

# The Eagle & The Crescent

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Transition to Self-Reliance

July 29, 2005

## CMC tours Iraq, speaks in Al Asad



Sgt. Juan Vara

General Michael W. Hagee, commandant of the Marine Corps, addresses Marines and Sailors with Provisional Security Battalion and Marine Wing Support Squadron 271, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (FWD), during a visit to Al Asad on July 25. Hagee and Sgt. Maj. John L. Estrada, sergeant major of the Marine Corps, visited service members supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom.

### Sgt. Juan Vara

2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (FWD)

AL ASAD, Iraq -- The Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen. Michael W. Hagee, visited Marines and Sailors here July 25 accompanied by Sgt. Maj. John L. Estrada, sergeant major of the Marine Corps.

"I'm here for two reasons," said Hagee. "I want to talk to the Marines and Sailors and see how they're doing and I

want to ensure they're maintaining operational situational awareness."

Escorted by Brig. Gen. Robert E. Milstead Jr., 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (Forward) commanding general, and Sgt. Maj. Collin A. Cotterell, 2nd MAW (Forward) sergeant major, the Corps' top leaders interacted with service members at the mess hall, an area of the base known as Rock Ridge, the base hospital, and Camp Ripper.

Marines and Sailors from various units

had breakfast with Hagee and Estrada. Corporal Lisa M. Carey, an intelligence analyst with the intelligence department of Marine Wing Headquarters Squadron 2, said having breakfast with the sergeant major of the Marine Corps was an awesome experience.

"To talk with the sergeant major and the commandant in a combat environment is probably one of the most memorable experiences I've ever had," said Carey, a native of Homestead, Fla. "Meeting with some of the most experienced Marines in the Corps helps some of us refocus and remember why we're here."

After breakfast, members of Provisional Security Battalion and the Immediate Reaction and Explosive Ordnance Disposal teams of Marine Wing Support Squadron 271 hosted the commandant and the sergeant major outside their workspaces. Captain William J. Markham, commanding officer of Alpha Company, Provisional Security Battalion, and Concord, N.C., native, showed Hagee some of the vehicles the unit uses to conduct convoy operations throughout Al Anbar province.

A few injured Marines and U.S. Army soldiers had an opportunity to talk with Hagee and Estrada in the hospital and the two addressed Marines and sailors from Combat Logistics Battalion 2 in the

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FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY
 Low: 90F High: 113F DUST	 Low: 88F High: 113F DUST	 Low: 89F High: 115F DUST	 Low: 86F High: 111F DUST
Sunrise 0618D Sunset 2009D LLUM 36%	Sunrise 0618D Sunset 2008D LLUM 27%	Sunrise 0619D Sunset 2007D LLUM 18%	Sunrise 0620D Sunset 2006D LLUM 11%

By Gunnery Sgt. Steven L. Saxton

## Camp Fallujah

### MWR events

5K/10K Fun Run: There will be a fun run held at the MWR recreation center Saturday starting at 6 a.m.

R&B Night: Come out to the recreation center and dance with your friends, Saturday night from 9:30 p.m. to 1 a.m.

Movie Night: Every day at 3 and 7 p.m. a movie will be played in the recreation center back room.

For more information, contact the MWR supervisor: [crystal.nadeau@halliburton.com](mailto:crystal.nadeau@halliburton.com)

### A message to The Eagle & The Crescent readers

The Eagle & The Crescent is not just an "internal information" newsletter but a weekly compendium of stories and photos featuring the servicemen and women of Multi-National Force – West/II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward). These stories and photos give readers a glimpse into the personal and professional lives of Marines, Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen serving far from home in a challenging and often hostile environment. The stories you read here are the ones that go untold, or underreported, in the mainstream media. Regardless of one's opinion about Iraq today or the decision to send U.S. military forces to Iraq, there are sacrifices being made every day by the men and women whose stories appear on these pages, and their fellow service members. I may be a little biased but I believe these brave men and women deserve your support.

THANK YOU -- to those readers who have helped spread the reach of TE&TC by forwarding copies to family and friends; to those readers who have taken the time to send us feedback or notes of support and encouragement; and not least, to those Marines, Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen whose stories on the pages of our newsletter demonstrate to the world your commitment, dedication and sacrifice.

