

The Eagle and The Crescent

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Transition to Self-Reliance

April 8, 2005

CMC visits warriors during Iraq tour



Cpl. Rocco C. DeFilippis

Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen. Michael Hagee, speaks to the Marines, Sailors and soldiers serving with the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (Forward) in Al Asad during a visit Thursday.

Lance Cpl. Aaron P. Mankin

II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward)

Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen. Michael W. Hagee and Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, John L. Estrada, spent four days visiting Marines and Sailors deployed to Iraq early this week.

During their tour of bases throughout the Corps' area of operations, Hagee and Estrada focused on making sure Marines knew they were appreciated.

"I want to thank you for what you are doing here," said the commandant. "You are making a difference. In years to come you will be able to tell your children and grandchildren that you participated in a significant time in history. A time when you helped change the direction of where this area of the world was headed."

See CMC, Page 7

24th MEU remembers fallen brothers

Staff Sgt. Demetrio J. Espinosa

24th Marine Expeditionary Unit

MARINE CORPS BASE CAMP LEJEUNE, N.C. -- Thirteen months ago the Marines and sailors of the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit came together at W.P.T. Hill Field here to begin a journey that would take them through an accelerated predeployment training schedule and

a turbulent tour in Iraq.

They returned to the same spot March 31, this time in the company of family and friends, to honor the 15 Marines who were killed during the MEU's deployment.

"It's only fitting that we here today go

See MEU, Page 2

Commanding Officer Col. Ron Johnson, 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, salutes while honors are rendered to the 15 Marines lost during the MEU's recent tour to Iraq. The memorial took place at W.P.T. Hill Field, Camp Lejeune, N.C.



Cpl. Sarah A. Beavers

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Fri 8 April	Sat 9 April	Sun 10 April	Mon 11 April
 Sunrise 06:43D Sunset 19:30D	 Sunrise 06:42D Sunset 19:30D	 Sunrise 06:41D Sunset 19:31D	 Sunrise 06:40D Sunset 19:32D
Low: 58F High: 63F	Low: 63F High: 92F	Low: 65F High: 89F	Low: 66F High: 88F
ILLUM 0 %	ILLUM 0 %	ILLUM 3 %	ILLUM 7 %

Morale Corner

Worship Services & Bible Study Schedule

Friday

6 p.m. - Memorial Service for Pope John Paul II at the main theatre
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

Salsa Night: There will be salsa dancing held at the MWR recreation center tonight from 9:30 p.m. to 1 a.m.

Hip Hop Night: Come out to the recreation center for some hip hop music. Tomorrow night from 9:30 p.m. to 1 a.m.

Spades Night: Tonight at the MWR recreation center from 7 to 10 p.m.

4-on-4 Volleyball: A 4-on-4 volleyball tournament will be held Saturday at the MWR recreation center volleyball court at 4 p.m..

Movie Night: Every day 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
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Cpl. Sarah A. Beavers

Family members of a fallen Marine from the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit place flowers as they kneel by a memorial display March 31, to honor their family member killed during the MEU's tour of Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom II.

MEU, from Page 1

through our final roll call in the same place we started," said Col. Ron Johnson, commanding officer, 24th MEU, at a memorial service.

"Nobody, but nobody, could have [been] given finer men than these 15 Marines."

The afternoon ceremony began under darkening clouds, adding to the somber mood of the assembly. Although rain was expected, it held out until after the ceremony.

Chaplain (Cmdr.) Benedict Brown, Battalion Landing Team 1st Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, gave his blessing over the ceremony, reflected on the deaths of the Marines, and offered his advice on dealing with the loss.

"We come to grips with evil and pain today. Our hearts are heavy as we confront the fact that 15 of our own have been taken from us," he said. "Religion and faith can-

not tell us why things like this happen, but it does tell us what to do about it. We are first to realize that we are not alone in our grief. Secondly, we are to remember in specific ways those for whom we grieve."

Brown also said, at a gathering like this, it is important to remember the nation grieves with us.

"Honorable people everywhere share our sorrow, our pride, our remembrance. I submit to you also that these 15 fallen heroes are with us, too. They continue to be with us as we continue to memorialize, that is, remember them."

