

3/5 Marine receives motorcycle from care package group



Corporal Clancy Cheek, an infantryman with Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, poses with volunteers from Operation Gratitude at Van Nuys National Guard Armory in Encino, Calif. June 5. The volunteers gathered and assembled approximately 5,000 care packages for service members deployed to the Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group and to see Cheek get his motorcycle.



Corporal Clancy Cheek, an infantryman with Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, gets comfortable on his new motorcycle at Van Nuys National Guard Armory in Encino, Calif., June 5. Cheek was given the keys to the motorcycle on Christmas Day, 2010, while deployed to Helmand province, Afghanistan.

Story and photos by Lance Cpl. Tyler Reiriz

An infantryman with Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment received a motorcycle from Operation Gratitude at Van Nuys National Guard Armory in Encino, Calif., June 5.

The keys to the Victory Vegas 8-ball motorcycle were included in Operation Gratitude's 600,000th care package. Cpl. Clancy Cheek was given the package while deployed to Sangin District, Helmand province, Afghanistan.

Carolyn Blashek, founder and president of Operation Gratitude, originally gave the milestone care package to Gen. James Amos, 35th commandant of the Marine Corps. Amos took the package with him as he visited Marines with 3/5 deployed in Afghanistan

during the holiday season.

The commandant gave Cheek the care package on Christmas Day in recognition of his outstanding service and his impressive record. The package contained the keys to the motorcycle and a note with information on how he would receive it when he got home.

The motorcycle was donated by Victory Motorcycles and features a special military salute emblem. It also has a special number 25 decal just below the seat, in honor of the 25 Marines from 3/5 who made the ultimate sacrifice during the deployment.

"It's truly a humbling honor to be a part of Operation Gratitude," said Robert Pandya, the external relations manager for Victory Motorcycles. "To know that one of our Marines is now a proud Victory motorcycle owner

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Division Marines participate in annual Mud Run

Story and photos by Lance Cpl. Tyler Reiriz

Marines of 1st Marine Division got dirty at the Armed Services YMCA World Famous Mud Run at Lake O'Neill on Camp Pendleton June 11.

Maj. Gen. Michael Regner, commanding general of 1st MarDiv, and seven teams made up of 1st MarDiv Marines, sailors and their family members ran the 10 kilometer obstacle course to help raise money for programs and services offered to military personnel and their families by the ASYMCA.

The mud run is more than a normal charity runs. It is filled with a series of muddy obstacles that make it truly stand out.

"It's a 10 kilometer course through lakes, rivers, and mud pits," said Regner. "A lot like what you would see at Officer Candidate School or at Parris Island through normal recruit training."

More than six thousand Marines, sailors and civilians ran the course either alone or as members of five-person teams.

"At the start of the race I was with them all," said Regner. "I told them that this was for honoring the service members who are forward deployed into combat and honoring their family members who are still here."

The teams from 1st MarDiv were

(MUDRUN, page 2)



Maj. Gen. Michael Regner, Commanding General of 1st Marine Division, and his wife, Mary Regner prepare to begin the World Famous Mud Run at Camp Pendleton, Calif on June 6. The Regners joined seven teams made up of Marines from 1stMarDiv and more than 6,000 other runners in 10-kilometer obstacle course to help raise money for programs and services offered to military personnel and their families.

BIKE

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thanks to Polaris Industries and Victory Motorcycles.”

The volunteers gathered in the armory to assemble more packages and see Cheek receive his new motorcycle.

“I can never repay you all for everything you do for all the armed forces,” Cheek said to the assembled volunteers. “If you’re ever having a hard day, just know that there is somebody on the other side of the world who opened your package and is thankful.”

The care packages assembled on Sunday will be distributed to service members deployed with the Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group.

Since Blashek started the organization in 2003, Operation Gratitude has sent more than 630,000 care packages to service members deployed around the world.

“I’m just honored that we have the opportunity to express our appreciation,” she said.