Lt. Col. Dave Lapan

Director, II MEF (FWD) Public Affairs  
[cepaowo@cemnf-wiraq.usmc.mil](mailto:cepaowo@cemnf-wiraq.usmc.mil)

### II Marine Expeditionary Force (FWD)

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Chaplain's Corner:

# Thunder in the Desert

Lt. Cmdr. Phillip E. Lee  
8th Communication Bn.



What was that sound? This is the first question on everybody's mind and many times voiced from people's lips when a loud noise is heard

here. Sometimes the noise is generated by the circumstances of war. We all relax when we realize it is our troops making the clamor as they fulfill their mission and support the cause of freedom. At other times, like last week, the noise comes from the heavens as a rare storm rolls in and announces its arrival with a mighty thunder. It's is a wonderful sound when you haven't seen rain in a while.

Between the "clap of God's hands in the heavens" and the clash of human differences in this part of the earth, another sound rings out in this place every Sunday. God's people come together to worship Him. Marines and Sailors attend services at various times and places around the camp. A familiar noise can be heard as you walk by the identified locations. Even a multitude of the heavenly host

probably takes notice and verifies that hearts are at worship. Songs rise up to the heavens with lyrics like, "Behold He comes, riding on the clouds . . . the voice of one crying in the desert, prepare ye the way of the Lord!" Prayers are said for fellow service members and our families back home. Key events related to spiritual growth are often highlighted and then one person, armed with the Sword of God (Eph. 6:17), stands to deliver a word of encouragement from Scripture.

When it comes time to sound the benediction, many participants linger and enjoy the echo of the worship service

as it saturates their souls. Others head out to chow for fellowship with those who recognize the sound of God's voice and the reverberation of His people at worship. The experience is so refreshing to the souls of a few that they attend multiple services.

The next time you walk by one of our chapel locations during

the week, stop in and listen. It usually is one of the quietest places on earth. Then come back on Sunday at the appropriate time and see if you hear the sound of thunder there as people give thanks to the one who made the thunder. Hope you will join us as we thunder praises to the glory of God!

'Key events related to spiritual growth are often highlighted and then one person, armed with the Sword of God, stands to deliver...'

Ephesians 6:17

# Drum major plays new 'gig' for Iraqi Freedom

**Gunnery Sgt. Shannon Arledge**  
*2nd Marine Aircraft Group (FWD)*

AL ASAD, Iraq -- The tap of the drum sounds as the different platoons move into position. Muskets loaded, the platoon commander orders his men forward, they move in step without hesitation; the drummer sets the pace.

The responsibilities of military bands have changed over the years, but their combat mission is still required today. Most Americans see military bands as they step onto the parade deck; the rhythmic beat pounds as they follow the non verbal commands of the drum major leading from the front. He raises his mace, turns to face the band, the tap of the drum suddenly ends.

In 1988 when Michael R. Montoya was finishing high school he had plans to join the military. His father passed away five years earlier and he wanted to help his mother with the possible financial hardship of sending him and his three brothers to college.

The young Montoya entered the Marine Corps as a trombone player, and attended the Armed Forces School of Music, in Little Creek, Va., after boot camp. Often seen at special events and parades, this Marine, and others like him, epitomize the analogy 'Every Marine is a Rifleman'. They prove this every day.

The Tactical Air Command Center is the nucleus for air operations throughout the Al Anbar province. The TACC, as it is commonly referred, is where air combat operations originate and are executed by squadron's of the forward deployed 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing.

A small team of Marines provides constant security for the TACC. They secure all entry control points and provide constant surveillance to prevent any unauthorized visitors into this vital area that

maintains a pulse on the enemy activity in this western region of Iraq.

During times of conflict and when commanders deploy, the bandsmen rally together, put down their instruments, and act as the security element for their headquarters; in this case, for the forward deployed 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing.

Growing up in Virginia Beach, Va., Montoya graduated from Green Run High School and for the past 17 years he's marched on many parade fields and played hundreds of concerts. Now a gunnery sergeant, he's left his role as drum major and claims the responsibilities of the TACC security guard commander.

"Very few civilians as well as Marines know that [Marine bands] are formed as rifle platoons," said Montoya. "[Even stateside] we have machine guns attached to us, and everyone is a rifleman. The switch from our garrison role to our combat role was like preparing for a different type of performance."

According to the gunny, he knew the time would arrive when he would be afforded the opportunity and privilege to serve his country off the marching field.