Following the invocation, a formation of Marines came forward to make the 15 rifle, boot and helmet displays. Each display was also adorned with the identification tags of each Marine. Once the displays were complete, the MEU's commanding officer, spoke a few words about each Marine, his grief audible in his voice.

"All of these men are America's finest," Johnson said. "And I am humbled to stand here on this ground and be with them. This is our final roll call, and we will never forget them."

According to Johnson, Cpl. Barton K. Humlhanz, field military policeman with MEU Service Support Group 24, epitomized the dedication that all the fallen men displayed.

"Cpl Humlhanz was an MP. He was on a patrol. Cpl. Humlhanz was just an example of these 15 Marines. He didn't whimper, he didn't cry. Though he was wounded, he reassured his base that he was going to make it and continued the action," he said.

Following Johnson's comments, a rifle detachment fired a 21-gun salute to the fallen Marines, and two trumpets echoed taps to honor them.

When all was done, the cloudy sky broke into a slight mist, mirroring the eyes of the Marines, Sailors, family and friends in attendance. It also brought to an end the MEU's eventful deployment.

Kilo 3/2 captures known insurgents

Lance Cpl. Lucian Friel
2nd Marine Division

SADAH, Iraq -- In the early morning hours, Marines with 1st Platoon, Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team-2, took seven detainees during a raid here Sunday.

The raid was conducted in order to detain people considered high value individuals for questioning.

"There were a couple of high value targets that needed to be taken in for questioning. We gathered intelligence on them, the houses they occupied and we had pretty large files on a lot of them," explained Cpl. Richard C. Marshall, 1st squad leader.

First squad was part of the main effort in the raid, taking down and detaining the mission's top priority high value target.

"The main individual we were going after was a known explosives expert and was also teaching others how to build them," continued the 21-year-old Denver native. "Bringing him in was important to cut

down the number of Improvised Explosive Devices and attacks on U.S. forces in the local area."

Kilo Company had support from explosive ordnance disposal technicians, combat engineers, amphibious assault vehicles and a combined anti-armor team with Weapons Company.

Marshall knew what he wanted to have happen and felt confident during the raid.

"I wanted to make sure that my Marines were aggressive enough and that none of them got hit during the mission," the 2002 Broomfield High School graduate said. "I felt confident that the Marines knew how to perform their assignments."

With the successful capture of his main target during the raid, Marshall hopes his unit continues to contribute to the success of capturing of other known terrorist and insurgents continues.

"Overall, I want us to get rid of all the local and foreign fighters that are making it difficult on the Iraqi people to live peaceful and secure lives," he said. "Today's mission was definitely a successful one."



Lance Cpl. Lucian Friel

Cpl. Richard C. Marshall, 1st squad leader, 1st Platoon, Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment leads his squad in rehearsals for the raid that took place in Sadah, Iraq Monday. Seven detainees were taken during the raid including their main target, who was a known explosives expert. Marshall, a Denver native, considered the mission to be a complete success.

Fighting a war, planning careers

Lance Cpl. Aaron P. Mankin
II Marine Expeditionary Force (FWD)

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq – One of the most life-shaping decisions a Marine can make at their end of service is whether or not to choose the Corps as a career, or get out.

For some it's not hard, they've been in long enough they can see retirement approaching. For others it may be the first time they have been faced with a reenlistment. Which way do they turn? Who should they listen to? Where can they find the advice they need?

Look no further than Staff Sgt. Carlos W. Arbelaez, career retention specialist for II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) and Queens, N.Y., native.

"A lot of Marines seem to avoid me. They think, 'this guy's going to try to make me reenlist.' That's not the reason I'm here," said Arbelaez.

Tour extension, special duty, retirement

and reenlistment are issues Arbelaez deals with on a regular basis.

"Marines tell me they're getting out, I just ask them to tell me why," said Arbelaez, a veteran of 13 years. "Usually, the answer involves finances. Some military occupational specialties pay well in the civilian sector. It's pretty hard to beat that argument, but I try to show them what we have. I also ask them if they joined for the money. The answer is almost always 'No.'"

One of the largest subjects dealt with by career retention specialists is permanent change of station requests. Marines have the option of changing where they're sta-

tioned after they have served for a period of time at their current location.

