

Tanks prepare for first mission in Afghanistan



Photo by Cpl. Daniel Blatter

Marines with Delta Company, 1st Tank Battalion, 1st Marine Division (Forward), fires the main cannon of an M1A1 Abrams tank during a range at Camp Leatherneck, Jan. 13, 2011. The Marines fired multiple rounds to align their sights and prepare their tanks for upcoming missions.

Story by Cpl. Ned Johnson

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan – Early versions of the tank shaped the battlefields of World War I, and more sophisticated versions helped quickly end the Gulf War for the U.S. Now tanks have landed in Afghanistan to help bring security to Helmand province.

Marines with Delta Company, 1st Tank Battalion, 1st Marine Division (Forward), began preparing for upcoming missions by sighting-in the main cannon and machine guns on their M1A1 Abrams tanks during a firing range exercise at Camp Leatherneck, Jan. 13.

The tanks, which were flown here from Kuwait, are not the vehicles the Marines have trained with and some preparation must be done before they are ready for combat, said Capt. Daniel Hughes, commanding officer of Delta Co., 1st Tanks.

“The first order of business is to bore sight and screen your tank,” Hughes added. “Screening ensures that when you fire the main cannon on your tank, you hit the exact target you want to hit.”

Even though these Marines have only been in Afghanistan about a week, everything seems to be going well.

While the Marines bore sight several times a year, the combat environment makes every adjustment of the main gun just that much more important.

“They require a tremendous amount of maintenance,” Hughes said. “If you go on a four or five-hour patrol to support the men on the ground, you will have four or five hours of maintenance when you get back just to keep the tanks in the fight.”

Once the preparation is complete and maintenance done, the tankers say they will be ready for their upcoming missions.

“We hope to support the infantryman on the ground and help them complete their mission,” said Hughes, a 38-year-old native of Olympia, Wash. “We also hope to intimidate the enemy and provide superior and accurate firepower to kill the enemy, and only the enemy.”

The tanks have another advantage in this fight besides intimidation and firepower. Hughes said the tracks and armor allow an M1A1 Abrams tank to withstand an impro-

NCL, 5th Marines unite for Operation Valentine



Maj. Gen. Michael R. Regner, 1st Marine Division commanding general, speaks with young women from the non-profit National Charity League during the 4th Annual Operation Valentine at Camp San Mateo, Jan. 9. A total of 1,100 mothers and daughters from the NCL filled 2,400 care packages and wrote Valentine's Day cards for deployed Marines and sailors.

Story and photos by Cpl. Zachary Nola

MARINE CORPS BASE CAMP PENDLETON, Calif. – The 5th Marine Regiment hosted an estimated 1,100 mothers and

daughters from the non-profit National Charity League who made it their mission to ensure every deployed Marine or sailor receives a gift, when they prepared 2,400 care packages during the 4th Annual Operation Valentine at Camp San Mateo, Jan. 9.

Even in the golden age of the internet there are parts of Afghanistan that are so barren the World Wide Web is inaccessible to those Marines and sailors deployed there.

This unfortunate, but understandable dilemma makes mail call even more precious since a hand-written letter or self-made care package may help ease the stress, anxiety, boredom and uncertainty of being in a combat zone.

“Our goal is to show gratitude and support to all Marines and sailors serving our country,” said Pam Roy, chairperson for Operation Valentine 2011.

The packages, which will be sent to three deployed battalions from the 1st Marine Division, were filled with combat boot socks, sanitary wipes, hand sanitizer, foot powder,

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1/23 Marines train hard for Afghanistan deployment

Story by Cpl. Paul Torres

Marines of Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 23rd Marine Regiment, have been aboard Camp Pendleton since Oct. 1, 2010, for intermediate location training in preparation for an upcoming deployment in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

The Houston, Texas-based battalion is scheduled to deploy sometime in February.

1/23 Marines used interactive simulators to train on countering improvised explosive devices and insurgent ambushes.

They also conducted live-fire platoon attacks at Camp Pendleton's Range 600. The platoons each rushed steep hills in buddy pairs while firing live rounds and completing a mock mission to accomplish a company sized objective.

The reservists also made good use of the infantry immersion training while they prepared for an upcoming six month deployment to Afghanistan.

Pvt. Clayton Z. Craig, a rifleman with Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 23rd Marine Regiment, fires an AT-4 rocket, Jan. 14 at Camp Pendleton's Range 600. The training evolution took place during platoon attacks as part of the battalion's intermediate location training. The Houston-based infantry battalion is scheduled to deploy to Afghanistan next month.



Photo by Cpl. Lucas Vega



Photo by Cpl. Lucas Vega

Lance Cpl. Yilson Chong, a machine gunner with Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 23rd Marine Regiment, assumes the role of a .50 caliber machine gunner during mobile counter-improvised explosive device interactive training at Camp Pendleton, Calif., Jan. 10. Chong has previously deployed to Iraq. This will be his first deployment to Afghanistan.



