

The Eagle and The Crescent

Vol. 1, Issue 1

Transition to Self-Reliance

April 1, 2005

II MEF Forward takes command



Lance Cpl. Aaron P. Mankin

The commanding general of II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward), Maj. Gen. Stephen T. Johnson, speaks to those present during a transfer of authority ceremony of Multi-National Force-West at Camp Fallujah, Iraq Sunday.

Lance Cpl. Aaron P. Mankin

II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward)

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq -- The scarlet and gold colors of a large Marine Corps flag served as a backdrop as the commanding general of I Marine Expeditionary Force transferred authority of Multi-National Force-West to the II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) commanding general, during a transfer of authority ceremony here Sunday.

The 45-minute ceremony included the casing of the I MEF battle colors and unfurling of the II MEF (FWD) battle colors. Among the guests present at the event was the commanding general of the Iraqi Security Forces, Lt. Gen. Abdul Qader.

"I've never been more optimistic in my almost two years of association with this area," said Lt. Gen. John F. Sattler,

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Workhorses put the pedal to the metal

Sgt. Juan Vara

2nd Marine Aircraft Wing

AL ASAD, Iraq -- The Marines from the Heavy Equipment Platoon of Marine Wing Support Squadron 271 are doing it again.

Pushing the pedal to the metal, the warfighters are building berms to enclose new fuel bladders near one of the runways here, which will become the new site for hot refueling.

The runway where aircraft are currently being refueled with their engines running, a practice often referred to as 'hot refueling,' is scheduled to shut down. The heavy equipment Marines are getting ahead of the game by building fuel berms to help the Marines in Fuels Platoon keep this time-saving method of getting birds back in the fight on an alternate runway.

"We're actually going to be done before the current runway (used for hot refueling) is

closed," said Chief Warrant Officer Todd L. McAllister, platoon commander. "It's going to be a smooth transition and there won't be any downtime on capabilities."

As site managers for the construction, Sgt. Jonathan D. Gables Sr. and Cpl. C. S. Dennis, heavy equipment operators, oversee the work done at the fuel berms and the stockpiling of material compounds.

"This is a sergeants' and corporals' war
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Weekend Weather

Friday:
Partly cloudy
66F/88F/71F

Saturday:
Cloudy
64F/88F/71F

Sunday:
Cloudy
54F/77F/65F

Morale Corner

Worship Services & Bible Study Schedule

Friday

6 p.m. - Catholic Mass
6:30 p.m. - Catholic hour social

Saturday

5:15 p.m. - Catholic Confession
6 p.m. - Catholic Mass

Sunday

7:15 a.m. - Catholic Confession
8 a.m. - Catholic Mass
8:30 a.m. - Latter Day Saints
9 a.m. - Protestant Worship
9:15 a.m. - Protestant Communion
10:30 a.m. - Protestant Contemporary
11 a.m. - Non-Denominational
1 p.m. - Gospel Service
6:30 p.m. - Latter Day Saints
7:30 p.m. - Intro to Old Testament

MWR events

Swinging Sunday: There will be swing dancing lessons held at the MWR recreation center from 5 to 7 p.m. Bring a partner.

Country Night: Come out to the recreation center for some country music and two-stepping. Tonight from 9:30 p.m. to 1 a.m.

Reggae Night: Tomorrow night at the recreation center from 9:30 p.m. to 1 a.m.

3-on-3 Basketball: A 3-on-3 basketball tournament will be held Saturday at the recreation center.

Movie Night: Everyday at 3 a.m., 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. a movie will be played at the recreation center back room. For more information contact the MWR supervisor at: crystal.nadeau@halliburton.com

II Marine Expeditionary Force (FWD)

Maj. Gen. Stephen T. Johnson, Commanding General
Sgt. Maj. Gary W. Harris, Sergeant Major

Public Affairs Director...Lt. Col. David A. Lapan
Deputy Director.....Maj. Sean D. Gibson
Public Affairs Chief.....Master Gunnery Sgt.
Constance S. Dillard
Press Chief/Editor.....Staff Sgt. Ronna M. Weyland

The views and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the Department of Defense. It is for information only and is not considered directive in nature.