"The best part of my job is making Marines happy," said Arbelaez. "After they get a cash bonus or receive the duty station they requested, they always have a smile. That makes my job very rewarding."

As a career retention specialist, Arbelaez explains there is one thing every Marine should understand about what he does.

"I am not here just as a guidance tool for those Marines that choose to stay in the Corps. I am also here to assist those Marines who plan on leaving," said Arbelaez.

The Marine For Life program focuses on Marines who are honorably discharged. They assist in the transition phase of a Marine's life out of the Corps no matter if they have four or 30 years. Marines can search for employment and look at companies who have joined the Marine For Life program in hopes of eventually hiring Marines.

"Marines still need to take care of business as usual," stressed Arbelaez. "Just because we are here in Iraq doesn't mean your future is put on hold. There are so many things that we can do. I can help."

Arbelaez is here to assist 17,000 Marines, to include Camps Taqaddum and Blue Diamond in western Iraq and Camp Victory, Kuwait. Since arriving a few weeks ago, 10 have extended their tours and two have reenlisted.

For more information, contact Arbelaez at 3401-717 or via e-mail at arbelaezcw@cemnf-wiraq.usmc.mil.

'Marines tell me they're getting out, I just ask them to tell me why.'

Staff Sgt. Carlos W. Arbelaez
Career Retention Specialist



Lance Cpl. Aaron P. Mankin

Staff Sgt. Carlos W. Arbelaez, career retention specialist for II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) leaves the door open to his office. Every Marine is welcome to stop by and speak with him.

3/4 Fallujah Marine turns life around

Lance Cpl. Paul Robbins Jr.
2nd Marine Division

FALLUJAH, Iraq -- Nothing would change his mind. Not the pleas of his parents nor the challenges which might lay ahead of him.

Something had to change and he knew just how to do it.

Lance Cpl. Manuel Frias, a 23-year-old squad automatic weapon gunner with 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, was not always the meritorious Marine he is today.

A high school drop-out at the age of 17, Frias spent nearly five years in his hometown of Los Angeles, working dead end jobs and partying all the time.

"I wasn't going anywhere," Frias said, "I was becoming fat, lazy. I was totally indecisive."

Time dragged on for Frias as one job replaced another: grocery store bagger, gas station attendant, cashier.

During the 40 or more hours he worked in a week, Frias attended continuation school in an attempt to salvage his education; but, like his work, the schools came and went.

"I started at one continuation school, then stopped, later started another," Frias explained, "Then I turned 18 and had to start attending an adult continuation school."

Realizing the pattern his life had taken, Frias looked to find a way to turn his life around and get back on track.

It didn't take him long to remember an idea he had struggled over shortly after dropping out of high school.

"I had been thinking about joining the Marines around the time I dropped out. I just didn't," Frias said.

With renewed purpose, he set out to enlist in the Marine Corps.

"I thought it was a good place for me to be," Frias said.

Frias attended and graduated from Westchester Emerson Adult School in early 2004. He later joined the Marine Corps in July of the same year.

Since then, Frias has been meritoriously promoted to lance corporal and has deployed here with his current battalion in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"The Marine Corps has made me physically and mentally stronger, more disciplined and showed me how to help myself," Frias said.

According to Frias, he is the first Marine in his family and has won over his previously skeptical, but now proud parents.