"When I was a lance corporal in 1990, I literally begged to deploy to Desert Storm," he said. "Unfortunately it wasn't in the cards. I wasn't going to let this one go by so I jumped at the opportunity to serve here."

Rising to the billet of drum major isn't an easy task for band Marines. Hard work, tenacity, and discipline are what drives this Marine to success. Similar to performance preparations back home, which, according to Montoya, require training, rehearsal and execution, this "gig" has been no easy feat, but he and his Marines have met the challenge and transitioned to their role as a security platoon.

"In the band, the drum major is customarily the most military of all the command billets," said Montoya. "He is the one who

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*Gunnery Sgt. Shannon Arledge*

Gunnery Sgt. Michael R. Montoya, security guard commander, and Virginia Beach, Va., native, is in charge of security for the Tactical Air Command Center of the forward deployed 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (FWD). Montoya is also the drum major for the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing Band, in Cherry Point, N.C.

# Out of retirement, into the fight

**Sgt. Stephen D'Alessio**  
*2nd Marine Division*

CAMP BLUE DIAMOND, Iraq -- Whoever said 'An old dog can't learn new tricks' never met Maj. James Charette, who deployed here with the 2nd Marine Division after coming out of retirement.

Charette, a Goshen, N.Y., native, and liaison officer for the Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned, is the Division's link to data concerning lessons in war fighting within the Division. He mobilized for duty after nearly seven years away and found that the Corps is an ever-evolving institution.

At age 50, Charette doesn't let the '20 somethings' slow him down. Since he's been back, he's participated in the Corps' new Marine Corps Martial Arts Program and earned a tan belt. It's brought back some youthfulness in him, but he's also found a few other changes that made him feel outdated.

"Now, the Marine Corps has a strong reliance on the Internet and e-mails to pass information," said Charette. "I guess it's just showing my age."

Charette works back home in the New York State courts system as a senior court clerk for Orange County. There, he processes and reviews official paperwork and answers questions, without giving legal advice, for customers who come in to file divorce and other legal proceedings.

"I was sitting at home one day looking at Marine Online when I saw this small advertisement for retired Marines to volunteer for mobilization," said Charette. "So, I put my name in the hat."

Charette retired back in 1998 after devoting about 10 years of active duty and another 10 to the Reserve Forces. Almost a year later, on April 1, he received a phone call from a staff sergeant.

"I thought it was an April fool's joke or that the Marine Corps Association wanted to sell me something," said Charette. "But when I looked at my caller I.D. and I saw that it came from (Marine Corps Base) Quantico. I knew it was time."

Many of his friends and colleagues thought he was crazy for returning to the Corps after retirement, according to Charette, who dismissed them and went to his closet for his uniforms.

"You have to look at the practical reality of it," said Charette, matter-of-factly. "The Corps said they could use me, so it was tough to sit on the sidelines. It may sound corny, but it comes down to who you are, not what you do."

The Corps had a billet for him to fill, but it wasn't exactly what he was looking for. They sent him to his first assignment at the F.B.I. laboratory, in the Terrorist Explosives Device Analytical Center. There, he examined the devices that Explosive Ordnance Disposal personnel recovered from Iraq.

It was a fitting job for a major with a background as a combat engineer, but he wanted to be where the action was.

"I didn't want to sit in Quantico for a year," said Charette. "I asked to go to a forward unit and 30 days later I ended up here."

Now, Charette is working for the Division's Commanding General, Maj. Gen. Richard A. Huck, who was a platoon commander as a captain in his Basic School class. He finds it funny that he ended up working for one of the Marines that was his instructor back in 1977.

"The Corps has changed a little, but the Marines haven't," said Charette. "Some of the fine points have changed, but the thought process is still the same -- probably since WWII. But the bottom line is that I just like putting on my uniform again."



*Sgt. Stephen D'Alessio*

Major James Charette, a Goshen, N.Y. native and liaison officer for the Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned, is the link to data concerning lessons learned in war fighting within the 2nd Marine Division. He remobilized for duty after nearly seven years away and found that the Corps is an ever-evolving institution.

# Sand Shark mechanics keep engines running

## Cpl. C. Alex Herron

2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (FWD)

AL TAQADDUM, Iraq -- From providing rescue and firefighting to fuel delivery services, the Sand Sharks of Marine Wing Support Squadron 371, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (FWD), have multiple tasks while deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. One of the most important ones is vehicle maintenance.

Without the efforts of the motor transportation maintenance platoon many vehicles would sit unusable for months, unable to support the various missions here.