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and we push hard the small unit leadership,” said McAllister. “We also push hard the supervision.”

Taking advantage of as much daylight as they can, the Marines play it safe by wearing their Outer Tactical Vests. Though this may safeguard them in case of an indirect fire attack, it also raises the mercury a few notches, causing the temperature to almost become unbearable.

All their effort and dedication have paid off and they’ve annihilated the timeline given; the project should be done almost a week ahead of schedule.

“We’re working pretty hard,” said McAllister. “They mostly stay busy and that’s good for the Marines in the platoon, that way they’ll know how things are going to be if we have to work 24 hours a day.”

Building fuel berms involves several platoons of the Workhorses’ squadron. Marines from Engineers Platoon survey the area and put stakes on the ground to mark the inner perimeter of the berm.

Before Marines from Motor Transport Platoon truck the stockpiling material, heavy equipment Marines level and compact the surface, then build the berm and add finishing touches that will help prevent dirt from flying around when the helicopters’ rotors are spinning.

According to McAllister, when heavy equipment Marines are not deployed they’re mostly assigned to provide forklift support.

“Whenever we do field training we try to gear it toward earth work because that’s not something you can just hop on a dozer and master right off the bat,” he said.

Lance Cpl. Jacob P. Mills, a heavy equipment operator, rips and dozes stockpiling material for the fuel berms. Though his piece of the puzzle is put together miles away from the finished product, he knows it’s as important as the role of the Marine pumping fuel into the aircraft.

“Every little bit is in support of the needs



Sgt. Juan Vara

Stockpiling material pours from a 7-ton dump truck as Marines from the Heavy Equipment Platoon of Marine Wing Support Squadron 271 build fuel berms near one of the runways in Al Asad, Iraq.

of the planes,” he said.

“If we don’t get this done the planes don’t get refueled and air support can’t be provided to the Marines on the battlefield,” said Lance Cpl. Aaron M. Briggs, the operator who loads the stockpiling material on 7-ton dump trucks.

The dump trucks take an average of 60 to 70 loads of stockpiling material near the flightline every day throughout the construction. Almost 3,000 cubic yards of stockpiling material had to be hauled for the project to be finished.

“It’s a good experience for the Marines,” said McAllister. “A lot of the Marines had never done this before.”

Lance Cpl. Casey J. Lazaruk, is a self-proclaimed ‘master sculptor’ of fuel berms. “It motivates me to see the finished product,” said Lazaruk.

Up-armor, even underneath saves lives

Cpl. C. J. Yard

2nd Force Service Support Group

CAMP TAQADDUM, Iraq -- The Marine Corps' new Marine Armor Kit, unveiled late last year, is now being installed on all humvees in the II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) area of operations by the Marine Armor Installation Team here.

Not only are the sides of the humvees being up-armored, the Marines are also installing extra armor on the bottom of vehicle to minimize the damage done by Improvised Explosive Devices if they are detonated underneath the vehicle. Up-armor of the gun turrets are done if the MAIT has them available.

The MAKs have one-quarter inch high, hard steel, three-eighths inch rolled homogenous steel and mild steel to offer improved protection.

According to Marine Corps Systems Command, follow-on efforts of previous projects, coordinated with Marine Corps Logistics Command, produced "zonal armor" protection on doors, flanks, tailgates and underbody.

"The appliqué panel for the underbody armor is the newest part of this kit," said Col. Jeff Krongaard, MAIT officer in charge. "That's the big thing; Marines were using old flak jackets and sandbags, even free-floating plates, underneath their feet. Even those

were not as safe as need be. This new underbody kit makes vehicles less penetrable from below."

Along with equipping the humvees with underbody armor kits, they also get a "facelift," getting new shocks, springs, ballistic glass and air conditioner units installed. Originally, the MAK was being developed in a combined effort with the Army, but the Marine Corps took what the Army had and improved it, giving it a distinct Marine Corps design.

