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POSTAL MARINES GEAR UP FOR HOLIDAY RUSH

Lance Cpl. Kasey Peacock
Combat Correspondent

For service members not going home during the holidays, the Christmas spirit can often be low and this cheerful time of year can feel like 'just another month.'

In today's technological world, a phone call home or an e-mail to a loved one can sometimes fill the void of being away during the holidays, but not quite as much as seeing your name on a package or a letter.

Working around the clock to fill that void, are six Marines at the Combat Center Post Office who work diligently to sort all Christmas and New Year's



LANCE CPL. KASEY PEACOCK

The Combat Center's postal Marines work diligently to sort Christmas and New Year's mail so they can arrive on time and intact.

mail so that they arrive on time and intact.

"The six of us work very hard to ensure that the Marines get their mail and packages as quick as possible," said Staff Sgt. Jonathan Davis, postal clerk, Headquarters Battalion. "We get a lot of Marines who come down here every day asking about their packages, so we understand that it is important to them. It is a great feeling to see the look on a Marine's face when you can deliver their their package, especially during the holiday season."

During Christmas and New Year's, the mail coming through the Combat Center post office increases substantially, according to Davis.

To compensate for the increase, the postal Marines do what Marines do best, deal with it.

"Even with the increase in work, we do what we have to do to get the mail out," Davis said. "We are Marines and that is what Marines do, adapt and overcome."

With the biggest push of mail coming in for the students at the Marine Corps

See **POSTAL** page A6

VINTAGE PARTY

ANNUAL HOLIDAY PARTY HOSTS MARINES, CLUB MEMBERS FOR MEMORABLE NIGHT



LANCE CPL. KASEY PEACOCK

[Above] Marines converse with Vintage Country Club members during the club's annual holiday party in Indian Wells, Calif., Saturday. [Bottom, right] Pfc. Brandon Keonakhone, student, Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School, shakes hands with a member of the All-American Boys Chorus during the holiday party Saturday.

Lance Cpl. Kasey Peacock
Combat Correspondent

Approximately 41 Marines with 1st Tank Battalion and the Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School met with Vintage Country Club members during the Vintage Country Club's Annual Holiday Party in Indian Wells, Calif., Saturday.

The annual event allows club members to provide the Marines with a fun evening, outstanding food and professional entertainment while enjoying each other's company.

While the meal was free for the Marines, the Vintage Club and American Friends of our Armed Forces also provided a chartered bus to transport the Marines to and from the event.

After introductions were made, Cpl. Jesus Bermudez, ammunition technician, 1st Tank Battalion, kicked off the night by leading everyone in the pledge of allegiance, setting the patriotic tone of the evening.

"I was extremely proud to be able to start the night off with

See **VINTAGE** page A6



CPL. D.J. WU

Tracey Holcomb, substance abuse control clerk, Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School, was awarded the Blacks in Government Meritorious Service Award for outstanding service in and around the community.

Holcomb, along with her service to MCCES in the alcohol and drug prevention program, founded a non-profit organization focusing on assisting women in the local community.

Holcomb was presented the award by Col. Andrew Murray, commanding officer, MCCES, on behalf of Clarence Johnson, director, Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel Readiness.

STEELKNIGHT



LANCE CPL. SHALTIEL DOMINGUEZ

Marines with Combat Logistics Battalion 5, Combat Logistics Regiment 1, 1st Marine Logistics Group, provide security for a tactical convoy as part of training leading up to Exercise Steel Knight 2014, Friday.

TACTICAL CONVOY TRAINING PREPARES MARINES

Lance Cpl. Shaltiel Dominguez
Combat Correspondent

"All vehicles halt," said the convoy commander over the radio. "Be advised, Vic 3 has taken indirect fire. Confirmed chemical weapons have been used." Immediately, Pfc. Justin Orovsky dismounted from the Humvee and signaled for the other Marines to don their gas masks. Two Marines dismounted from the lead vehicle to provide security while the turret gunner kept his machine gun on a swivel.

The Marines established a perimeter around the convoy and performed the necessary procedures to repair the damaged vehicle. Operating in rough terrain, harsh weather conditions and dealing with possible equipment malfunctions were just a few of the challenges that the Marines of Combat Logistics Battalion 5, Combat Logistics Regiment 1, faced during this training event aboard Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, Friday.

This was conducted as part of training leading up to Exercise Steel Knight 2014, an annual large-scale exercise designed to prepare 1st Marine Division

for deployment as the Ground Combat Element of a Marine Air-Ground Task Force supported by 1st MLG and 3rd Marine Air Wing. Combined, the MAGTF is able to deploy and respond in a timely manner to any situation across the globe.

As logistics units in support of the MAGTF, 1st MLG's convoys are required to provide supplies to the front lines, overcoming any obstacles and threats along the way. This tactical convoy training is an essential part of their skillset.

"Convoys can come across certain risks such as indirect fire and chemical warfare," said Sgt. Brandon Edgerton, convoy commander, Headquarters and Support Company, CLB-5, CLR-1. "There are also internal risks such as vehicles breaking down, so we really need to keep our Marines in a combat mindset at all times."

The training provided the Marines with some experience on how to operate in an expeditionary environment.

"Four vehicles and 16 Marines from H & S Company participated in

See **MLG** page A6



LANCE CPL. CHARLES J. SANTAMARIA

Pvt. Brian Ritzenthalen, student, Marine Corps Communications-Electronics School, volunteered to be the snowman for the Winter Festival Saturday.

WINTER Festival

COMBAT CENTER BRINGS HOLIDAYS INDOORS

Lance Cpl. Paul S. Martinez
Combat Correspondent

Marines, sailors and their families gathered at Del Valle Field for a chance to talk to Santa Claus and get some goodies during the annual Winter Festival, sponsored by Marine Corps Community Services and the United Service Organizations, Saturday.