"Every mission out here requires vehicles," said Lance Cpl. Joshua Deblasis, a mechanic and Cleveland native. "We contribute to every operation by fixing vehicles for anyone on base, keeping everyone combat ready."

The mechanics and welders in the platoon work with a common purpose, to repair Sand Shark vehicles and help any other unit that needs assistance.

"All of our Marines are working together to accomplish our job," said Sgt. Ramon Zuniga, a maintenance platoon section chief and Dallas native. "We have guys working on equipment they have never repaired before."

The teamwork is really evident when the younger Marines are able to share their knowledge of the newest techniques and procedures.

"We have had a few instances where we had something break, that one of our junior Marines who joined the unit a month before deploying would show us more senior guys how to fix it without any problems," Zuniga said. "They are a great asset and have the most current knowledge in our job field, which changes almost annually."

One challenge the Sand Shark mechanics face is fixing vehicles for last minute

tasks or that are essential to the success of the airfield.

"When one of the fire trucks breaks down we have to immediately stop what we are working on and get that truck up and running," said Lance Cpl. Rusty Young, a motor transportation mechanic and Redding, Calif., native. "They have to keep a certain number of trucks operational or the airfield has to close."

"There have been a few instances when a vehicle comes in and they need it for a convoy the next day, so we have to work through the night to get that vehicle ready for action," said Zuniga. "It's part of the job, we do it because these vehicles are needed to accomplish the mission."

When the Sand Sharks arrived in February, they inherited quite a few vehicles that needed repair. Since their very first day, the Sand Shark's maintenance platoon has been operating at full speed,

working to keep the vehicles in the fight.

"Since day one our guys have been doing a good job. That day we fixed five vehicles and they have just been constantly turning out vehicles at a steady pace." Zuniga said. "We get vehicles out of here in three days or less and have been down to one truck in our lot a couple of times."

"It is nice to see our hard work makes a difference," Young said. "With the trucks out of our shop that means the operators can accomplish their mission. From any flightline operation to convoy security, we play a hand in all aspects of the fight."

While the MWSS-371 maintenance platoon continues to repair vehicles and assist other units, the forward deployed 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing and other units here continue to roll strong in the fight for a bright and free Iraq.



Cpl. C. Alex Herron

Lance Cpl. Rusty Young, a mechanic with Marine Wing Support Squadron 371, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (FWD), and Redding, Calif., native, repairs a universal joint on a rear drive shaft on a self-loading trailer here. The maintenance platoon is made up of welders and mechanics who work together to repair vehicles.



**There are no  
admin movements.**

**All movements are  
Combat Ops.**



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IEDs KILL

## Caught in the Spotlight

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq -- After his family moved from Vietnam to the United States in the mid-90s, a Combat Logistics Battalion 8 Marine found himself in a new environment and engulfed in a culture unfamiliar to his own.

Now Cpl. Khanh Pham, 23, combat engineer, CLB-8, 2nd Force Service Support Group (FWD), finds himself in a new environment yet again, while serving his adopted country in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Born in Saigon, Vietnam, now known as Ho Chi Minh City, Pham's family moved to the United States when he was 13 years old to start a new life.

"It was good in Vietnam, but it was more restricted over there than the [United States]," Pham said. "It was hard to get a job and there is no free education. My dad wanted us to be able to get a good education so we decided to move to the [United States]."

Because Pham's father served as a captain in the South Vietnamese Army during the Vietnam War, his family was allowed passage to the United States through a program established for veterans who were allies to America during the war.

"We had to pay for the ticket, but we were allowed to come legally," said Pham. "We could have come a long time before we did because they gave people the opportunity based on their area code, but my father wasn't ready to go then."

Upon arriving to the United States the family moved to Portland, Ore., where Pham would later meet with a recruiter and join the Marine Corps.

Pham graduated from Franklin High School in 2000 and went on to attend Portland State University, while also working jobs in construction to make some money on the side.

After more than a year and a half at the university Pham decided he wasn't focused enough to complete his school work and decided to look at other options for the time being.

"I joined the Marine Corps because I messed up in school and I wanted to do something different for a little while," said Pham, the youngest of six children. "At first my parents didn't want me to join, but I eventually talked them into it. I told them my situation in school and told them I wanted to take a break from it."

Two years and four months later, Pham is now stationed at Camp Fallujah, Iraq, building firm bases and entry control points, among other things tasked by his battalion.