Corporal Clancy Cheek, an infantryman with Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, gets comfortable on his new motorcycle at Van Nuys National Guard Armory in Encino, Calif., June 5. Cheek was given the keys to the motorcycle on Christmas Day, 2010, while deployed to Helmand province, Afghanistan.



Sgt. Maj. Michael Kufchak and Barbara Kufchak carefully move down a muddy slope during the World Famous Mud Run at Camp Pendleton, Calif. on June 6. The Kufchaks joined commanders, sergeants major and families from seven teams representing 1st Marine Division in 10-kilometer charity obstacle course.

MUDRUN

(cont. from page 1)

there to do more than just have fun and raise money for charity.

“Families and Marines that train together are cohesive; they’re a better unit,” said Regner.

They had to work to get through the course as quickly as possible. The teams had to cross the finish line together for their times to count, teamwork was important on the obstacles.



Maj. Gen. Michael Regner, Mary Regner, and Sgt. Maj. Michael Kufchak jump over a five-foot wall during the World Famous Mud Run at Camp Pendleton, Calif. on June 6. Seven five-person teams from 1st Marine Division participated in the 10-kilometer race.

The Regners were there to lead by example, finishing together with the other mud-covered members of their team.

Though his team didn’t finish first, the Regners enjoyed the run.

“My wife and I never think we’re going to win an event, but we actually win just by being together,” he said. “It’s not about winning all the time, its about being together. We don’t do enough of that in the Marine Corps because we’re deployed a lot, so when you can work out and have a fun event with your family in a setting like this I highly recommend it.”



Participants in the World Famous Mud Run cross approximately 400 meters of a lake during at Camp Pendleton, Calif. on June 6. More than 6,000 participants ran the 10-kilometer obstacle course to raise money for charities and programs offered to military personnel and their families.

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11th Marines welcome new Sgt. Maj.

*Story and photos by
Lance Cpl. Tyler Reiriz*

The 11th Marine Regiment greeted their new senior enlisted advisor in a post and relief ceremony at Las Pulgas, June 10.

The retiring sergeant major, Michael Gonzales, relinquished his post to Sgt. Maj. Terry Jones.

Jones brings with him a wealth of experience. He has served in the Marine Corps since 1984, including tours in Operation Desert Shield and Operation Iraqi Freedom, time as a drill instructor at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego and a Naval officer candidate instructor in Pensacola, Fla. He recently returned from a deployment with 1st Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment attached to the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit. This is his third time serving with 11th Marines.

Col. Michael Frazier, commander of 11th Marines, said he is happy to welcome Jones back.

"We served together at 2nd Battalion, 11th Marines, so I know exactly the kind of leader-

ship and mentorship he brings," Frazier said. "He is a tremendous asset coming from 1/4 with his experience on the MEU. We are extremely glad to have Sgt. Maj. Jones back at 11th Marines."

Jones said he is looking forward to teaching the Marines and learning from them in return.

"Being assigned to 11th Marine Regiment again is an honor and a privilege," he said. "I look forward to a great tour here and I think we'll do well."

After the post and relief ceremony, Gonzales was presented with the Legion of Merit Medal for his service as the sergeant major of 11th Marines. Gonzales retired from the Marine Corps after more than 30 years of service.



Colonel Michael Frazier, commanding officer of 11th Marine Regiment presents Sgt. Maj. Terry Jones with the 11th Marines organizational non-commissioned officer sword at a post and relief ceremony held in Las Pulgas, Camp Pendleton, June 10. Jones relieved Sgt. Maj. Michael Gonzales from his post as 11th Marines senior enlisted advisor.

Frazier wished Gonzales the best of luck in his future beyond the Marine Corps.

"Sergeant Major Gonzales has been a tremendous sergeant major," he said. "I'm sad to see him go, but I'm also extremely proud of him. He has a great career."

Jones has previously served with Gonzales and also praised his service.

"His 31 years of service is obviously a testament to his commitment to being a Marine," Jones said. "I have some mighty big shoes to fill."