The event featured games such as strongman and paintball, pony rides, face-painting and a toy give-away.

See **FESTIVAL** page A6

[Winter: Your Vehicle & You]

Guy Rosbough
MAGTFTC, MCAGCC Safety Division

The rapid approach of winter means drivers should take additional precautions when driving. Snow, sleet and ice can lead to slower traffic, hazardous road conditions, and unforeseen dangers. By preparing yourself and your vehicle for winter driving you can help keep yourself, your family and other travelers on the road safe.

At any temperature, 20 degrees below zero or 90 degrees above zero, weather affects road and driving conditions which can pose serious problems. Your local radio, television, newspaper and internet forecasts will give you the most up to date information on weather and road conditions.

Keep your vehicle properly serviced by checking the owner's manual for the recommended intervals. This ensures better gas mileage, quicker starts, faster response on pick-up and passing power and prevents major problems.

- ✓ Check the concentration level of the antifreeze in your vehicle's engine. Insert an antifreeze tester into the water reservoir of your car. Do not open the radiator cap!
- ✓ Add a stronger windshield cleaning/de-icer fluid solution to keep the spray from freezing.
- ✓ Check the air pressure in your tires (including the spare) and replace any worn tires. (Having proper wheel alignment will lead to a longer life for your tires).

Vehicle Checklist for Winter Weather

Before winter arrives, check these in your vehicle:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heater and windshield defroster | <input type="checkbox"/> Brake Fluid |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tires | <input type="checkbox"/> Oil |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Battery | <input type="checkbox"/> Ignition system |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Exhaust | <input type="checkbox"/> Radiator |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brakes | <input type="checkbox"/> Lights and emergency flashers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fuel | <input type="checkbox"/> Power Steering Fluid |

BIRTH ANNOUNCEMENTS

MASON LEE GRAY
Born on: Nov. 26, 2013
Born to: Jacob and Alanna Gray

DANIEL ALEJANDRO CAMACHO
Born on: Nov. 30, 2013
Born to: Daniel and Rosa Camacho

JHAMIEL GREEN
Born on: Nov. 26, 2013
Born to: Omak and Maria Green

LINDY SUE RYDMAN
Born on: Nov. 23, 2013
Born to: Kara and Micah Rydman

ISABELLE MARIE FISHER
Born on: Nov. 29, 2013
Born to: Westin and Sadie Fisher

BRIAN LAWRENCE MALAKIE
Born on: Nov. 28, 2013
Born to: Conor and Aisling Malakie

BLOOD DRIVE

COMBAT CENTER PATRONS DONATE



Combat Center personnel participate in the blood drive hosted by Desert Blood Services at the Robert E. Bush Naval Hospital parking lot Dec. 11.

Photo and story by
Lance Cpl. Alejandro Bedoya

Combat Center personnel participated in a blood drive hosted by Desert Blood Services at the Robert E. Bush Naval Hospital parking lot Wednesday. The blood drive was open to anyone willing to donate.

Desert Blood Services visits the Combat Center approximately once a month. DBS's mobile donation station enables them to park in various locations throughout the installation, allowing more personnel to donate.

"We love coming to visit the service members and families aboard this base," said Caroline Paxton, registered nurse, DBS. "It is amazing to see how willing our service members are to donate. Not only are they fighting for their country but they are helping save lives by donating to our organization."

The donated blood is given to people in need and may also be separated into plasma, red blood cells, and platelets, to facilitate more use from one donor.

According to Paxton, sometimes people will not need the blood but will need a part of the blood. By donating one pint of

blood, the donor may be helping to save up to three people.

Although the blood saves lives, there is a necessary criterion which needs to be met in order to donate. Some of the most well-known things to make a person ineligible are tattoos, sexually transmitted diseases, and travel or birth in other countries.

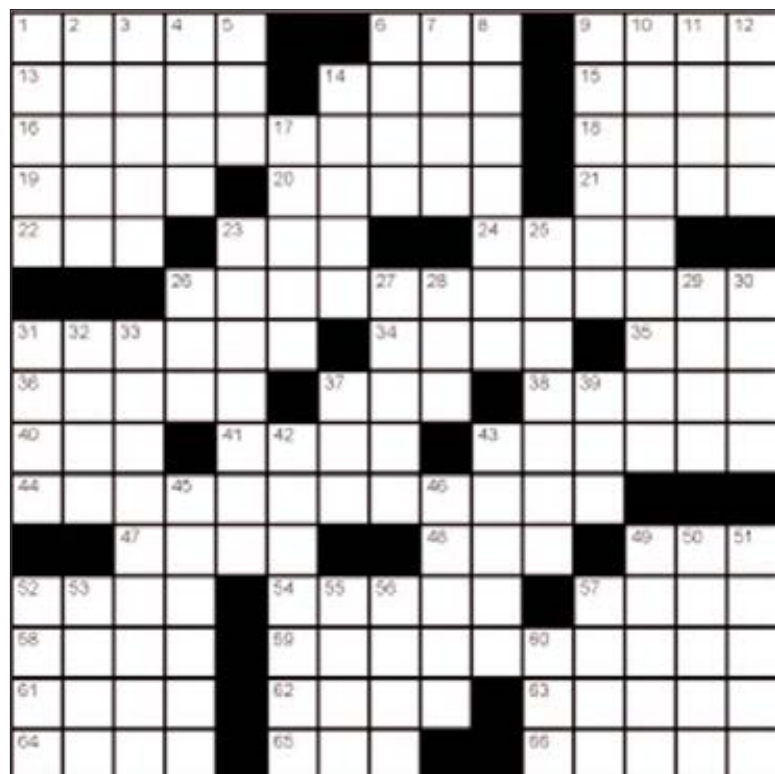
Once a person is eligible to donate, their blood pressure, temperature and pulse is taken and they give a small blood sample to ensure they're not anemic. They then lie down and their arm will be cleansed with an antiseptic wipe. A sterile needle is then used to collect the pint of blood to be donated. The donor is offered snacks and drinks after they are done. They are also given a t-shirt thanking them for their donation.