The Marine Corps added a few things, like adding an additional window on the doors, said Krongaard. The Marines said it was easier to see with two windows.

Due to the strain the vehicles have endured while traveling the roads of Iraq, some of the vehicles are unable to be up-armored.

"The [Major Subordinate Commands] are bringing in the vehicles, with the MEF coordinating that effort. We are hoping to get to a point where they drive in and exchange them," said Krongaard, a Tucson, Ariz., native. "Sometimes vehicles come in here and we can't do anything to them. We have humvees with twisted frames and we can't get the doors to square up on them, or we can't get the armor to fit it. They could still be used for on base operations or where armor may not be required. We just can't do anything with them here."

A twisted frame or severe body damage in the rocker panel or pillars would prohibit portions of the MAK from being installed, said Capt. Matthew Juhl, a Nevada, Iowa, native and project manager for the MAIT. In those cases, the pre-existing armor and ballistic glass would stay on the vehicle and it would be returned to the unit.

According to Gunnery Sgt. Tavis Harrington, the armor operations manager, the Marine Armor Installation Site is at a low-rate initial production. The biggest factor in slowing down production is not having all the facilities of the MAIS up and running.

The MAIT has an estimated output of 200 humvees and 30 Medium Tactical Vehicle Replacements or 7-ton troop trucks per month, said Juhl.

"We're getting them out faster than expected," said Harrington. "Not having all of our support equipment is holding us back, though. Once the other buildings are up, we'll be pumping out the vehicles at an incredible rate."



Cpl. C.J. Yard

Lance Cpl. James Cameron, mechanic, Marine Armor Installation Team, records the serial numbers of humvees at the Marine Armor Installation Site.



Cpl. C.J. Yard

Lance Cpl. Richard Cardona, heavy equipment operator, loads scrap metal onto a truck.

Patrols secure southern Baghdad

Lance Cpl. Scott L. Eberle
15th Marine Expeditionary Unit

BAGHDAD, Iraq -- Shortly after arriving at their forward operating base in the Baghdad area, Bravo Company, 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) set out to make their mark in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The company inserted into a rural area of southern Baghdad for a 10-day mission to disrupt the insurgency and provide security and stabilization to the region.

Attached to the company was a platoon of Iraq National Guardsmen who would help work with the locals and ease the burden of a language barrier.

After a short helicopter ride, they landed in a freshly plowed field. The first wave established security around the landing zone as the helicopters headed back to the FOB to pick up more of the company.

Moving from the LZ, Marines came across a suspected Improvised Explosive

Device. Everyone quickly moved to a safe distance while explosive ordnance disposal technicians moved in to investigate. Although it wasn't an IED, the incident reminded everyone of the hazards in their area of operations.

At the patrol base, Bravo sent 3rd Platoon out on a night patrol while mortar men set up their guns to support the company with indirect fire if needed.

The heat of sunrise was welcomed after a night of bitter cold. The morning light revealed water-filled canals, uneven fields with knee high grass and numerous palm tree groves - not the desert-like sandy terrain most Marines expected.

Before 3rd Platoon returned from their patrol, the company moved the patrol base to a new position. Marines formed a tactical column with everyone keeping a watchful eye for any suspicious activity.

During the movement, the company passed a farmer and his son standing in front of their home waving. Many in 3rd Platoon

said they liked seeing local citizens in their homes because it reminded them of the peaceful side of this war-torn country.

Bravo Co. set up their next patrol base in the middle of a large palm tree grove. This would be their home for the next week.

Satellite communications was established with the Combat Operations Center back at the FOB and the Marines rested.

As they started the next day's patrols, the platoon ran across locals who informed them of insurgent activity in the last month.

That, coupled with recent intelligence, led the platoon to a small area where a weapons cache was supposedly buried. Marines moved in and cleared a suspected building, finding it empty. But in a nearby muddy field, fresh footprints were discovered, leading to a recently dug hole that appeared to have been a weapons cache.