2/5 returns home from 31st MEU

*Story and photo by
Lance Cpl. Alfred Lopez*

Marines with Fox Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, returned home from a six-month deployment with the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, June 3.

Approximately 60 Marines and sailors returned home, during this wave, from the deployment. The unit's primary mission was to be a maritime readiness force with amphibious-raid capabilities on the 31st MEU.

"It feels very good to be home," said Sgt. Blake Brassfield, a platoon sergeant with Fox Co. 2/5. "It's been a really emotional deployment as far as it goes with the family. This is the first long period of time I've been away from the girls."

"We missed you really, really much daddy!" Said Brassfield's daughter, 5-year-old Allison.

Students from St. John's Episcopal School, in Rancho Santa Margarita, were also in attendance during the celebration. The students were present to support



Sergeant Blake Brassfield, a platoon sergeant with Fox Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, kisses and holds his daughters at Camp San Mateo, June 3. The Marines and sailors returned home from a six-month deployment with the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit.

operation Help-a-Hero, a charity foundation that welcomes home units from Camp Pendleton returning from deployments.

"It's cool seeing the Marines and sailors," said students from St. John's Episcopal School. "This is our second time coming here. It's really exciting."

The organization brings bags of toiletries, gift cards and assists the Marines and sailors for the preparation of their rooms as a part of a welcome home gift.

"They work on it all year," said Monica Barnum, the assistant principle of St. Johns. "We'll bring the students down and they'll help clean and decorate the rooms. We've had this program going for almost five years now."

One Marine coming home held his new born daughter for the first

time, however it was not the first time seeing her. Lance Cpl. Douglas Bennett, a rifleman with Fox Co., 2/5, witnessed the birth of young Raleigh via Skype.

"It's great to be home," Bennett said. "Holding my daughter for the first time feels amazing."



Students from St. John's Episcopal School, from Rancho Santa Margarita, Calif., welcome home Marines and sailors returning home from the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit at Camp San Mateo, June 3. The students are a part of Operation Help-a-Hero, a charity that cleans service members' rooms and gives care packages with giftcards for their welcome home.

Battalions hold changes of command

*Story and photo by
Cpl. Ned Johnson*

The Marines of 5th Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment formed a full parade on a sunny day in Las Pulgas, as Lt. Col. Joseph Russo relinquished command to Lt. Col. David Everly, and Sgt. Maj. Rodrigo Macias relieved Sgt. Maj. Scott Van De Even June 16.

Russo and Macias took over the battalion together 27 months ago and left together as well.

“When Sergeant Major Van De Even and I walked off the parade deck together 27 months ago, I said, ‘Are you ready for this?’ and he said ‘Let’s do it,’” Russo said.

During their command, 5/11 deployed multiple batteries in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and changed the way the Marine Corps uses rocket artillery on the battlefield, Everly said during his speech.

“Sergeant Major Macias and myself realize that we have some really big shoes to fill,” Everly said.

The ceremony involved full pomp and circumstance for a change of command including the 1st Marine Division Band, rifle manual, and a troop pass in review.

“To the Marines and sailors of 5th Battalion, you have done a magnificent job today; I appreciate the hard work that has gone into making this occasion,” Everly said. “I am proud to serve you as your commander and am looking forward to meeting you and your families in the coming months.”

The Marines have a new commander and sergeant major, but training for upcoming deployments will continue for the rocket artillerymen of 5/11.



Lt. Col. Joseph Russo, the outgoing battalion commander of 5th Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment, passes the unit colors to Lt. Col. David Everly, the new battalion commander of 5/11, during a change of command ceremony at Las Pulgas, June 16. The ceremony included a full

*Story and photo by
Cpl. Jeremy Fasci*

Marines from the 3rd Assault Amphibian Battalion participated in a large ceremony to celebrate the changing of their battalion commanding officer at Del Mar, June 16.