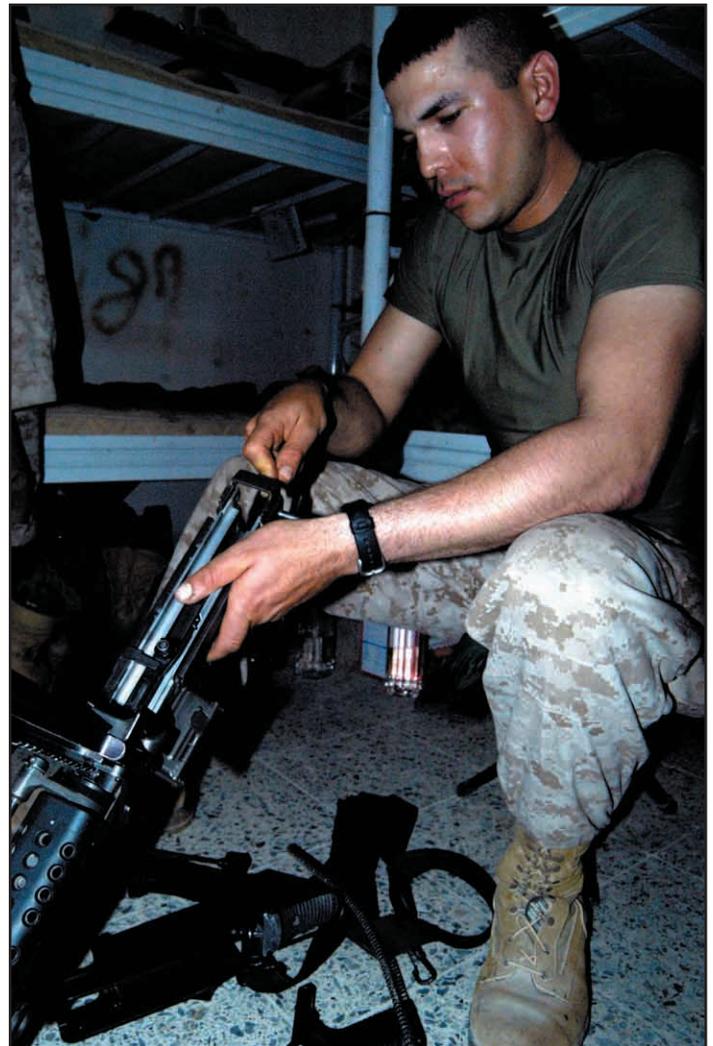
He is appreciative of the changes instilled by the Marine

Corps and proud of his service as a Marine.

"Not everyone can say they've done what I have," Frias said. "We're here helping these people."

Third Battalion operates in and around Fallujah to stabilize and secure the once insurgent-ridden city for the citizens of Iraq.

Frias has completed three months in Fallujah, and is scheduled to return to the states sometime in August.



Lance Cpl. Paul Robbins Jr.

Lance Cpl. Manuel Frias, 23-year-old squad automatic weapon gunner for 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines, Regimental Combat Team-8, cleans his weapon inside his company's firm base in Fallujah, Iraq. Frias joined the Marine Corps in July 2004, to make some changes in his life.

Searching locals, making an impact

Cpl. Christi Prickett

II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward)

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq – When Women Marines first entered service in the Marine Corps Reserve in 1918, they only worked in clerical positions. During the war on terror, women Marines have now found themselves in almost all aspects of the Marine Corps and are expected to succeed just as the Marines who have come before them.

This is a weight Lance Cpl. Megan L. Phuhl shoulders when she turns off her alarm at 5 a.m. every morning. Stationed with Communication Company, Headquarters Battalion, 2nd Marine

Division, Phuhl and 15 other female Marines go out to eight different Entry Control Points in Fallujah to search Iraqi women and children.

Encounters with the local population bring life to what could be a monotonous job.

“Our mission is to find any hazardous items on the women, but I think I’ve seen it all,” said the Harrisburg, Va., native. “People will bring farm animals in, dead or alive, and each person has their own style of clothing as well.”

Each day more than 400 women pass through the search area and the work hours can be long.

“We are given time off throughout the day to get out of the heat, and we also have one day off a week,” said Phuhl. “But I come back on my days off because I love my job.”

Phuhl isn’t the only one who feels this way.

“Even though I just finished my fourth day out at the ECPs, it was my turn in the rotation to have a day off. But I’m coming back out tomorrow. I wouldn’t miss it,” said Lance Cpl. Kimberly B. Lambert, Truck Company, Headquarters and Support Battalion, 2nd Marine Division.

Interacting with the people makes the Marines committed to the job. Communication through body language and a small amount of Arabic language training makes the relationships easier, too.

“During our chow breaks, I try to converse with the local Iraqi Police and Iraqi Security Forces who are training with us at the checkpoints,” said Lambert, native of South Hadley, Mass. “I also learned from other Marines like Lance Corporal Phuhl.”

Phuhl said that a smile is her key to successful searches.

“The majority of the time, they treat us the way we treat them. If we are nice, they are nice. We respect the women, so they respect us,” she said.