"It feels good to donate," said Staff Sgt. Salvador Cavan, unmanned aerial system technician, Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 3. "It is a fairly quick process and it may save a life. Why wouldn't someone want to donate?"

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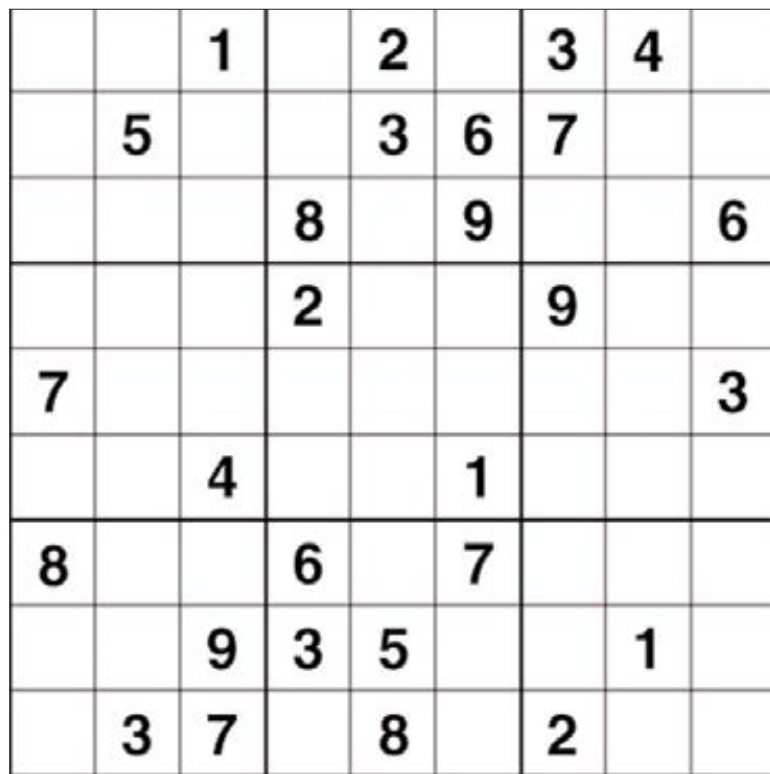
SPLIT DECISION

- ACROSS**
- Politically correct pronoun
 - Letters before U
 - Pile
 - Survey choice, sometimes
 - Former stadium for the Mets
 - World's Fair word
 - Bread choice
 - Facades
 - School period
 - Blood-pumping organ
 - One of the Seven Deadly Sins
 - Cry to the Toreador
 - Ripken of baseball
 - Quaker food
 - Some family tree members
 - Be a bad houseguest
 - Marge and Homers middle child
 - House vote
 - Enjoys, as benefits
 - Wine container
 - One brick shy of a load
 - Landers of advice
 - "Woe is me!"
 - Lose it
 - Breed that runs quickly over short distances
 - Stray dog, often
 - Ladies of the house
 - Gorilla's cousin
 - Three-card monte, notably
 - ___-Kettering Institute
 - Trebek of "Jeopardy!"
 - Foil-wrapped chocolate treat
 - Quaver, in music
 - Actor Sharif
 - Razor brand
 - Old anesthetic
 - New England team, for short
 - Golf peg
 - It makes bread rise
- DOWN**
- Do-it-yourselfer's bookstore section
 - Singer Mermaid
 - Coast
 - Captain's spot
 - Before
 - Perlman of "Cheers"
 - Cook very quickly, as a tuna steak
 - Parlor acquisitions
 - Wellness
 - Comment to a burper
 - Many N.Y.C. homes
 - Washington newspaper
 - Pantry division
 - Animal with blubber
 - "The Cup of Tea"
 - painter Mary
 - Speechless
 - '50s dance
 - Get red in the face
 - Fix, as an outcome
 - Monthly expense
 - Gives an opinion
 - Iran neighbor
 - Bill of fare
 - Tropics headgear
 - Jolt
 - Unified
 - "Dig in!"
 - Pres. Ulysses S. ___
 - Whispered words
 - Nebraska's largest city
 - Honolulu howdy
 - "For ___ sake!"
 - Exercise, as influence
 - Hit the mall
 - Deep sleep
 - Dietetic, in ad-speak
 - Beast
 - Prefix with chamber or bellum
 - "Yo!"



See answers on page B4

SUDOKU 3116D





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

OBSERVATION POST

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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.
 - K Smoke Shop, 5865A 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.
 - Whispering Palms Apts., 449 E. Arenas Road
 - NYPD Pizza, 260-262 N. Palm Canyon Drive

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

WHAT I'VE LEARNED

Michael

Grove City, Penn. utilities maintenance chief, 32

BAKER

> **I grew up in** what I like to think in between cornfields. Very small town, USA. I worked on cars with my dad and grandpa.

> **It's funny.** The show, the Biggest Loser, I watch with my wife. The host of the show does triathlons. She's a mother of two, but not the typical build athlete. She was one of my inspirations; if she can do it, I can do it.

> **I think I have more triathlete** pages liked on Facebook than military ones.

> **Another inspiration** for me was a man named Shane Helman. I met him while on recruiting duty. He's a little bit older than me, served in the Marine Corps during Desert Storm, and loved it. We share some of the same passions, and he started running marathons at the age of 42.