These patrols, lasting 12 hours or more, left the Marines sunburned and weary. Each day, the Marines stepped off before the sun came up and returned as the sun was setting.

The company was resupplied each night by a CH-46E Sea Knight helicopter or by a tactical convoy of vehicles. Flying in black-out conditions, helos skimmed right over their heads to deliver Meals Ready to Eat and bottled water. Enemy forces also paid attention to the resupply patterns by periodically firing mortars near the landing zone.

On the third day of patrols the long, routine patrol turned productive when locals guided Marines to a suspicious hole in the ground. After clearing away an old car hood and other debris, the Marines dug for a few minutes to discover a buried coffin-sized container.

Around the edges of the container were several empty mortar tubes, but the container itself was empty.



Lance Cpl. Scott L. Eberle

Lance Cpl. Joshua J. Rynders of McHenry, Ill. (left) and Pvt. Michael G. Duncan of Temecula, Calif., both with the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) provide security for Bravo Co. 1/1.

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Good Friday run inspires participants

Sgt. Russ Meade

II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward)

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq -- “Look to the front and who do you see, our Lord Jesus Christ is carrying me,” was the cadence that echoed Friday morning throughout Camp Fallujah.

Carrying on a tradition which started nearly 10 years ago, the Christian Stations of the Cross Run was continued here.

With a group of 56 runners from various units wearing boots and utilities, the Marines, Sailors and soldiers participated to show reverence to Christ during his painful walk to the Cross of Calvary.

During the three-mile run, the participants stopped at 14 stations along the way to do one or two Marine Corps exercises and also to meditate on what his pain and suffering meant to each one of them.

At each of the stations, participants performed exercises and some would volunteer to freeze into position, acting like statues depicting the various aspects of Christ’s excruciating walk to Calvary.

“Hopefully the good pain we felt in this spiritual physical training will give us at least a glimpse into the pain and joy Christ felt as he showed his love for us,” according to Chaplain (Lt. Cmdr.) John Hannigan, II Marine Headquarters Group, II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward).

“Sometimes this run occurs during Lent. This year it was awesome that it happened to fall on Good Friday,” the Chi-

ago native said. “I cannot think of a better way to start off Good Friday.”

For some of the runners it not only lifted them spiritually, but also emotionally.

Corporal Patricia C. Pichowsky, G-4 embark clerk and driver, said, “Today was very uplifting. It gave me the motivation I needed to get past the day to day life here in Fallujah.”

“This was best day I have had in two months,” said the Cleburne, Texas native.

Gunnery Sgt. Stephen P. Doherty is still unsure what got him up to participate in the run.

“Maybe it was a combination of having to exercise my faith and my body at the same time,” he said. “I think this is one of the most important holidays. It is the day that Jesus sacrificed himself for me and you.”

Doherty, a Minnetonka, Minn. native, continued by saying this run was a good way to also remember our fallen service members.

“I ran for those who can run no longer, hoping that their sacrifice will mean no less than the one exemplified by Christ on the cross,” he said.

According to Hannigan, the run also helped bring insight into the opportunities this earthly life offers us to bring to our world; the message of hope, the message that to be selfless is better than being selfish; and the comfort and challenge that enables us to grow through imitation of Christ’s example.

Service members sweat under the rising sun during the stations of the cross run in Camp Fallujah, Iraq, March 25. The three mile motivational run started at 5:30 a.m. and also included various stops with exercises.



Sgt. Russ Meade

Charlie 1/5 has a night on the town

Cpl. Tom Sloan
2nd Marine Division

AR RAMADI, Iraq -- Bellows from the 7-ton's diesel exhaust echoed off of brick buildings lining the narrow streets. Corporal James P. Kohler Jr. and his fellow squad members sit cramped in the big rig's bed singing halfhearted Marine Corps' cadences trying to relieve nervous tension as they traveled to their destination.

It was late; close to 10 p.m. They knew nothing good was out at that hour and that is why they're there.

