

Regional Command Southwest

Round-up

Weekly PAQ Report

----- October 30, 2012 -----



NEWS

Joint academy closes, Afghans take over

Story and photos by Cpl. Timothy Lenzo

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan – Coalition and Afghan forces continue to make strides toward an independent Afghanistan with the Joint Sustainment Academy Southwest shutting down operations. Afghan National Security Forces developed the capability and capacity to assume the responsibility of the advanced training courses JSAS once offered. Afghans began their first reception, staging, onward movement and integration course a couple weeks ago. The course, taught by Afghan instructors to ANSF students, showcases the ANSF's ability to train and sustain their own advanced training. "The (RSOI) course is really great," said ANA Sgt. Zakraulla, a student enrolled in the Afghan RSOI courses. "This is a step in the right direction for our country." The academy provided more than basic training for Afghan forces. Each course focused on sustainment and professional development of ANSF. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



Magnificent Seventh takes over for the Fighting Sixth

Story and photos by Cpl. Ed Galo



CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan – Marines and sailors aboard Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan gathered for a relief in place/transfer of authority ceremony, Oct. 25. After 10 months of service, Regimental Combat Team 6 will be returning home to Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, N.C., while Regimental Combat Team 7 takes over their area of operations in southwest Afghanistan. RCT-6 has been deployed to northern Helmand province and Nimruz province since December of 2011. In the July of 2012 they took over all of southern Helmand as well from RCT-5. RCT-7 is expected to stay for a year with all of Helmand province and Nimruz province as their area of operation. "I would like to tell you how proud I am of the Marines of RCT-6," said Col. John Shafer, commanding officer, RCT-6. "Every RCT headquarters that's deployed in support of (Operation Enduring Freedom) since the beginning of the surge has had daunting challenges. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

Secretary Mabus visits Marines, sailors in Helmand

Story and photos by Sgt. John Jackson

FORWARD OPERATING BASE GERONIMO, Afghanistan – Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus spent time visiting with Marines and sailors of 3rd Battalion, 8th Marines, Regimental Combat Team 7, at Forward Operating Base Geronimo, Oct. 28. This is the Secretary's 10th visit to Afghanistan and ninth to Helmand province since he assumed his position as the 75th Secretary of the Navy during May 2009. Secretary Mabus said he has seen drastic changes in the security of Afghanistan's most hostile province throughout the past three years. "The biggest change is just how good a job the Marines have done in this area in terms of security, in terms of making the population secure, and in terms of just the great work they have done," Secretary Mabus said. In addition to speaking with Marines and sailors, the secretary had an opportunity to see firsthand expeditionary energy efficient equipment Marines are currently using throughout the battlespace. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



Deployed runners push bodies, complete marathon overseas

Story and photos by Cpl. Timothy Lenzo



CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan – Before the sunrise Sunday, participants of the Marine Corps Marathon Forward were preparing for the challenge that lay ahead. More than 250 servicemembers from different countries, civilian contractors, and one linguist, ran the 26.2 miles throughout Camp Leatherneck and Camp Bastion. It was a unique experience for the participants, who ran the marathon while deployed to a combat zone. "Running this marathon out here is a totally different environment," said Master Sgt. Edwin Holloway, food service chief, Regional Command (Southwest), and the marathon's organizer. "It definitely means a lot to the participants to run while deployed." The Marine Corps Marathon Forward started during 2006 at Al Asad, Iraq, to give deployed servicemembers the chance to participate. It works in conjunction with the Marine Corps Marathon held the same day in Washington, D.C. Marathon runners typically train for months in preparation for a race. The servicemembers here worked around their schedule, making sure their training did not interfere with their mission. "It's tough to find time to run one or two hours when you work 12-hour days," said Holloway, from Spokane, Wash. "We try to find two or three hours for the long runs on the weekends." [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

