in my walk with God, I felt like I could take on anything."

The day after Tasha exited boot camp, her grandfather died, giving Tasha a devastating blow. However the family tragedy grew the family closer.

"My family is stronger because of it," Tasha said. "He was my crutch, and it forced me to stand on my own."

It was a fight, but Lawler and Tasha fought through the pain and early marital struggles, and are stronger now from their fight.

"I live by this," Lawler said. "I am a Christian first, husband, father,

fighter, then corpsman."

Lawler's family is growing, as he is planning on adopting his 11-year-old niece and Tasha recently found out she was pregnant.

Adopting their niece, Danielle, is very important to the Lawlers.

"I came from a rough abusive childhood and she is growing up similarly," Tasha said. "I want to give her a chance. We have always treated her like our daughter. I want to start working with her and preparing her for college. No one in my family went to college so it was really difficult for me to prepare for it."

The adoption process however, is a fight. After three years, the Lawlers finally have temporary custody. They need to wait another year in hopes to receive full custody.

Fighting to Fight

Lawler's love for mixed martial arts started early in his life growing up in Summerset. He moved onto amateur kickboxing and boxing when he was 16 and later went on

Being a martial artist makes you look at life differently. Each time you compete you get a different sense of who you are as a fighter.

- Ian Lawler

to learn Jiu Jitsu.

"I had a rough time in middle school, I was very small," Lawler said. "I traveled 40 miles to train three days a week in Jiu Jitsu. My coach would shut off the lights and make us fight. It was amazing how much our technique improved over a few months."

On top of his own career, Lawler offers his time to teach others to fight before and after work three days a week.

"I can take a guy with no fighting experience with the desire to fight and make him a fighter and competitor," Lawler said.

He has won the Grapplers X Advanced National Championship in 2011; the Grapplers Quest Advanced Absolute Championship- declaring him the best fighter in the advance division regardless of weight class; the U.S. Grappling Advanced Absolute Championship and Advanced 175 pound championship.

Lawler will be preparing to fight in the International Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Federation Tournament in October – an invitation only event.

Until then, Lawler continues teaching mixed martial arts at Neo Warrior MMA N' Boxing Gym, a local gym in Twentynine Palms, and watches his students apply what he has taught them in competition. His love for the sport gives him a big thrill out of teaching and then watching them compete.

"Being a martial artist makes you look at life differently," Lawler said. "Each time you compete you get a different sense of who you are as a fighter. I'll be doing this until I die."

More photos on B6





Combat Center Clubs

Excursions Enlisted Club

Monday: Margarita Mondays
 Thursday: Rockin' Karaoke 7-10 p.m.
 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.

Bloodstripes NCO Club

Monday: Margarita Mondays
 Thursday: Warrior Night 4:30 - 9 p.m.
 Friday: Karaoke Night 6 - 9 p.m.

Hashmarks 29 SNCO Club

Friday: Steak Night, 4:30 - 8 p.m.
 Monday-Friday: All-hands lunch from 11 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.
 Monday: All-hands steak night, 4:30 - 8 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

Free Line Dance Lessons

Learn to dance the night away
 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.

Don't Hug Me Christmas Carol

When: Now til Dec. 15, check website for times
 Where: Theatre 29
 73637 Sullivan Rd., Twentynine Palms, Calif.
 For more information call 316-4151
 or visit <http://www.theatre29.org>

367-3577 For Advertising

Lower Desert

Ohio Players and The Family Stone

American funk groups perform
 When: 8 p.m., Saturday, Dec. 29
 Where: Spotlight 29 Casino Resort
 46-200 Harrison Place, Coachella, Calif.
 For more information call 866-377-6829 or visit <http://www.spotlight29.com>.

Men of Soul

Jeffrey Osborne, Peabo Bryson and Freddie Jackson perform
 When: 8 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 5
 Where: Agua Caliente Casino Resort Spa
 32-250 Bob Hope Dr., Rancho Mirage
 For more information call 888-999-1995 or visit <http://hotwatercasino.com>.

Golden Boy Boxing

Fighters take the ring
 When: 7 p.m., Friday, Jan. 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>.