Recently, Pham was attached to Iraqi Interdiction Force Platoon, Echo Company, 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion, 2nd Marine Division, where he will remain until the end of his seven-month deployment.

With IIF Platoon, Pham conducts improvised explosive device, mine and weapon cache sweeps during combat operations in 3rd Recon's area of operation.

"Our unit usually sends twelve of our Marines to support Recon," he said. "I volunteered to go because I wanted to get out and do something different. I like going out with them."

When Pham gets out of the Corps, he plans on going back to college at Portland State University.



Cpl. Khanh Pham

# Man's best friend helps battle terrorism

**Cpl. Mike Escobar**  
*2nd Marine Division*

FALLUJAH, Iraq -- Nick is a smart, cute, playful and affectionate five-year-old German Shepherd, who likes to take long walks, bite rubber balls and chew on fluffy pillows.

That's who he is on his off-time, anyhow.

When this explosives-detecting canine is on the job, however, he would just as soon sniff out a roadside bomb as he would maul the terrorist who placed it there.

Nick is the weapon of choice for Marine K-9 handlers like Cpl. Chris Mann, who arrived here in mid-March. The 23-year-old Bartlett, Tenn., native and his dog accompany 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, personnel on numerous raids and combat patrols throughout Fallujah and the surrounding areas. Together, they search the streets and houses for hidden weapons and improvised explosive devices.

"On a patrol, we usually take point (lead man position), that way the dog can clear the road for IEDs," said Mann, a 2000 Bartlett High School graduate.

"These dogs can detect all types of explosives and rounds of ammunition. On raids, we go inside and clear the house, and then the combat engineers sweep through again with their metal detectors. It's a lot quicker to use the dogs than to have the (infantry) Marines go through and search every part of the house."

The K-9 handlers' latest effort to deter terrorist activity, Operation Hard Knock, took place here July 7. During this mission, the battalion's infantrymen blocked off entire neighborhoods, while other Marines and Iraqi soldiers swept through each house inside the sector. Alongside them were Mann and Nick, rapidly moving through each residence to sniff out any possible threats.

"We were there to find weapons caches, but also to act as a deterrent to insurgents," Mann said, explaining how terrorists are less likely to attack troops while the dogs are with them because many fear canines. "We searched inside and outside the homes, and on the ground for buried explosives. We got a couple of hits."

After the 10-hour-long mission, the K-9 handlers had assisted their infantry counterparts in finding a shotgun shell, several magazines of ammunition and an AK-47 assault rifle.

Hard Knock, however, was only one mission in a string of counter-insurgency operations K-9 handlers like Mann have accomplished during their time in Iraq.

"We've done several combat patrols and raids, but we've mostly been working at the ECPs," Mann stated, referring to how the dogs assist forces in searching vehicles for contraband at vehicle and personnel entry control points throughout the city.

"We also did the push into Saqlawiyah back in April," he added. The K-9 Marines assisted U.S. and Iraqi forces to establish a base of operations in this township outside Fallujah, a place to which many insurgents fled after last year's offensive.

These missions keep the Marines constantly busy, both while conducting the operation, and during their rest time. All troops are charged with watching theirs and their buddies' backs on patrol, but the K-9 Marines' job entails extra responsibilities. Mann and his fel-

low handlers must also look to the welfare of their furry friends while keeping an eye out for enemy activity.

"Hard Knock was definitely the longest we've worked our dogs," Mann said. "Usually, they only go for about an hour straight, but that day, they were out for almost 11. Dogs can't sweat; they just pant. That's why we're always giving them water to drink and pouring it on their bellies to keep them cool. I must've gone through about seven CamelBaks (approximately ten liters of water) that day."

Even after completing their missions, the K-9 handlers' jobs have just begun.

"We have to take care of our dogs by bathing and feeding them, along with keeping them hydrated," Mann stated. "We're the duty experts on dogs out here, so we brief colonels and commanders on what we can and can't do."

To learn how to train and properly care for these dogs in challenging climates such as these, the handlers attend a joint-service, 13-week K-9 handler training course aboard Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, after their basic military police schooling.

There, they train their dogs on explosives and narcotics detection, to attack on command, and how to conduct building searches.

Upon graduating, the Marines and their canine companions are ready to hit the Fleet Marine Force, where their skills get put to the test in combat. Many, like Mann, end up in Iraq's deserts and cities, where their dogs' keen noses and senses are put to good use sniffing out insurgents.

First Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment's K-9 handlers will continue assisting the infantry and ISF personnel rid the troubled city of a persistent insurgency.

"I'm looking forward to doing more operations," Mann said. "That's what I came out here for, to go out with the grunts and help secure this country."



*Cpl. Mike Escobar*

Cpl. Chris Mann, a K-9 handler in direct support of 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, helps his German shepherd, Nick, stay hydrated here July 7 during Operation Hard Knock.

# Unit creates MCI course library in Iraq

**Cpl. Ruben D. Maestre**

*II Marine Expeditionary Force (FWD)*

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq -- Ask Marines serving here and many will say that having timely access to needed Marine Corps Institute courses is one of the career frustrations they face while serving in Iraq. It usually takes several months before MCI courses are received through the mail and the wait is longer for Marines on temporary orders to units conducting operations here.

One unit based here has decided to tackle this problem head on. The Marines assigned to Force Protection Company, II Marine Expeditionary Force, Headquarters Group, II MEF (FWD), have created an MCI Library that has dramatically shortened the length of time needed to study, test and post completed courses online.

"More than 75 MCI courses have been completed since the start of this library July 15," said 1st Sgt. Michael Sanderson, of Corona, Calif., and first sergeant for Force Protection Company. "The testing, grading and processing of your completed MCIs [online] is almost instantaneous."

The library at Force Protection Company consists of more than 180 MCI courses covering several subjects sent by the Marine Corps Institute for the purpose of allowing Marines to check out a course book after being enrolled in an "active status" on the MCI online Web site. The student will then study over the book and come back for testing under the guidance of a proctor. Answers to the test are processed online and test results are posted to the enrolled account in as little as 24 hours.

Many are heartened by the chance of not having to wait for MCIs to arrive by mail and being able to see their completed results in a dramatically shorter amount of time.

"I had some MCIs that were lost in the mail," said Lance Cpl. Joe Solis, of Plainview, Texas and an anti-tank gunner assigned

to Force Protection. "The process of using the MCI library has allowed me to finish six MCIs in a matter of weeks versus that many in a year."

Course books available at the library include the basic courses covering Marine Corps Leadership, Personal Finance, Terrorism Awareness and other courses commonly studied by lance corporals. A limited amount of books covering courses for sergeants and certain field-specific MCIs are also available.

The library has caught the attention of many junior enlisted members of the Corps wanting to attain education points needed for enhancing their cutting scores, being competitive in their military occupational specialty and achieving promotion to the next rank.

"It's like a revolving door," said Staff Sgt. Daniel DeVine, of Amarillo, Texas, a platoon guide with Force Protection and a proctor for the library. "As soon as someone has read the MCI and done the test, another Marine comes in ready to take the test."

Having the courses in the library to check

out speeds up the overall process.

"The library increased the turnaround rate from before," said Sgt. Arturo Morales, of Alamogordo, N.M., and a mortarman with Force Protection. "A lot of younger Marines are more motivated to do their MCIs now, knowing they can get their test results within 24 hours."

The prospect of improving the educational levels and strengthening the careers of younger members in the service is a major priority in maintaining the readiness of II MEF (FWD) conducting operations in Iraq.

"My ultimate goal is to provide a user friendly process for my young hard-charging, dedicated, and motivated Marines to get their MCIs done for the next higher grade, and so that they could still remain competitive amongst their MOS peer group even when deployed," said Sanderson. "This is going to be a reusable resource for Marines to utilize, not to mention that this is a cost savings for the Marine Corps."



*Cpl. Ruben D. Maestre*

Lance Corporal Joe Solis, of Plainview, Texas, and Lance Cpl. Jonathan Johnson, of Amarillo, Texas, search for their completed Marine Corps Institute courses posted online here July 27. Solis and Johnson, both anti-tank gunners assigned to Force Protection Company, II Marine Expeditionary Force, Headquarters Group, II MEF (FWD), have completed at least six MCIs each since the unit opened up an MCI library more than two weeks ago.

## CMC, from Page 1

courtyard. Later, the commandant and the sergeant major stopped by Camp Ripper to spend time with service members from Regimental Combat Team 2.