Gunnery Sgt. James G. Delao, Charlie Company gunnery sergeant, 6th Battalion, 1st Marine Division, thinks the Marines are setting high standards for themselves.

“The female Marines here are doing well,” he said. “I never hear complaints. They have stuck with us all along and they haven’t buckled under pressure. I’m proud of them.”

Some of the female Marines come to the job with very little training. It is essential to learn from others who have been at an ECP longer, said Lambert.

“I had a class about searching people, including women, but honestly, I never thought I’d be doing it, especially this many women,” said Phuhl. “We were given specific points to remember before we came out for the first time and we are often reminded to do thorough inspections.”



Cpl. Christi Prickett

Lance Cpl. Megan L. Phuhl, Communication Company, Headquarters Battalion, 2nd Marine Division, loves her job so much she usually volunteers herself to work on her days off. The local Iraqi women respect the Marines, just as the Marines respect them.

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The recent history of Iraq has been marred with anti-coalition terrorists and former regime loyalists. Estrada spoke of the difference his Marines are making in Iraq.

“Your efforts here are changing the shape of this region,” explained Estrada. “The Iraqi people have not been able to dream. Now, you are giving them the chance to realize their dreams. Now they are in the infancy of democracy. You and your fellow Marines make that all possible. The bottom line is you are a large part of everything taking place right now.”

The commandant ate breakfast with Marines stationed at Camp Blue Diamond one morning during his tour of the area of operation.

“It was truly an honor to eat breakfast with the commandant of the Marine Corps,” said Cpl. Amy A. Butiko, administration clerk, Headquarters Battalion, 2nd Marine Division. “It is not every day that a chance like this one comes along.”

As the highest ranking Marine, Hagee took time to hold a town hall style meeting with Marines stationed at Camp Fallujah. He spoke of how important it was for Marines to lead the way and set the example.

“We want to build the trust between



Lance Cpl. Aaron P. Mankin

Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen. Michael W. Hagee and Sgt. Maj. of the Marine Corps, John L. Estrada entertain questions during a town hall meeting at Camp Fallujah.

the Iraqi Security Forces and the Iraqi people. We have to teach the Iraqi forces how the armed forces in a democratic society work,” he said. “Teach them how to respect the people and how to help the people. You can set that example. Even if you are not working directly with the Iraqi forces your actions here day to day will set that example for them. How you interact and treat the Iraqi people will also show them what to expect from their armed forces in the future.

“We need to build a secure environment here so companies and businesses, even people that live here in Fallujah, will return and get the economy going. Providing a secure environment is critical in winning

the war here. Part of that is training up the Iraqi Security Forces. We need to be able to turn the security mission over to them.”

During the town hall meeting, Estrada added, “The majority of Iraqi citizens are very thankful for what you’re doing. The enemy is still present but they are very much the minority. They are trying to stop this locomotive called democracy. But you are staying [on] course and you are making a difference.

“I appreciate your sacrifices. I ask you to stick in here with us until our mission is completed. Granted there is still work to be done. It is important that you complete that work so that your sons and daughters don’t have to come back years down the road.

“As you know, our president is committed to complete this mission as I know you are committed.”

The leaders’ visit also included Camp Taqaddum, Camp Hurricane Point and Al Asad.

“I have been in this area several times,” said Hagee. “I am really quite amazed at how the atmosphere has changed here. And it has changed for the better.”



Cpl. Christi Prickett

Caught in the Spotlight

Sergeant Shawn J. Maichle, 21, has been at Camp Fallujah for a month. He is a construction wireman with 8th Communication Battalion, II Marine Expeditionary Force.

Maichle’s four-year mark in the Marine Corps will come in July, but he has already re-enlisted. He plans on staying in 20 years or more.

“I joined the Marines to get out and do something on my own, which I have done,” said the native of New Castle, Del. “When I retire, I want to work for a cable company somewhere.”

Maichle said he wouldn’t have picked an-

other military occupational skill when joining the Corps.

“I love my job and the equipment we work with,” he said. “The hours are nice. We work hard.”

Maichle and his wife now live in Jacksonville, N.C. His wife is expecting their first child in May.