> **So I said,** if Shane can do it at 42, and here I was at 31, I can do it. I picked triathlons because I was always fond of cycling, and could do the running. The swim was my biggest obstacle because I was comfortable in the water but not a strong swimmer.

> **I started swimming** routinely during lunch as many days as I could. I met Don Tolbert, very nice and helpful guy. He taught me effective swimming, and I learned how to swim. With his help and guidance on getting the technique right, I became a very effective swimmer.

> **That was it.** My wife just said go do it. She registered me for the Lake Havasu Bucket List Triathlon. My first one. I completely boogered it, but it was neat to do.

> **I met interesting people,** from pros, to amateurs, to guys in better shape than me and some in worse shape than me.

> **I got hooked.** Since then, I've done the Mission Bay in October, and the Tour De Big Bear; a 50-mile road bike around Big Bear, Calif.

> **I did better on** the Mission Bay triathlon. Out of 1600 competitors, I placed 760th, which I think is better than my first one where I placed second to last.

> **Mission Bay was my favorite** so far. It was my first swim in a bay. I learned very quickly to keep my mouth closed due to the salt water. I was very nervous. With feet and hands flailing everywhere. It was nerve-wrecking, but as soon as the gun went off, all of my nerves turned into energy.

> **I went for 500 meters.** I swam over top people, around people, beside people, anything to find my way through the crowd. I felt good getting out of the water about 11 minutes later.

> **We rolled right into** our first transition, getting on the bike. I can remember running and stumbling over myself getting the wetsuit off because time was everything. Then my wife said relax, and I slowed down to just get it off and jump on the bike.

> **I was really strong** on the bike. I passed a few people and only got passed by a couple. I was thinking that it's okay because I had beat them out of the water.

> **After 15 miles on the bike,** we did the last transition. I could hear my wife and kids yelling go daddy go. It was time for three miles.

> **Me and running don't** get along, but we have this respect that I know I have to do it so I do it.

> **I saw a funny sign that made** me laugh because it said, "Keep running, there's a zombie behind you." I had a lot of fun that day.

> **This triathlon was huge,** not like my first one. When I finally finished, I heard the announcement say 'Congratulations Michael Baker, you are now a triathlete.'

> **I thought it was the coolest** thing in the world, getting that recognition and applause.

> **I love it,** and I don't know why I put myself through it because I can't move the next day. I guess I do it for me, because I want to do it, and I'm getting better at it.

> **When you cross the finish line,** everything goes away for a few seconds. I didn't finish first, I'm not second, but I'm finishing. That's all I want to do.

> **I continue to work on it.** I'm my biggest critic and I always want to get better.

> **Don't give up.** I wanted to run a triathlon, and I did it. I didn't quit on it. On my first race, the only guy I beat was 58 years old. Even during that race, I thought about how much I wanted to just sit down, but I kept going.

> **One of my big goals** is to do an Iron Man before I'm 40. It's the same swim-bike-run event, but a 2.4 mile swim, 112-mile bike ride, and 26.2 mile run. I want to hear the words, Michael Baker, you are an Iron Man. I've got eight years to train for it.

MICHAEL BAKER WAS INSPIRED BY SEVERAL SOURCES TO UNDERTAKE THE CHALLENGE OF A TRIATHLON. SINCE COMPLETING HIS FIRST, HE HAS WORKED VIGOROUSLY TO ONE DAY BECOME AN IRONMAN.



Interviewed and photographed by Lance Cpl. Paul S. Martinez Dec. 3, 2013



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SANTA VISITS COMBAT CENTER KIDS



LANCE CPL. PAUL S. MARTINEZ



LANCE CPL. CHARLES J. SANTAMARIA

[Above] Tyler Paul, 8, son of Navy Lt. Joshua Paul, psychiatrist, 7th Marine Regiment, sits with Santa Claus at the Marine Corps Exchange Dec. 6.

[Top, right] Rian Coons, son of 1st Lt. Andrew Coons, Company A, 3rd Combat Engineer Battalion, tells Santa what he wants for Christmas at the Marine Corps Exchange Dec. 6.

[Bottom, left] Esperanza Yanez, daughter of Petty Officer 3rd Class Dominic Yanez, aviation ordnance airman, USS Carl Vinson, enjoys a visit from Santa Claus at the Marine Corps Exchange Dec. 6.

[Bottom, right] Austin Kerrigan, 8 months, son of Capt. Will Kerrigan, company commander, E Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, meets Santa Claus for the first time at the Marine Corps Exchange Dec. 6.



LANCE CPL. PAUL S. MARTINEZ



LANCE CPL. PAUL S. MARTINEZ



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[I] [S] INDOOR SOCCER

Headquarters versus Whoppers



PHOTOS BY LANCE CPL. PAUL S. MARTINEZ

[Above] Soccer players with Headquarters Battalion and Team Mollie Whoppers face off during the indoor-soccer championship match at the East Gym Dec. 5.

[Left] Hugo Antunez, defender, Headquarters Battalion, observes the playing field during the indoor-soccer championship match at the East Gym Dec. 5.



[Above] Thomas Salukombo, soccer player, Headquarters Battalion, and Kyle Blankenship, soccer player, Team Mollie Whoppers, compete for the ball during the indoor-soccer championship match at the East Gym Dec. 5. [Right] Thomas Salukombo, soccer player, Headquarters Battalion, and Ricardo Jones, soccer player, Team Mollie Whoppers, compete for the ball during the indoor-soccer championship match at the East Gym Dec. 5.



The energy was high as Combat Center soccer players representing Headquarters Battalion and Team Mollie Whoppers arrived at the East Gym's indoor soccer playing field for the last game of the season. One more bout between two teams of seasoned, no-nonsense players would result in one being named champion.