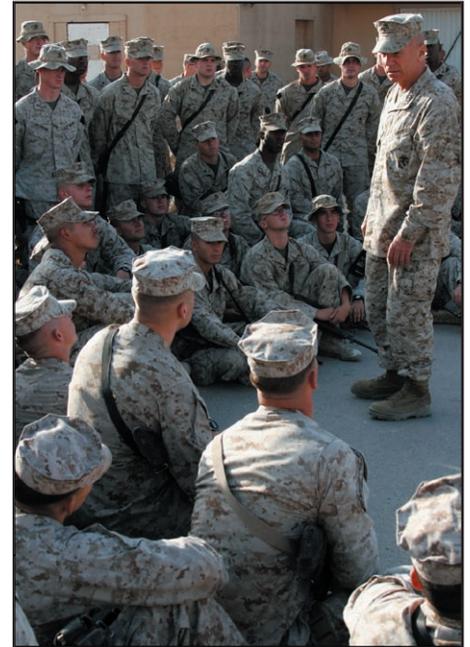
Some of the things Hagee talked about with representatives of the different units were the recent updates to his guidance, which lays out a vision for the 21st century Marine Corps. He also presented some of the Marines and Sailors with challenge coins for their outstanding contributions in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

“There are many great young Marines and Sailors here who are all very brave and this visit gives me an opportunity to thank them for the job they’re doing and

the sacrifices they and their families are making,” said Hagee.

After visiting Al Asad for the better half of the day, Hagee and his party continued traveling throughout the II Marine Expeditionary Force’s area of responsibility. The commandant and his staff were scheduled to visit other Marines and Sailors in Iraq who are working tirelessly to establish a brighter future here.

General Michael W. Hagee, commandant of the Marine Corps, addresses Marines and Sailors with Provisional Security Battalion and Marine Wing Support Squadron 271, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (FWD), during a visit to Al Asad July 25.



Sgt. Juan Vara

## Drum, from Page 3

maintains discipline and is responsible for the security of the band facility and is considered the guard commander for the band. The job of TACC security guard commander requires a Marine with similar attributes.”

Montoya said he started preparing for drum major billets at the rank of corporal when he was assigned to the 4th Marine Aircraft Wing Band, in New Orleans. But, he recalls, the bulk of his apprenticeship and development came in 1995 when he was assigned to the Marine Corps Logistics Base Band, Albany, Ga. Since then he’s maintained the momentum, and his leadership ability took notice.

In 2001 Montoya was about to graduate advanced training at the School of Music when he was approached by the staff. His performance during the course earned him a spot as an instructor; he was selected to remain at the school as the Drum Major Instructor and the Field Drill Instructor.

“In these positions I taught future drum majors, both Marine and Navy, how to lead a band,” said Montoya. “I also taught individual musicians drill movements and instrument handling. I also served as the

platoon sergeant for 120 plus Marines.”

The Tactical Air Command Center serves as a vital element in the success of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The Aviation Combat Element reacts to the decisions made here and the security element is crucial to the mission. It provides the Marine air wing commander and his staff, the ability to take the fight to the insurgents daily.

Montoya starts his day around 4:30 a.m. and remains on duty until early evening. However, he remains on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Almost six months into this deployment he shows no sign of fatigue. He makes rounds to each post daily and is constantly reviewing reports to remain vigilant against any possible threats.

“It is a privilege to serve actively in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and be a part, albeit a small one, of the fight,” he said.

“Gunnery Sergeant Montoya is a role model for all Marines,” said Sgt. Kristine A. Streng, sergeant of the guard, and Powhatan, Va., native. “He accepts nothing but the best from those in his charge, either in the rear during drill or here in Al Asad for TACC security. He is able to balance mis-

sion accomplishment and troop welfare, maintaining morale despite our rigorous work schedule.”

Although his ability to lead on the parade deck has contributed to his knack to guide Marines here, the Virginia Beach native said that it isn’t his talents as a drum major that prepared him for this assignment.

“It is the leadership skills learned through the years of being a Marine that prepared me,” he said. “It is the leadership toolbox that all [Marine leaders] possess. I just used the basic toolbox that the Marine Corps has given me to keep the machine running. I use the same toolbox as the drum major and as the guard commander. I just pick and choose which tools to use.”

Montoya has made the transition from drum major to security guard commander with relative ease, trading his mace for a weapon, he leads his guard force and ensures disciplined security. The guard commander and his Marines understand the role they play here, and serve as the commander’s security force of choice as the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (Forward) continues their stride to forge a brighter future for the people of Iraq.