Unfortunately, Maichle will still be deployed. He will be here for seven months total. This is his first deployment to Iraq.

Maichle is a huge Washington Redskins fan. He also likes racing and playing baseball and football.

Iraqi children find friendship with Marines

Sgt. Stephen D'Alessio
2nd Marine Division

CAMP BLUE DIAMOND, Iraq -- Marines that make up the camp's quick reaction force conducted another patrol down the dangerous streets here Sunday.

This was no ordinary patrol, though. The Marines saddled up in their High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle for a chance to do something for the children, instead of rooting out insurgent hideouts.

The gates of the camp were opened and the Marines of the friendship patrol trailed out into the sandy reaches of Ramadi to hand out soccer balls and stuffed animals to the children.

The toys were donations by patriotic students at Camp Lejeune High School in Jacksonville, N.C., where the 2nd Marine Division is headquartered. The gifts were donated in the hopes that they would help the children of the war-torn city have a sense of normalcy.

Jazmine Hall, a student at the high school, spearheaded the toy drive as a testament of support for the well being of the citizens of Iraq from the families and friends of the Marines serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Immediately out of the gate, the Marines found themselves in a precarious position as they weaved through a Sunday street market. Usually on patrol, the force doesn't get too close to the locals, for fear of suicide bombings, ambushes or improvised explosive attacks.

"We went through some danger areas, but I think doing things like this really makes a difference in our mission here," said Sgt. Paul Suarez, a 22-year-old Santa Clara, Calif. native and squad leader for 2nd squad. "We really kept a close eye out for anything out of the ordinary and we were able to do something for the children at the same time."

On their way into the narrow streets of central Ar Ramadi, Al Anbar's provincial capital, the children popped their heads out of stony corridors and ran across fields to see why the Marines were in their neighborhood.

The convoy stopped in one neighborhood and dismounted. At first, there was an apprehension among the children who hid behind fences and rubble to observe the Marines with their heavy weaponry. But soon they knew there was nothing to be afraid of as the Marines lowered from their machine gun turrets and reappeared with a few soccer balls.

Soon women gathered to talk and young shepherds redirected their flocks to see the commotion and take

part in the frenzy of dozens of children jumping for a chance to have their own ball or stuffed animal.

"We really saw first hand what a difference it could make to give one of the kids something as simple as a soccer ball," said Suarez, a 2000 Fremont High School graduate.

The Marines boarded their HMMWV and snaked through the alleyways to another neighborhood. All along the way, the children came out of hiding and followed the Marines.

The once quiet neighborhoods of Ar Ramadi quickly turned into a torrent of children laughing and skipping down the dirt roads in trail of the convoy. All of this was possible thanks to the Camp Lejeune High School students.

As the sun lowered on the horizon, the houses were washed in a hazy, orange light.

Locals waved goodbye to the Marines from their porches as their children kicked up dust and continued to play with their newfound toys.

"It was a change from what we're used to doing out there and hopefully we can have a chance to do other missions like this in the near future," said Suarez.



Sgt. Stephen D'Alessio

Staff Sgt. Jerome H. Murkerson, a 33-year-old Adger, Ala. native and staff noncommissioned officer-in-charge of the Camp Blue Diamond quick reaction force, hands a new soccer ball to an Iraqi child, Sunday. The Marines handed out stuffed animals and soccer balls to Iraqi children to foster good relations with the citizens of the town. Murkerson is a 1990 graduate of Oak Grove High School.

Paralyzed Marine provides example

Donna Miles

American Forces Press Service

SNOWMASS VILLAGE, Colo. -- From the moment he became paralyzed while rescuing a fellow Marine four years ago, Joey Avellone refused to accept life on the sidelines.

Today, he's a volunteer peer counselor for other disabled veterans in St. Louis and a role model for newly injured veterans, including those of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom who are here at the 19th National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic.

Avellone, 27, understands firsthand the frustration young disabled troops experience. He was at the top of his game - a rescue swimmer in Hawaii - when a fellow Marine fell into the surf.

Recognizing that the water was shallow, Avellone immediately conducted a shallow-water dive, arching his back and kicking his feet to stall his momentum. Despite his precautions, he hit a rock head-first and his entire body went limp. Avellone was under water for about four and

a half minutes before he was pulled out.