The 21-year-old Grandterrace, Calif., native and the other Marines with 2nd Platoon, Company C, 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, spent a night on the town to find out what was going "bump" in night.

The platoon conducted a combat patrol in a portion of the city here where Company B Marines manning an observation post reported seeing suspicious activity after curfew hours, which are between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.

According to 2nd Platoon's commander, 2nd Lt. Austin P. Adams, reports indicated several groups of four to 10 people were going in and out of a house located in a neighborhood between the Euphrates Canal and the city's main road late at night.

Their actions suggested they could be insurgents leaving an intelligence house going to execute attacks on U.S. forces, or they could just be innocent Iraqis gathering, he said.

Kohler, third squad leader for 2nd Platoon, led his Marines through the dimly lit, narrow streets to get better "eyes on" and determine if the groups' intent was hostile.

"If they mean to do harm to (coalition forces), then we're going to stop them," the 2001 Colton High School graduate said.

While searching for higher ground to use as a lookout, Kohler and his Marines encountered a group of more than 20 Iraqi teenage boys and girls playing a late-night game of soccer beneath a streetlight. Several adults were standing outside their residences, too.

"There's a lot of people breaking curfew," Kohler said. "They seem harmless, though. They're not doing anything to harm Marines."

Kohler explained the Iraqis, while innocent in their actions, are still in the wrong for being out on the streets so late. Until coalition forces rid the city of insurgents and deem it safe, the curfew will be enforced. It's for the Iraqi civilians' safety, he added.

Third Squad located a two-story, abandoned building they used as a lookout.

Lance Cpl. Bradford L. Dunn, 3rd Squad's squad automatic gunner, breached the building's main door with a right kick and headed to the roof where the 20-year-old Covington, Ky., native and his fellow Marines set up an over watch.

The location was ideal for monitoring the area where the groups had been meeting, according to Lance Cpl. Eric Aguilar, 3rd Squad's grenadier.

"The house is empty and is higher than the others around it," said the 22-year-old from Ganado, Texas. "It has good concealment, too. If there are insurgents in the area, they probably don't know we're here. If they try shooting at the (observation post) over there, we'll see them and take them out."

Aguilar and the other Marines with 3rd Squad remained on the building's roof for more than an hour monitoring everything that happened while the other squads did the same from different buildings.

Nothing suspicious happened, and Adams gave the order to leave the area and head back to their base camp, Snake Pit.

Marines with 2nd Platoon made the two-mile trip on foot and accomplished their mission without incident.

"The mission went well," said Kohler, who plans on pursuing a higher education and becoming a history teacher when his enlistment ends in June. "We determined exactly what's going on out there. It's basically some kids and adults breaking curfew, but they don't mean any harm.

"The benefit from the patrol tonight is that squads going there in the future will know what to look out for."



Lance Cpl. Scott L. Eberle

With a hard, right kick, 20-year-old Lance Cpl. Bradford L. Dunn, squad automatic gunner, 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, from Covington, Ky., becomes a human battering ram and breaches the entry to an abandoned building his Marines will use as an over watch.

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commanding general of I MEF. “The energy, the enthusiasm of the people is catapulting this movement forward. The Iraqi security forces are capable, well led and confident and that confidence flows over to the Iraqi people.”

More than 41,000 Marines, soldiers, Sailors and airmen took part in operations in western Iraq since August 2004. They conducted campaigns against terrorism in Najaf, northern Babil, Karbala and Al Anbar provinces in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom II.

“We have had the opportunity to fight some tactical fights and we have had some great tactical victories,” said Sattler. “But, the strategic victory is still out there...to seal that we need to take Fallujah and continue the reconstruction effort, continue to bring the people back and get the security forces online.

“The Al Anbar province is in good hands with Maj. Gen. Stephen Johnson and his great II MEF (FWD) team. I wish them God speed as they complete the next chapter of the mission.”

Western Iraq has been a nesting ground for anti-coalition terrorists and former regime loyalists.