It was an adrenaline-fueled match as players hastily maneuvered the playing field. Tensions were high, and fast, forceful kicks to the soccer ball were even higher. After two halves of pure sport, it was Headquarters Battalion who emerged victorious with a score of 9 to 5.

With the soccer season officially over, Combat Center soccer players will take a well-deserved break until the outdoor season kicks off next year.

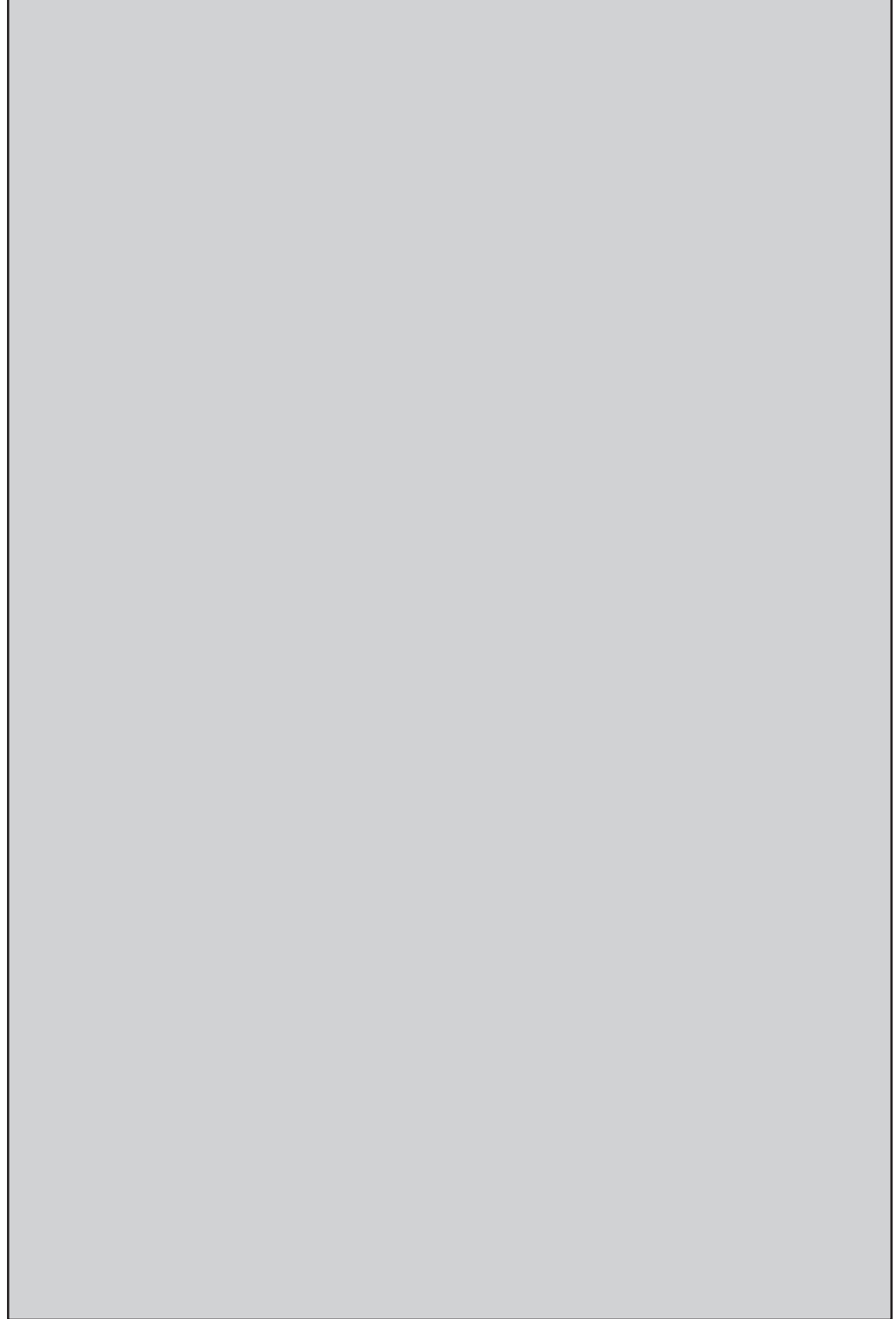
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See page B2 for Sunset Cinema movie schedule



FESTIVAL, from A1

However, increasingly fast and sandy winds quickly put the event at risk. Within an hour, it was ultimately closed down, leaving its attendees saddened as they watched tents and booths being closed down.

"It was sad to see it shut down. We come every year," said Patricia O'Toole, discipline teacher, Onaga Elementary. "At least the kids still got their toys." O'Toole understood the danger that the strong winds were imposing, and understood the decision to call it off.

Although the weather was bad enough to stop the Winter Festival, it couldn't break the Combat Center's holiday spirit. Attendees of the festival reconvened at the Marine Corps Exchange, where Santa Claus and carolers from the Select Choir at Twentynine Palms High School were keeping the holiday alive.

"MCCS kept it going by having it here," O'Toole said. "At least for the kids, they kept it alive."

In one area of the Exchange, Santa Claus himself was open to have children sit on his lap and request a Christmas gift.

"I'm happy I got to see Santa," said Logan Thoummavong, 5, son of Pfc. Manothong Thoummavong, student, Marine Corps Communications-Electronics School. "I asked him for a Nerf gun for Christmas."

Near the entrance, the student choir gracefully sang such carols as We Wish You a Merry Christmas, Here Comes Santa Claus, and Jingle Bell Rock as Combat Center patrons looked on.

"This choir is really nice," said Sgt. Melody Coppock, unit defense maintenance technician, MCCES. "It's unfortunate they had to cancel, but anything counts to put a smile on a little kid's face."

The choir was delighted to make an appearance for service members and their families.