Today, Avellone is paralyzed from the waist down and has been medically retired from the Marine Corps. But as a former motorcycle racer, football player, wrestler and swimmer, he said he's unwilling to count his active days over.

"My friends told me I was lucky that I had done so many great things before I got hurt, because now I was stuck in a wheelchair," he said. "But just because I'm in a chair doesn't mean I can't do these things anymore. I just have to modify how I do them."

And do them he has. Avellone counts skiing, rock climbing, ski diving, handcycling, and snowmobiling among his endeavors.

"Since I was paralyzed, I've done more than most able-bodied people," he said.

Avellone has brought his can-do attitude here to the 19th National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, where he said he tries to inspire newly disabled veterans.

"It's a chance to show people that just because you are 'disabled' doesn't mean you

can't do everything you want to," he said.

Attending the clinic this year for the fourth time, Avellone called it an opportunity to share his zest for adventure with his fellow disabled veterans and to encourage them as they push themselves to try new experiences.

Avellone shared his philosophy with Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz during the first day of the clinic, Sunday, and the deputy secretary referred to Avellone's words in his address during the opening ceremonies.

"This is not just recreation; this is serious business," Wolfowitz said Avellone told him of the winter sports clinic. "It's a matter of conquering fears (and getting) back to the active life that all of you have had."

Avellone said the clinic offers disabled veterans a chance to do more adventurous things than most able-bodied people ever do.

"You might not think you can do some of these athletic challenges, but you can," he said. "It's not about competition. We are here to push ourselves to try new things and grow in confidence, cheering for each other."

Motomail not just for Marines anymore

Cpl. C.J. Yard

2nd Force Service Support Group (Forward)

CAMP TAQADDUM, Iraq -- The Marine Corps' newest way of staying in touch with loved ones, Motomail, has been extended to the Soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, 112th Armor, 36th Infantry Division.

"We're doing them a favor because they are doing us an even larger favor by putting their lives at risk guarding this base," said Master Sgt. Robert Simpson, the postal chief for Headquarters and Service Battalion, 2nd Force Service Support Group (Forward).

Motomail is a service to send letters to Marines via the internet and have the Marine receive the letter within 24 hours. A family member or friend is able to logon to www.motomail.us and type letters to their Marine serving overseas. The letter is then downloaded and printed in a secure envelope and delivered to the Marine during mail call.

"No one ever sees what is in the letters," said Simpson. "The really cool thing is the person who sent the letter can go back to the site and see when it was downloaded and printed. It's communication for free; and it's nice to have that letter in your hand instead of always reading e-mail."

According to Simpson, the only glitch in

the system is the Marines who are not always inside the wire do not always get their mail within 24 hours.

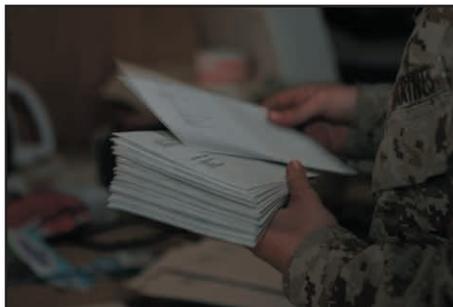
The concept of Motomail came from the British Royal Marines, said Simpson, a Tonawanda, N.Y., native.

"Since the base is 70 percent Army, we thought we could give the family members of the 2/112th another way to keep in touch with their loved ones," he said. "We proposed the idea to the battalion commanding officer] and he said that it was good to go.

"When a family member logs on, they choose from a list of addresses, and there is only one address for the Army, that's here," continued Simpson.

Camp Taqaddum averages about 400 pieces of Motomail in a day and the Army gets anywhere from 30 to 50 letters, according to Simpson.

"The 2/112th has been set up to use Motomail for the past two weeks," said Army Maj. Lloyd Waugh, executive officer the 2/112th and native of Cypress, Texas. "Motomail will have an impact on the morale of our troops moving forward; however, we have not been able to measure its success yet. This media should help our soldiers and their families that do not have e-mail readily available in order to improve communications while deployed."



Cpl. Rocco DeFilippis

The post office at Camp Taqaddum, Iraq prints nearly 400 Motomails daily and ensures delivery in western Iraq.