Muslim servicemembers celebrate Eid al-Adha at Camp Leatherneck

Story and photos by Cpl. Timothy Lenzo

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan – Muslims from multiple countries gathered at the Camp Leatherneck Town Hall in celebration of Eid al-Adha, Oct. 26. Eid al-Adha, the second of the Eid holidays, is celebrated by Muslims worldwide. It marks the end of the Hajj for Muslims and remembers the obedience of the prophet Abraham. The Hajj, which is one of the five pillars of Islam, is a mandatory rite of worship every Muslim must fulfill. If they are physically and financially able, they must make the pilgrimage to Mecca, the Muslim holy city, once in their life. "This shows obedience for our God and our prophet Mohammad," said Jordanian Army 2nd Lt. Nabeel Khatabeh, the Imam for the service. "It's about closeness with our God." Imam is an Islamic leadership position, similar in responsibilities to a chaplain. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



Marine's keen attention to detail saves lives

Story and photos by Cpl. Anthony Ward Jr.



CAMP BASTION, Afghanistan - Those familiar with how wars are fought understand the importance of air superiority; without control of the skies, everything becomes more challenging. Catching the minor issues before they become serious problems is a must because maintaining the machines that soar through the air is an important part of combat. That is something Sgt. Vernon Kiester does well, having recently discovered a problem that could have caused some serious damage to one of his squadron's aircraft. "I was climbing up on top of the UH-1Y Huey to inspect it as there was another Huey about two helos down taxiing by," said Kiester, a helicopter mechanic with Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 469. "At the end of the blade there is

a shear restraint, all four blades have one, it allows the blade to pivot, and it takes a good portion of the flexing. I noticed the whole shear restraint was bouncing up and down." [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

VIGNETTES

Marathon means more than a race, honors fallen heroes

Story and photos by Cpl. Timothy Lenzo

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan – A marathon tests runners' physical and mental toughness. The 26.2 miles push even the most resolved individuals' focus when faced with the daunting task. Runners have to find their motivation and remember why they are putting their bodies through the pain. Some participants run for fun, a check off their bucket list, competition or simply the challenge. Then there are those running for something that transcends the individual runner. They run for something more than themselves. Driven with each step he took and wearing his dark blue Team Kelly T-shirt, Maj. Speros Koumparakis, detachment commander, 9th Communication Battalion, Regional Command (Southwest), finished the Marine Corps Marathon Forward for his fallen friends. He ran on behalf of Team Kelly. Kathleen Kelly, the sister of 1st Lt. Robert M. Kelly, organized the team. [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



Philly native fulfills dream of becoming Marine, now trains Afghans on deployment

Story and photos by Sgt. James Mercure



FORWARD OPERATING BASE SABIT QADAM, Afghanistan – Decisions at the age of 3 usually consist of which color crayon to use. For one Marine, it was a point where he made the biggest decision of his life. For Cpl. John Anthony Cleaver, becoming a Marine was something he's wanted to do since he started to talk, walk and wear his uncle's Marine boonie cover. Seventeen years later serving at a forward operating base in what used to be the most dangerous place in Afghanistan, Cleaver works directly with his Afghan National Army counterparts as an advisor, teaching them everything from patrolling tactics to how to guard their base. "We spend a lot of time with the ANA," Cleaver said. "We train the trainers so to speak. We show their leadership how to do things the right way, so when they go back to their units, they can teach their soldiers." [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

Tibet native earns citizenship as Marine, serves in Afghanistan

Story and photos by Sgt. James Mercure

FORWARD OPERATING BASE SABIT QADAM, Afghanistan – When an 8-year-old Tibetan boy fled his home country with his family for religious and cultural freedom, becoming a United States Marine was the last thing on his mind. For Lance Cpl. Tashi Dhondup, a supply warehouseman with 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines, Regimental Combat Team 6, leaving his home of Lhasa, Tibet, and moving to northern India to practice his religion and learn about his culture was the first step on his journey of becoming a U.S. citizen.