“What we need to concentrate on are the positive things that are going on in places like Fallujah,” said Maj. Gen. Stephen T. Johnson, commanding general of II MEF (FWD). “They have security set up, markets are opening, people are getting back to work, the

government is building up and they are working on their constitution. Those are the things we need to focus on. The important things are emerging.”

Johnson stated his vision for what he hopes to see accomplished during his command of II MEF (FWD).

“The threat here is to freedom. That’s where the real threat lies and we are dealing with that on a daily basis. We are making progress every day.

“We are going to see a great increase in the Iraqi Security Forces. They are becoming very effective. We are going to see the emergence of the Iraqi government. Their constitution is being written, elections are being held and political decisions are being made in a democratic fashion.

“We are also going to see the emergence of truth. For years, this country has not known truth and we will be seeing more of that.”

The expectation is for II MEF (FWD) to spend 12 months in the Al Anbar Province, providing security and working to rebuild infrastructure, create jobs, and conduct a transition to Iraqi self-reliance.

“Marines are professional,” said Johnson. “They want to be here. They believe in the Marine Corps, their country and freedom. They are delighted to be here and help the Iraqi people as they try to achieve freedom as well.”

Caught in the Spotlight



Cpl. Christi Prickett

Sergeant Christopher N. Cary, Jacksonville, N.C. native, joined the Marine Corps to serve his country. He thinks every American should serve in the military.

As a lance corporal, Cary made Marine of the Quarter for II Marine Headquarters Group twice and Marine of the Year once. As a sergeant, Cary has made non-commissioned officer of the Quarter twice. The Military

Affairs Committee of Jacksonville City Council also appointed him Service Member of the Month.

This is Cary’s second deployment. He works with II MHG S-4 and has a two-part job. One is a heavy equipment chief and the other is working with camp operations in the construction section.

“We put up all the cement and barriers, barbed wire, and other things up all around the camp,” he said. “We have locals that help us.

He believes all it takes to be a good Marine is to stay squared away.

“Take charge and people will notice,” he said. “I try to lead from the front. I think every sergeant should already have these qualities. If you get things done as soon as possible and work hard, then no one can ask questions.”

Cary has a wife and a son, Anthony, who is five. His father retired as first sergeant and his mom is a school teacher.

“My family is everything to me,” he said. “I miss them but they’re proud of me.”

Cary hopes to be a drill instructor after this deployment. He is also working on his bachelor degree in business administration.

Tracking the enemy with the BAT of an eye

Cpl. Christi Prickett

II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward)

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq -- Stopping terrorists and insurgents is not an easy task. Part of the problem is positively identifying and keeping track of them, but with the help of modern technology the task is getting much easier.

To assist in the large mission of finding insurgents, the Marines and local citizens here have to look Marines in the eye.

Biometrics Automated Toolset, otherwise known as BAT, is being used throughout Afghanistan and Iraq to keep a database of the terrorists, insurgents, local workers and detainees.

Jon E. Davis, field service representative for BAT in the Al Anbar province, manages the BAT network, trains users and administrators and fixes the gear. He has been based at Camp Fallujah since November.

"The first few weeks I was here we did a whirlwind trip around Iraq," said Davis, a Tysons Corner, Va. native. "I went with my predecessor to Ramadi, Blue Diamond, Al Asad and Al Qaim to install very high quality fingerprint scanners per Department of Defense regulations."

The system works by scanning the iris of an eye to take a unique picture and storing it with other information like names, front facial pictures, and fingerprints to form a profile. The profile also provides information about an individual's past record, for example, if the person had been detained before or has been wanted for illegal activity.

Davis said, detainees held more than 72 hours must be fingerprinted on the better of two fingerprint scanners capable of working with the computer.

"The normal small one just takes single finger flat prints vice the slap and roll print," he said.

The BAT system recently underwent a major upgrade, completed in November, which now allows BAT to store more records than the previous version.

In a matter of seconds, a Marine working at a gate or check point can collect biometric data from an individual, search the database in the computer, and look for a match with the many other records already in the database.