Photo by Cpl. Lucas Vega

Sgt. Ashford Keena, a rifleman with Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 23rd Marine Regiment, yells to his squad that he is going to reload his M32 grenade launcher at Camp Pendleton's Range 600, Jan. 14. The training took place as part of the Houston-based infantry battalion's intermediate location pre-deployment training. The battalion is scheduled to deploy to Afghanistan in February.

Marines with Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 23rd Marine Regiment, prepare their weapons before stepping off to complete their platoon attacks training evolution at Camp Pendleton's Range 600, Jan. 14. The training took place as part of the Houston-based infantry battalion's intermediate location pre-deployment training. The battalion is currently scheduled to deploy to Afghanistan sometime in February.



Photo by Cpl. Lucas Vega

GIFT

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snacks and other highly coveted items.

This year, the NCL also took female Marines into consideration, and produced 100 special care packages for members of deployed female engagement teams.

While NCL members got special thanks from the 1st Marine Division commanding general, Maj. Gen. Michael R. Regner, and the commanding officer of the 5th Marine Regiment, Col. Willard Buhl, the day was centered on thanking deployed Marines and sailors, and giving the young women of the NCL a greater understanding about the sacrifices of American service members.

NCL member Yukie Meyers said letting the young women of the NCL, such as her daughter Kelsey, fill care packages with



Mothers and daughters from the non-profit National Charity League write Valentine's Day cards for deployed Marines and sailors during the 4th Annual Operation Valentine at Camp San Mateo, Jan. 9. A total of 1,100 mothers and daughters from the NCL created 2,400 care packages and wrote Valentine's Day cards for deployed Marines and sailors.

such simple items as sun screen gave them a better understanding about being thankful for what they have.

The event also gave the local communities' young women a prospective of the military which television and hearsay cannot,

added Meyers.

"They see it in the movies and that's not it," said Meyers. "This is the kind of event that makes it real for them."

Each package also received a personalized Valentine's Day card, written by NCL members, thank-

ing the package's recipient for his or her service.

While packages are not sent to a specific Marine or sailor, many NCL members were hoping their package reached a service member who does not often receive mail.

"I couldn't imagine being deployed and not hearing from someone," said Meghan Cutler, an 18-year-old NCL member from Coto de Caza, Calif. "It doesn't take much time to sit down and write a letter telling someone you are thankful for what they do for you, your peers and your country."

While NCL members were grateful of their hosts they were quick to point out their efforts were of self-sacrifice in recognition of those who risk sacrificing everything for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

TANKS

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vised explosive device better than any other vehicle in Afghanistan.

While tanks have never been in Afghanistan, neither have most of the Marines with Delta Co.

"It's definitely humbling to be the first tankers in Afghanistan," said Cpl. Todd Cross, a tank crewman with Delta Co., 1st Tanks. "We want to make a good name for ourselves and we want to leave a good name for the tanks who come after us as well."

"I am looking forward to the challenges and am definitely excited about what we are going to do," said Cross, a 23-year-old Elkridge, Md.

After the rounds were fired, the tanks' sights were properly aligned and ready for battle.

The Marines will continue firing rounds on ranges to sharpen their skills until they leave for their first mission in Helmand province.



Marines with Delta Company, 1st Tank Battalion, 1st Marine Division (Forward), work with a bore laser to find the center of the M1A1 Abrams tank gun's barrel during a battlefield zero range at Camp Leatherneck, Jan. 13, 2011. The Marines aligned their sights and fired the main gun during a range to prepare the tanks for upcoming missions.

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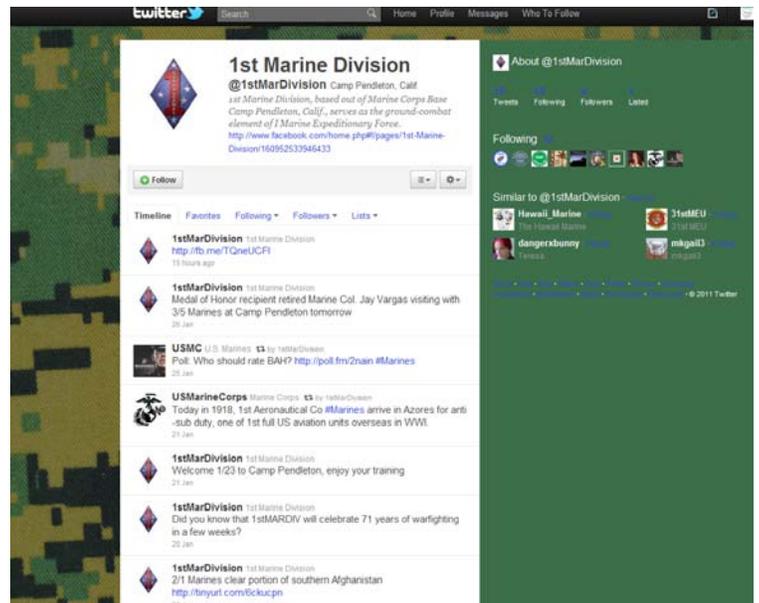
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