“When I was 8, my family ran away from Tibet because there is no freedom of religion, no freedom to learn our own language,” Dhondup said. “We moved to India so we could study our own language and learn our culture.” [\(Read the STORY\)](#)



From Bronx to Sandbox: New York native keeps forward operating base running in Afghanistan

Story and photos by Sgt. James Mercure



FORWARD OPERATING BASE SABIT QADAM, Afghanistan – Volunteering to deploy to what has been one of the most volatile areas in Afghanistan may come as a tough decision for some, but for Lance Cpl. Marbelyn Cepeda, the decision was easy. Cepeda, from 6th Communications Battalion based out of Brooklyn, New York, has served for more than three years at the reserve unit as a generator operator. Now, she is serving in Sangin, Afghanistan, as part of Combat Logistics Battalion 2, providing general support to 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines, Regimental Combat Team 6. Not only is Cepeda responsible for making sure generators at the forward operating base are up and running correctly, she has taken on the task of helping the other CLB-2 Marines on the FOB by managing and assisting the laundry facility and utilities section. “It’s a different experience for me,”

Cepeda said. “I volunteered for this, for the life experience. Down the line, I’m going to be able to say that I came out to a war zone and did my part.” Growing up in the Bronx, Cepeda said she misses something about her city that may seem strange to those not from a metropolitan area. “I miss the crowds,” Cepeda said. “It’s not something I thought I would miss out here, but being somewhere that’s alive and upbeat is a complete shift from being out here.” [\(Read the STORY\)](#)

VIDEOS

Secretary of the Navy visits Marines, sailors in Helmand province

Video by Sgt. John Jackson

Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus visited Marines and sailors of 3rd Battalion, 8th Marines at Forward Operating Base Geronimo in Helmand province, Afghanistan, Oct. 28. Soundbites by Secretary Mabus. [\(Watch the VIDEO\)](#)



RCT-6 Transfers Authority in Helmand

Video by Sgt. John Jackson



Regimental Combat Team 6 transferred authority to Regimental Combat Team 7 during a ceremony at Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, October 25. Soundbites from Col. John Shafer, RCT-6 commander, and Col. Austin Reforth, RCT-7 commander. [\(Watch the VIDEO\)](#)

HMLA-469 AIF

Video by Cpl. Gregory Moore

U.S. Marines with the air interdiction force (AIF) assigned to Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron (HMLA) 469, Marine Aircraft Group 39, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing (Forward), conduct Operation Aero Hunter with other Regional Command (Southwest) elements in Helmand province, Afghanistan, Oct. 24, 2012. AIF was used as a quick reaction force in support of counter-insurgency operations in southern Helmand. [\(Watch the VIDEO\)](#)



Marines Train for Marine Corps Marathon Forward

Video by Sgt. John Jackson



Marines currently deployed to Helmand province, Afghanistan, train for the upcoming Marine Corps Marathon Forward. Despite the dust, wind, heat, rocks, sand and other obstacle, Marines work hard to prepare themselves for the 26.2 mile course. [\(Watch the VIDEO\)](#)

HMLA-469 Over Helmand

Video by Sgt. Keonaona Paulo

U.S. Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Richard G. Deibler, UH-1Y Venom door gunner and Lance Cpl. Joshua S. Martinez, UH-1Y Venom crew chief with Marine Light Helicopter Squadron (HMLA) 469, Marine Aircraft Group 38, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing (Forward), conducts operations over Helmand province, Afghanistan, Oct. 17, 2012. HMLA-469 provided air support for counter-insurgency operations in Helmand. [\(Watch the VIDEO\)](#)



Col. John Shafer

Video by Sgt. John Jackson



Marine Corps Col. John Shafer, commander of Regimental Combat Team 6, talks to a Pentagon Channel reporter about operations in Afghanistan. [\(Watch the VIDEO\)](#)

Marketed/Republished Combat Correspondent Product

Lance Cpl. Travis Breese, talks to a WTKF-FM reporter about driving armored vehicles as a motor T operator, growing up in Florida, joining the Marine Corps and his goal to become a U.S. Marshall.

Six Nations One Goal - Better NCO republished in the Northern Star

Commander: Afghan Forces Gaining Capability, Respect

Q&A: The top enlisted Marine in Afghanistan

Tibet Native Earns Citizenship, Serves in Afghanistan republished in North Shore Journal

See photos of the Marine Corps Marathon Forward