Some of the factors in the accomplishment of the program are the equipment and the results.

"Success with BAT comes from the relative ease of collecting good quality biometric data and then searching for a person using that data," Davis said.

Biometrics also solves the current problem of matching the spelling of local names, which is often encountered even when an interpreter is available.

The majority of Marines working the gates are able to learn how to operate the system in a matter of days.

"It took me less than a week to learn the computer. The iris scanner is also easy to use," said Lance Cpl. Ivan O. Galvan, II Marine Headquarters Group, administrative clerk.

Iraqi detention facilities, military and police academies and entry control points are all using BAT.

"Most of the cities where major units are headquartered have BAT," said Davis.

There are six ECP's in Fallujah proper alone and seven in Ramadi.

BAT played a major role in the success of the recent elections. About 1,050 election workers came to work the polling stations. It only took 30 hours compared to several days for them all to be identified or put in the database.

"The election workers came from all over Al Anbar in groups of 30 to 100. In order to get them to their designated polling stations, we had to hurry the process along. The system and the Marines running it made it happen," said Davis. "I was shocked at the ease of how the system kept the workers from waiting in line so long."

Even the Marines using the gear have a good impression of BAT.

Corporal Craig T. Peterson, Chesapeake, Va., has worked with BAT at the east gate of Camp Fallujah for about three-and-a-half weeks.

"I like the system because it provides positive identification of everyone that walks in. If the badge and face don't match up, we turn to the iris scanner," said Peterson. "We make sure everyone is good-to-go before letting them on base."



Cpl. Christi Prickett

Lance Cpl. Ivan O. Galvan does an iris scan on the eye of a local Iraqi. Galvan, a native of Brownsville, Texas, learned in a matter of days how to operate the Biometrics Automated Toolset, which is being used to keep track of local detainees and area nationals.

Corpsmen race against time to save lives

Cpl. Rocco DeFilippis

2nd Marine Aircraft Wing

AL TAQADDUM, Iraq -- The sound of a ringing bell means one thing to the corpsmen of the II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) casualty evacuation team—someone is hurt and they have to provide help.

These highly trained ‘devil docs’ stand ready with the Marines of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 364 to respond to calls from anywhere throughout the Al Anbar province.

Serving as the only dedicated evacuation team in the area of operations, the corpsmen and aircrew fly into the face of danger every day to bring wounded Marines, soldiers and civilians from the battlefield to safety.

“Casualties are a part of war,” said Chief Petty Officer Leonard F. Miller, CASEVAC chief and native of Cleveland. “However, our corpsmen are extremely well trained and working each day to minimize the extent of those injuries. They are saving lives.”

The CASEVAC team works around the clock in 12-hour shifts, with two-

man teams assigned to different aircraft. When the call is sounded, the corpsmen run to the birds and take to the air with time as their biggest enemy.

“We train with the principle of the ‘golden hour,’ the time when most patients will die without stabilization,” said Petty Officer 3rd Class Jeremy R. Moore, CASEVAC corpsman and native of Kinston, N.C. “We are always racing the clock, because we lose 15 to 30 minutes on the way to the point of injury. So when we get on the ground, we work as fast as we can to fight shock and fluid loss to stabilize the patient.”

One of the keys to their success lies in the strong bond the corpsmen develop with their partners.

“When you are with the same person every day, you learn how to work with them,” Moore said. “You start thinking the same, and before long there are no gaps in your action because you can anticipate your partner’s next move.”

The corpsmen of the II MEF (Fwd) CASEVAC team began their preparation

for their important mission long before stepping foot in country. Attending the CASEVAC operational emergency medical skills and Army flight medic schools, the devil docs are highly skilled and proficient.

“This is the best prepared CASEVAC team that has come out here,” Miller said. “They hit the ground running and started doing their job with very little turn over. Training is continuous, even out here, so they are always on top of their game. They are the best corpsmen I’ve ever had.”