Lt. Col. Daryl G. Crane, who first came to the battalion in 2005 as the battalion operations and logistics officer, relinquished his command of 3rd AABn. to Lt. Col. Howard F. Hall.

“This is kind of a sad day for an amtrack, especially as an amtrack officer because there’s nothing else after this for us,” said Crane. “After the battalion command you realize the MOS (military occupational specialty) you love so dearly is all over. You walk away from the battalion and then its staff job after staff job, but there is no amtrack regiment for us to come back into.”

During his speech Crane expressed his gratitude to all the Marines and family members who helped him throughout his term as the commanding officer. He also spoke about the many guests who attended the ceremony including former Marines from the 1st Marine Division Association and others that were involved with the battalion over the years.

“Thank you to the Marines that are standing out here in front of me,” Crane said. “It has been an absolute honor to be able to serve with you, to be able to be apart of this battalion.”

The ceremony was elaborately designed and precisely executed by the Marines of the battalion; showing their commitment to excellence and their great respect for Crane as he relinquished his command. The large formation was comprised of five companies that marched onto the parade deck at the beginning of the ceremony. There were more than 20 amphibious assault vehicles on the parade deck, showcasing flags from different states and countries. Some of the assault vehicles participated in the pass and review at the end of the ceremony.

Hall reiterated everyone’s belief in the quality of job Crane conducted as the battalion commander and delved deeper into his plans to continue the legacy of the storied battalion into the future.

“I’d like to personally thank Lt. Col. Crane for everything he has done for this battalion and for a job very well done,” Hall said. “We’ve got quite a job ahead of us. The operational tempo is going to stay high, but I’m confident and I know that we are going to succeed because we are going to keep working together the way that we have in the past.”



Lt. Col. Daryl G. Crane, the commanding officer of 3rd Assault Amphibian Battalion, 1st Marine Division, presents the battle colors to his replacement Lt. Col. Howard F. Hall during a change of command ceremony at Del Mar, June 16. Sgt. Maj. Alberto Ruiz retrieved the colors from the color guard and presented them to the off going battalion commander and took them from the new battalion commander after their exchange. The passing of the battle colors represents the passing of authority from one commander to another.



Lt. Colonels Joseph Russo and David Everly salute after Russo relinquished command of 5th Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment, to Everly during a change of command ceremony at Las Pulgas, June 16. During the previous two years, Russo commanded the battalion that always had at least one battery deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, and Everly said he hopes to maintain the combat readiness of his new unit.



Safar Bazaar's 'little mayor' reaches Afghans

Story and photos by
Cpl. Colby Brown

GARMSIR DISTRICT, Helmand province, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan -- Lance Cpl. Robert Lemonte smiles as he patrols, at six in the morning, down the main street of the Safar Bazaar. He's not smiling because someone told a joke; the Mansfield, Ind., native smiles because he recognizes the shop owners who are opening up for the day. He smiles because they smiled at him first.

"When I first got here, my first patrol through the bazaar was completely different from what I expected," said the squad leader from Charlie Company. "Everyone was introducing themselves to me, inviting me in for chai. There was even a guy who wanted me to stay at his house for the night because he just wanted me to have me over."

Lemonte hasn't accomplished a feat that warrants this "bazaar celebdom;" he just doesn't miss the chance to introduce himself to a new face. He has been nicknamed

'the little mayor of the Safar bazaar,' because when he patrols there, nearly everyone stops to wave, say hello or invite him in for chai tea, and it's all a part of his job.

He patrols two times a day, sometimes three, with his squad and elements of Afghan National Security Forces. As he walks his beat, he isn't just looking for suspicious activity. Lemonte makes a point to spend more time interacting with the people than patrolling, not because he is lazy, but because building a good relationship with the people of Afghanistan is part of 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment's mission in Garmsir.

"Lemonte basically treats the local nationals ... like he was at home with his friends," said Lance Cpl. Noel Desantiago, a member from Lemonte's squad. "And that's how all Afghans want to be treated. Lemonte knows that you just have to treat them like you would treat anyone else."