"A lot of our kids are military kids, and the base has been extremely supportive," said Michael Mayes, music director, Twentynine Palms High School. "We love to be able to have the opportunity to do what we can."

With spirits lifted for the day, children, with candy canes and photos of Santa Claus in hand, excitedly departed the Exchange to await the return of Santa on Christmas Eve.



LANCE CPL. PAUL S. MARTINEZ

Gunnar Simmons, 5, son of 1st Lt. Geoffrey Simmons, TTS training officer in charge, Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School, rides a pony during the Marine Corps Community Services' Winter Festival at Del Valle Field Dec. 7.

POSTAL, from A1

Communication-Electronics School, it is an especially good feeling to bring a sense of holiday cheer to Marines so early in their careers, according to Sgt. Maria Ortiz, postal clerk, Headquarters Battalion.

"It makes me personally feel like I can bring a part of the holidays to them," Ortiz said. "Having been deployed to Okinawa and to a combat zone, I understand how important mail can be. For these students, that piece of home coming in a package can be just as important."

The biggest build-up of mail the postal Marines handle is coming back from the New Year's break. While the Marines still manage to sort it all out and have it ready for pick up, it still makes for an extremely long morning, according to Lance Cpl. Basem Bakhtan, postal clerk, Headquarters Battalion.

"Coming back from New Year's makes for a really busy morning, but we always get it done on time," Bakhtan said. "It feels good providing to these Marines because for some of them, this is all they are looking forward to over the holiday breaks."

While the average work day and load for postal Marines can be much different than that of other Marines, their role in the boosting of morale in our Corps solidifies their dedication to service, and earns them a key role in the continuance and preservation of our legacy.

MLG, from A1

the exercise," said Edgerton, a native of San Antonio, Texas. "We have to make sure that our convoys stay on point, maintaining dispersion and good communication with each other."

The convoy covered approximately 6 - 10 kilometers during the exercise and faced different types of terrain, including soft sand and large hills. Each driver was required to coordinate with the convoy commander about the speed and the location of their vehicle.

"The lead vehicle needs to be vigilant, being the first one to take any hits and the one who probes from the front," said Lance Cpl. Mitchell Burri, lead vehicle driver and vehicle commander, H & S Co., CLB-5, CLR-1, 1st MLG. "You have to be constantly aware of your surroundings, [maintaining] a combat mindset at all times."

The training provided the Marines of CLB-5 with experience on what to expect when they are deployed to expeditionary environments and how to support forwarddeployed units, such as 1st Marine Division, during operations and exercises like Steel Knight.



LANCE CPL. KASEY PEACOCK

[Left] Cpl. Jesus Bermudez, ammunition technician, 1st Tank Battalion, leads the crowd in the pledge of allegiance during the Vintage Country Club Annual Holiday Party in Indian Wells, Calif., Dec. 7. [Above] Marines speak with country club members during the annual holiday party held at the club Dec. 7.

VINTAGE, from A1

the pledge of allegiance," Bermudez said. "It is great to see other people showing how proud they are of what we do every day. It is definitely a night I won't soon forget."

The evening continued with dinner and conversation, as the Marines were broken up into groups of two and seated with club members.

"This was an especially exciting event for me because I haven't experienced many things like this in my short time in the Marine Corps," said Pvt. Steven Donegan, student, Marine Corps Communication-

Electronics School. "The food was excellent and the entertainment was fantastic."

The entertainment came to a close with a performance by the All-American Boys Chorus, an internationally-acclaimed choristers group who perform world-class concerts throughout Southern California, the USA and the world.

"I was amazed by the singer," Donegan added. "I wish I could sing like them."

Throughout the years, the Vintage Club members have provided significant support to family programs with the Combat Center through its asso-

ciation with the American Friends of our Armed Forces.

Since its start, AFAF has provided more than 1.5 million dollars in sponsorship support for programs that assist Marines and their families.

While many of the club members were prior service members, everyone shared the common goal of giving thanks and appreciation to those currently serving.

"The members really enjoy giving their appreciation to the Marines at events like this," said Alan Boeckmann, club member and event host. "The fact that they provide their service and sacrifice every day for us, this is the least we can do."



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



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



WeekINPhotos

3rd Battaion, Recruit Training Regiment



LANCE CPL. JERICO W. CRUTCHER

[Top, left] A Marine Corps Martial Arts Instructor demonstrates an air choke to recruits with Company K, 3rd Battalion, Recruit Training Regiment during the MCMAP training session Nov. 18. Recruits learned two chokes, the blood and air choke.

[Above] Recruits with Co. K execute a knife technique under the watchful eyes of drill instructors during training Nov. 18. Training in MCMAP is an essential part of creating combat-ready Marines.

[Left] Recruits learn various MCMAP techniques during training aboard the Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, Nov. 18. Once they have mastered the different chokes, they are taught techniques to counter the moves.



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The Christmas STORIES

Celebrating the holidays varies from house to house and with the Marine Corps' diversity among its ranks and holiday traditions differ from each other. These are the stories of just a few Combat Center Marines and employees and their Christmas experiences.



ALI AZIMI

I am a Persian-American, born in Iran into our Islamic-rooted family. Although we are non-practicing, I lived in Iran until I was five and had no concept of Christmas until we moved to the United States.

My first Christmas in America was interesting. We were living in Alaska and the cultures of these two worlds were as different as their climates. I knew very little English, which made learning the customs from kids in my kindergarten class difficult.

One random snowy day, my uncle brought a tree into the center of our living room. I was confused. I didn't know what Christmas was or why there were fat, red men on top of everyone's roofs chasing down deer with a whip on a sled.

It was never really explained to me either. Nobody sat me down to tell me the Santa myth. His folk lore and why because of him we should be naughty or nice was never part of my Christmas experience.