445th CAB: Never out empty handed

Cpl. Christi Prickett

II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward)

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq -- Most service members fight battles with a weapon in hand or with a radio on their back, but some do it with small bags of peanut butter crackers in their cargo pockets.

Staff Sgt. Mario E. Bertuccelli, of the Army's 445th Civil Affairs Battalion, a reserve unit out of Mountain View, Calif., attached to 5th Civil Affairs Group, enjoys doing his job, especially when the mission is to pass out food or supplies to the families of southern Fallujah.

"My job as a civil affairs staff sergeant is to win the hearts and minds of all the Iraqi civilians living in Fallujah," said Bertuccelli. "I want to help everyone, but mostly children because I see that they have the hardest lives."

"Quick! Quick! Throw some to your right!" Bertuccelli tells the soldier in the turret. A package can be seen flying through the air as the High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle takes off from a post sign.

A former Marine and native of San Jose, Calif., Bertuccelli has been in the area since August 2004. He said he has seen some rough times.

"This is a dangerous job," explains Sgt. 1st Class Benjamin Sturges, team leader and San Francisco native. "We are on the streets of the city, day in and day out."

Bertuccelli nods in agreement.

"But it's all worth it," Bertuccelli agrees. "I have so much sympathy for the people of this town."

The five soldiers, also known as Team Wild West, delivered small boxes of a variety of breakfast cereals to the Iraqi children and their families.

"The kids are just trying to survive," Bertuccelli said. "Being that they do not have or receive much of anything, the children beg, cry and fight for these humanitarian supplies. They're 'must have' items to survive in this already very difficult place to live."

The kids weren't just looking for cereal or treats. Many of them asked for footballs. One young girl even wanted Bertuccelli's pen.

"Do you have paper?" he laughed, speaking in Arabic. She pointed to her house, which was actually a tent. He handed it to the girl.

"They know our trucks by the big tires on the front," Bertuccelli said. "Once they see us, the kids come running. Well, it used to be only the kids but now the adults are coming up to us, too."

He sees families are beginning to trust the Americans.

"We're respected out here," Bertuccelli said. "They know we are there to help."

The team's main focus is sewage, water, electricity, academics, trash and food. They do at least one supply run weekly to drop off medical supplies at certain homes in the area where they are needed.

"As we were going house to house to deliver food, we found a man who had been shot in the hip. We don't know the full story behind the shooting, but we don't really care. He needed medical attention and we're here to help," said Sturges.

The team delivers pain medications and clean dressings. Sgt. Alfredo Desby, combat lifesaver for 445th CAB, does some unplanned check-ups on certain patients. When he's not on active duty, he is a U.S. Marshal in Corpus Christi, Texas.

"Many times, if they see us coming, the adults will bring their sick children up to me," said Desby. "I gladly help out when I can. A home we went into today had a child with an ear infection, so I gave the family some ear drops."

The team's mission has become more like a way of life.

"We never leave empty handed. That's our motto. We will never leave this place without something for the families here, if we can help it," said Bertuccelli.

Bertuccelli said there is a reason the children are out in abundance when they deliver food and supplies.

"The schools are overcrowded so many of the kids don't go. There are thousands of kids in the southern part of the city and only a few schools in the area," he said. "We are in the process of getting school materials. We already have tried to fix the walls, windows, and roofs so they'd have a decent building."

The five-man team assesses the situation in town and reports back to the contracting officer at the Civil Military Operations Center. Then, local contractors bid on the jobs throughout the city. The future concerns are the building of three soccer fields and about nine clinics in the city of Fallujah.

When all is said and done, Team Wild West is completing its mission.

"Every day when we finish our missions in the city we always come back feeling great, knowing we helped so many people in real need," said Bertuccelli.



Staff Sgt. Mario E. Bertuccelli

As an Army Civil Affairs team member, sometimes your day-to-day job can be emotional. Especially when you're a combat lifesaver like Sgt. Alfredo Desby. The Corpus Christi, Texas native often helps out small children brought to him by parents during the daily supply convoys into Fallujah. Along with bringing medical supplies and aid, the soldiers bring food, toys, and building materials.