Humble, in light of the importance and magnitude of their mission, the team is full of men and women who just want to do their part.

“You get a great sense of pride knowing that you helped to save someone’s life,” said Petty Officer 3rd Class Travis J. Hess, corpsman and native of Heniker, N.H. “Ever since I went into field medicine, I’ve wanted to be doing this.”

“This is the primary function of a corpsman, risking your life to save to save another’s,” Moore said.

Since their arrival here two months ago, the team has answered more than 40 calls for help. The corpsmen don’t discriminate, they fly in to treat Marines, soldiers, civilians and even enemy prisoners of war.

“You don’t think about the fact that you are treating a guy who was shooting at you a few moments earlier,” Hess said. “You treat everyone the same, provide the same care regardless of their status or service.”

None of the corpsman want to see Marines and soldiers get hurt, but according to Miller, they know the importance of doing their jobs to the best of their ability.

“The CASEVAC mission gives unit commanders the confidence to carry out their mission,” he said. “In the back of their minds they know their Marines are going to be taken care of immediately with a dedicated CASEVAC team.”

With these proud corpsmen standing ready, the service members on the ground fighting to secure peace and stability for the people of Iraq can rest just a bit better, knowing that help is only a bell ring away.



Cpl. Rocco DeFilippis

A wounded Marine is carried on to a CH-46E from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 364. The HMM-364 ‘Purple Foxes’ are currently flying casualty evacuation missions in support of II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) CASEVAC team. The team responds to calls from anywhere throughout the Al Anbar province.

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While members of the platoon investigated the house, another Iraqi approached the platoon with information on insurgents just down the road.

Second Lt. Byron Jay Owen, 3rd platoon commander for Bravo Co., quickly reacted to this information by posting a squad on security at the house while the rest of the platoon began making their way down the road to their new objective.

While Marines entered the front of the house, a man ran out the back door and headed down the road when he was caught and apprehended. The search of the house quickly turned up an AK-47 lying on the floor with a round chambered and ready to fire.

The suspected insurgent was detained until he could be questioned. The rest of his family gathered outside while a corpsman made sure the children were in good health.

After the search for the two insurgents who had fled the scene was unsuccessful,

the platoon decided to remain at the house overnight to see if the situation would develop. Some Marines set up security while others tried to get some rest.

Throughout the night, Marines providing security apprehended three more suspected insurgents. One by one, each of the detainees were questioned. While the interrogations took place, a helicopter was called to take the detainees to a different location.

The Marines weren't the only ones keeping busy on the patrol. A Navy hospital corpsman attached to the platoon was able to test his medical skills when Cpl. Eric Bobbitt cut his hand while removing flex-cuffs from a detainee. The corpsman immediately determined Bobbitt would need stitches.

Three stitches later, the corpsman cleaned and wrapped the wound.

The morning eventually arrived like a long-lost old friend, as the Marines started cleaning up the house. Before beginning the day, the platoon took care of damages done to the house and started on that day's patrol.

Shortly into this patrol, Marines heard

machine gun fire in the distance. They immediately took action and searched the houses nearest to the gunfire. An Iraqi man at one of the houses said that an American convoy had just driven by and fired shots into the trees, however, no convoys had gone through the area for a while.

As the Marines searched his residence, they found a machine gun with the barrel still hot sitting in his chicken coop and suddenly his story had holes. A further investigation turned up a box of ammunition, binoculars, a bayonet, and a rifle magazine lying in the yard. He was questioned, detained and sent away for further interrogation.

During six long days of patrols, each of Bravo's platoons had covered more than 40 miles and captured numerous suspected insurgents. Hopkins summarized the company's performance by saying, "The mission went great because of high operational tempo and positive contact with the locals."

If I had a hammer...



Photos by Lance Cpl. Aaron P. Mankin

Marines with Company B, 8th Engineer Support Battalion construct sea huts under the Middle Eastern sun. The huts are located at a consolidated entry control point and will be used to house Marines responsible for the area. The new ECP will allow locals faster access to the city.