Mariachi Divas

Quintet performs
 When: 9:00 p.m., Saturday, Dec. 15
 Where: Morongo Casino Resort and Spa
 49500 Seminole Drive, Cabazon, Calif.
 For more information call 800-252-4499 or visit <http://www.morongocasinosort.com>.

Sunset Cinema

Friday, December 14

6 p.m. – Alex Cross, Rated PG 13
 9 p.m. – Cloud Atlas, Rated R
 Midnight – Sinister, Rated R

Saturday, December 15

10:30 a.m. – Free Matinee Jingle All the Way, Rated PG
 12:30 p.m. – Here comes the Boom, Rated PG
 3 p.m. – Silent Hill Revelation 3D, Rated R
 6 p.m. – Fun Size, Rated PG-13
 9 p.m. – Argo, Rated R
 Midnight – Paranormal Activity 4, Rated R

Stunning-looking tale of survival offers much to conceive



COURTESY PHOTO

Based on the 2001 novel of the same name, it's the story of an Indian boy and what happens after a disaster at sea sets him off on an adventure in a lifeboat with a ferocious Bengal tiger.

NEIL POND

"Life of Pi"

Starring Suraj Sharma, Irrfa Khan and Adil Hussan
 Directed by Ang Lee
 PG, 127 min.

An epic tale of faith, survival and the circle of coexistence, the stunning-looking "Life of Pi" loads a lot — and a lot to think about — into its more than two hours of running time.

But in the end, it circles around to leave you wondering what, exactly, you're supposed to think about what you've just seen.

Based on the 2001 novel of the same name, it's the story of an Indian boy and what happens after a disaster at sea sets him off on an adventure in a lifeboat with a ferocious Bengal tiger.

The tale actually begins years earlier. We meet Piscine Patel as a child, learning the unlikely, watery origins of his name, a foreshadowing his oceanic ordeal to come. Soon he shortens his name to simply "Pi," giving him a connection to the universal mathematical

constant and a symbolic link to the interconnectivity of all things.

We're told how Pi, the son of a zookeeper, explores several religions, finding things in Hinduism, Christianity and Islam that all make sense...or at least make a good story. His father cautions him to use his intellect. "Believing in everything at the same time," he says, "is the same as not believing in anything at all."

Seeking a better life, Pi's father decides to relocate his family and their zoo to Canada. They book passage on a freighter and head across the sea.

That sets up the movie's dramatic middle section, in which Pi and the tiger become (eventually) the sole survivors after their cargo ship sinks in a spectacular storm.

Ang Lee, the Oscar-winning director of "Brokeback Mountain," uses special effects to create a wondrous spectrum of delights, not the least of which — by any means — is the tiger, a marvel of completely lifelike seamless computer animation married to the motion of a real animal.

The eye-popping treats also include a dazzling nighttime encounter with thousands of phosphorescent jellyfish

and a breaching whale, a splattery intersection with a school of flying fish, and a stunningly imaginative dream sequence that melds the minds of Pi and the tiger with the sea and the sky.

It's difficult to describe much more without giving away spoiler details, but I will say that things take a trippy turn toward fantasyland in the final half hour, then into a conclusion that will probably strike some viewers as profound and uplifting, and others as confounding and contradictory.

Perhaps Pi himself best sums it up in the end. Telling his incredible story "Forrest Gump" style throughout the movie in flashback to an interviewer who wants to turn it into a book, he offers in parting what may be the key to enjoying — and understanding — this thought-provoking, visually rapturous tale.

Prodded to explain what his amazing saga means, Pi responds with a question of his own. "Why does it have to mean anything?" he asks.

Sometimes, he implies — reaching for a cosmic connection far beyond his own experience — a good story is good enough. Especially one that looks, and sounds, as good as "Life of Pi."

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 Thursdays with The Desert Trail
 Fridays with The Observation Post



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PHOTOS BY CPL. SARAH DIETZ

[Left] Ian Lawler laughs with his students in-between exercises at Neo Warrior MMA N' Boxing Gym in Twentynine Palms, Calif. Lawler volunteers his time to teach Mixed Martial Arts three days a week.

[Right] Ian Lawler watches his students perform an arm bar during one of his classes at Neo Warrior MMA N' Boxing Gym in Twentynine Palms, Calif.

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