Along with providing security, Lemonte's squad supports the local community as much as it can, either by finding a place to start a program or by simply explaining why the Marine Corps is in Afghanistan.

"Interacting with a positive attitude with the local people is only going to bring about good things," said Desantiago, a native of Porterville, Calif. "If you're scared of them or point your rifle at them, they're not going to trust you, and [they'll] ask why are you here. It's better to interact with the people the way Lemonte does."



An Afghan man smiles after shaking Lance Cpl. Robert Lemonte hand during a security patrol here, May 25. Lemonte, a Mansfield Ind., native, is a squad leader in Charlie Company, 1st battalion 3rd Marine Regiment. He has been nicknamed 'the little mayor of the Safar Bazaar' because of his ability to relate to those of a different culture. His relationships in the local community are a model for how 1st Bn., 3rd Marines wants its Marines to interact with the local people here.

His supervisors and subordinates attribute his success at building relationships to his ability to genuinely relate to people from a different culture than his own.

"He is just the type of guy who is open to everything the locals ask for," said Desantiago. "He takes his gloves off when he shakes [local people's] hands; he covers his heart when he meets someone new; he gives them hugs; he is someone (who) accepts their culture, and that is what is unique about Lemonte. He doesn't think it's weird; he just gets into it."

Lemonte's bond with the local people allows him to tune in more closely to his surroundings. Without them, he would only be able to observe. He has realized that to help someone in need, he has to build a good relationship with them.

"Lemonte comes across as a genuine person," said 1st Lt. Victor Barnes, Lemonte's platoon commander. "When Lemonte speaks

with village elders, who are often 60 years old or more, and they explain the needs of their village, you can tell that they see the genuine concern Lemonte has."

Lemonte's plans for the future include furthering his relationships in the community and providing the support needed to better the local people's standard of living.

His platoon commander hopes more Marines will adopt the same approach.

"Just being out there isn't going to win their confidence," said Barnes, a native of Brunswick, Ga. "If you don't sit down with people everyday then you're wrong. You have to meet with people and build a real relationship with them. That's the only way we are going to be able to help the local people; explain that we're here to help and having their own government and is better than having [insurgent forces] in the area. And Lemonte does that."




Lance Cpl. Robert Lemonte walks across the street to a shop owner he knows during a security patrol here, May 25. The Mansfield, Ind., native is a squad leader in Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment. He has been nicknamed "the little mayor of the Safar Bazaar" because of his ability to interact with the local community. His relationship with the local community is a model for how 1/3 wants its Marines to interact with the local people here.

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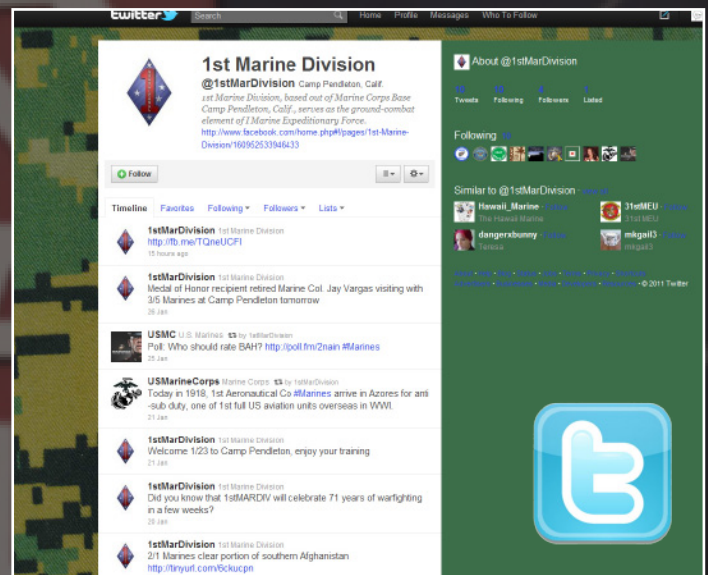


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