So, there stood that tree for what seemed like forever, decorated in scarlet and blue orbs. Tinsel wrapped around its brush in a spiral and beneath it was empty, until one unexpected morning.

In my living room, there sat presents below a tree, wrapped in shiny paper. It was that easy. Unwrap the shiny paper, and a new toy was mine. I love America.

PAUL MARTINEZ

Among my most fond Christmas memories is from December of 2011. Several years prior, my family traditionally began celebrating Christmas at my aunt's house and her children, whom my siblings and I are very close with. I loaded our wrapped presents into my aunt's Ford Explorer, and off we went to her house. I was excited about Christmas and spending time with my family. This was my last before leaving for recruit training, and I was well aware that in the Marine Corps I might not always be able to spend the holidays with my family like I did. Given that, I made sure to cherish every moment.

The lights outside my aunt's house glistened as we arrived on Christmas Eve, and I quickly glanced at the Christmas village my aunt always sets up on the chimney mantle, admiring the spirit it brings. After placing the gifts we brought under the beautiful, brightly-lit tree, our parents caught up on life, and so did my cousins and I. I didn't always get the chance to spend time with them, but the holiday season afforded me that chance. A memorable gift I received that day was a scarlet Marine Corps flag, as a gesture of good luck in the path that lied ahead. For me, it wasn't necessarily caroling or snow that I held most fondly, but rather the unity my family celebrated during the holiday season.

MARIA GARDNER

For some countries, Christmas is only a one-day celebration, but this is not the case in the Philippines. Of all the festivals celebrated throughout the country, Christmas is the longest celebration amongst Catholic Filipinos.

In my home, we start by putting up the Christmas tree and decorations as early as September. This is how early the spirit of Christmas can be felt in the Philippines. However, the yuletide season in the country really begins on the 16th and lasts until the 24th day of December when *misa de gallo* or midnight mass occurs; this is a nine-day devotion, which is usually done as early as 3 a.m., each day. Filipinos are encouraged to participate in this series of midnight masses because it is believed that if a person completes the nine mornings of epiphany, one wish shall be granted to them.

Filipinos are also fond of caroling during the Christmas season. Most of the carolers are children who tend to ask for their *aguinaldo* or Christmas present, which come in the form of cash and coins. Most of the time, the local government, churches and even private institutions conduct Christmas fund-raising contests like Christmas lantern making, caroling and Christmas light exhibitions to be donated to orphanages, schools or hospitals. As a family tradition, my family celebrates the highlight of the season by staying up late on the eve of 24th for the night-long dinner party referred to as *Noche Buena*.

Now that I am living far away from home, I find myself trying to recreate these traditions for my family to enjoy. After all, Christmas is about spending time with your loved ones. No matter where I am, I try my best to keep that in mind and in my heart.

ALEJANDRO BEDOYA

Growing up, I thought the way I celebrated holidays was the way everyone celebrated the holidays. Eventually, I learned each culture has their own way of doing things. I didn't have Santa or presents under my Christmas tree. Instead, my Christmas was based off of my religion and my culture. My Christmas wasn't the average American Christmas. It was unique.

In my culture, Christmas always began on the 7th of December. This day is known as "El dia de las velitas" or the day of the candles. At dusk, my family and I lit candles and lined them up on pieces of wood. We then decorated the front of our house and our church with these candles and let them burn throughout the night. The day was not complete until my family gathered to dance and eat. This event symbolized the beginning of the Christmas season.

On the 16th, my family would reunite to celebrate "La Novena de Aguinaldos" or the Christmas Novena. My family is Catholic, so this part of our celebration was a must. My family would get together every night until the night of the 24th to reflect on our faith and remember the birth of Jesus. Each night of the Novena, we would sing "villancicos" or Spanish Christmas carols. The Novena would rotate from one family member's home to another.

On the 24th, I would write a letter to baby Jesus letting him know what I wanted for Christmas and I would leave the letter in the nativity. My letter would 'mysteriously' disappear and baby Jesus would deliver the presents on or near my bed. Once I received my presents, my family would spend the rest of the day giving gifts to friends or some who may be less fortunate.

This time of year is when my family showed appreciation for each other, our religion, and the people around us.



Movie musical puts soulful new spin on familiar Christmas story



COURTESY PHOTO

NEIL POND

"Black Nativity"

Starring Jennifer Hudson, Forest Whitaker, Angela Bassett and Jacob Latimore
Directed by Kasi Lemmons
PG, 93 min.

If you'd like going to the movies to be a little more like going to church, then you'll probably like going to see "Black Nativity."

Based on a 1960s musical by acclaimed poet/novelist/playwright Langston Hughes, it's a modern embellishment of the Nativity story as told through the converging lives of various characters coming together for the staging of a Christmas Eve pageant at a Harlem house of worship.

Writer/director Kasi Lemmons fleshes out Hughes' stage play with a wider drama about a down-on-her-luck single Baltimore mom (Jennifer Hudson) who sends her teenage son (Jacob Latimore) to live with his grandparents in New York during the holidays while she works two jobs and tries to figure out how to keep her and her son off the streets.

Langston (named after the famous poet) bristles at the rigid God-centric rules laid down by his strict pastor grandfather (Forest Whitaker), but warms somewhat to his beaming, gracious grandma (Angela Bassett).

The original "Black Nativity" stage production was a tapestry of traditional Christmas music and hymns, African-American rhythms, jazz and poetry. The movie version weaves in all of those elements, too, sprinkling throughout its dozen performances some contemporary hip-hop and rap for today's ears.

Everybody sings, but it certainly helps that the cast includes a gut-busting tune-belter like Hudson, the Grammy and Oscar-winning "American Idol" finalist, and an appearance by Mary J. Blige, the electrifying "Queen of Hip-Hop Soul."

It's Whitaker, though, who truly surprises. The Oscar-winning actor doesn't often get a chance to show off his old college chops as an opera tenor, but he does here when he cuts loose in the "Black Nativity" pageant as the reverend leads the congregation in a soulful burst of preachin' and praisin'.

This modest little feel-good movie probably won't contend for any major awards (unlike Whitaker's other movie this year, "The Butler"). It's pretty basic in its production — although some of the handsome shots by veteran cinematographer Anastos Michos are top-notch — and its drama tends to get a bit syrupy as it's trying to soar.

But its heart is in the right place. And it can put yours there, too, if this holiday season you're seeking a wholesome story with a joyous, tune-filled message about forgiveness, second chances and the true, timeless meaning of Christmas.

Combat Center Events

Operation Homefront Toy Distribution

Operation Homefront will be providing toys to military families. In order to receive toys, children must be registered at the organization's site.

When: Friday, Dec. 13.

Where: Bldg. 1004

Call visit events.OperationHomefront.net

Holiday Family event

Come see Santa. There will also be face painting and caricature artists.

When: 4 p.m. - 8 p.m., Friday, Dec. 13

Where: Main Exchange

Dr. Sears Seminar

This two-hour seminar on childcare is taught by Dr. William Sears, the author of more than 40 childcare books. Childcare is available with reservations only.

When: 10 a.m. - 12 p.m., Thursday, Dec. 19.

Where: Protestant Chapel

Whooping Cough Vaccines available

This is a one-time booster for individuals over the age of 7. The boosters are available in the immunization clinic for children and adults on a walk-in basis.

When: 9 to 11:30 a.m. and 1 to 4 p.m., Mon. - Fri.

Where: Naval Hospital

For more events visit <http://www.mccs29palms.com>

Sunset Cinema

Friday, Dec. 13

6 p.m. - The Fifth Estate, R

9 p.m. - The Counselor, R

12 a.m. - Thor: The Dark World 3-D, PG-13

Saturday, Dec. 14

10 a.m. - Free Admission The Santa Clause, PG

12:30 p.m. - Free Birds 3-D, PG

3 p.m. - Ender's Game, PG-13

6 p.m. - Thor: The Dark World 3-D, PG-13

8:30 p.m. - About Time, R

11:30 p.m. - Last Vegas, PG-13

Sunday, Dec. 15

12:30 p.m. - Delivery Man, PG-13

5 p.m. - Sneak Preview Grudge Match, PG-13

8 p.m. - The Best Man Holiday, R

Monday, Dec. 16

6:30 p.m. - The Best Man Holiday, R

Tuesday, Dec. 17

7 p.m. - Thor: The Dark World 3-D, PG-13

Wednesday, Dec. 18

5 p.m. - The Fifth Estate, R

8 p.m. - Last Vegas, PG-13

Thursday, Dec. 19

6 p.m. - The Counselor, R

7:30 p.m. - About Time, R

High Desert

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 (760) 363-3343.

A Christmas Carol

Classic seasonal story performed live

When: 7 p.m., Fridays & Saturdays, Nov. 15 - Dec. 14

Where: Theatre 29

73637 Sullivan Rd., Twentynine Palms, Calif.

For more information, call (760) 316-4151

Low Desert

Golden Boy Boxing

Boxers compete for Super Featherweight Title

When: 4 p.m., Friday, Dec. 13

Where: Fantasy Springs Resort Casino

84-245 Indio Springs Parkway, Indio, Calif.

For more information, call 800-827-2946 or visit

<http://www.fantasyspringsresort.com>

Charo

Iconic Spanish-American singer, comedian performs

When: 9 p.m., Friday, Dec. 13

Where: Morongo Casino Resort and Spa

49500 Seminole Drive, Cabazon, Calif.

For more information, call 800-252-4499 or visit

<http://www.morongocasinoresort.com>

The Oak Ridge Boys

Country and gospel coal quartet performs

When: 8 p.m., Saturday, Dec. 14

Where: Spotlight 29 Casino

46-200 Harrison Place, Coachella, Calif.

For more information, call 866-377-6829 or visit

<http://www.spotlight29.com>

Moscow Ballet

A performance of the Nutcracker

When: 8 p.m., Friday, Dec. 20

Where: Agua Caliente Casino, Resort and Spa

32-250 Bob Hope Dr., Rancho Mirage, Calif.

For more information, call 888-999-1995 or visit

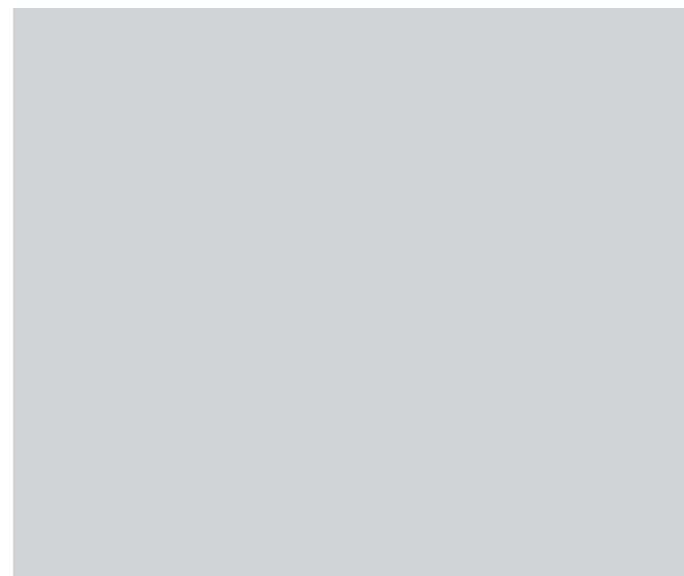
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