

# THE PARRIS ISLAND BOOT



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## The dog, the myth he is Legend



Pfc. Legend stands in front of Parris Island's replica of the Marine Corps War Memorial, Nov. 7. Legend graduated from recruit training with Platoon 2093, Hotel Company, 2nd Recruit Training Battalion, Nov. 4.

Photo by Lance Cpl. Michael Rogers

### New language program available

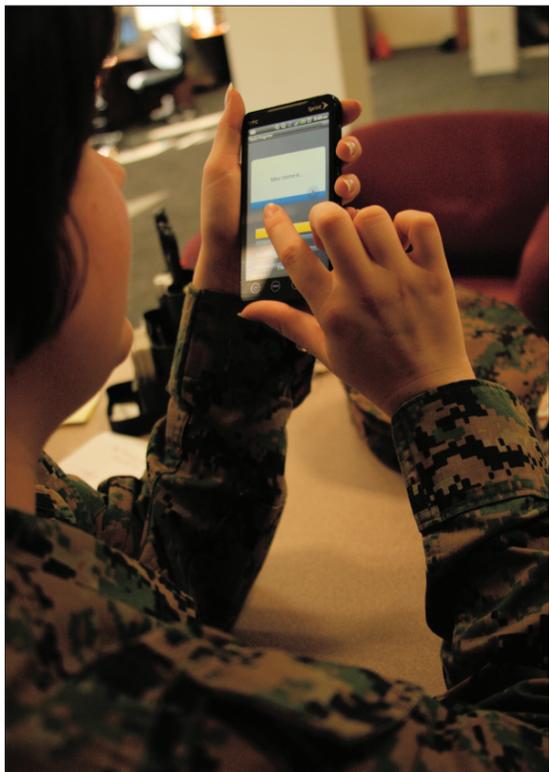


Photo by Lance Cpl. F. J. Abundes

Transparent Language Online is the new program offered to Marines for recreational language learning. The program has a variety of applications that can be used with smart phones.

Lance Cpl. F.J. Abundes  
Staff Writer

The Marine Corps replaced the Mango Language Program with Transparent Language Online Oct. 17.

The new program gives the extended Marine Corps community, including dependents and retirees, access to a recreational language learning system.

"We could only afford 12 languages with Mango through our funding, and the basic languages didn't even have complete courses," said Cynthia Shipley, library program manager for Marine Family Division, Headquarters Marine Corps. "With Transparent Languages, at a less expensive cost, we have over 80 complete languages."

Transparent Language Online is the most complete, top-of-the-line

SEE LANGUAGE PAGE 2

### Honor bracelets authorized in uniform

Lance Cpl. F.J. Abundes  
Staff Writer

Honor bracelets were authorized for wear in uniform Nov. 1, by Gen. James Amos, commandant of the Marine Corps.

"Marines, our Corps has been at war since Sept. 11, 2001. Ensuing 10 years of continuous combat has claimed the lives of many of our brothers and sisters whose memory will live with us for the rest of our lives," Amos said in All-Marine Message 043/11. "It is in this spirit of remembrance that I am officially authorizing the wear of honor bracelets while in uniform."

According to the message, there are specific rules to wearing the bracelets. No more than one can be worn at a time and the bracelet will be silver or

black in color. Additionally the bracelet will be a half-inch wide and engraved with the rank or rate and name of the person being honored. The bracelet will also include the date the person was captured, missing or deceased and the operation or location where it occurred. Multiple names on a single bracelet are authorized.

Marines as a whole are pleased with the commandant's decision.

"To have people trying to take that away from us was very irritating," said Staff Sgt. Michelle Baerman, a staff non-commissioned officer with the protocol office. "I needed that word to come out so that I could say 'yes, I can wear this.'"

"It boosts morale because some people have lost their family members in war – and to be able to wear their name on your wrist and walk around in uniform – it shows that you're a living legacy," she said. "You are carrying on the tradition and honoring them."

Many Marines are just as passionate about the issue as Baerman.

Cpl. Wilson Mceacher, a Marine with Starlite Range, Weapons and Field Training Battalion, said he was happy with the changes. He said the tributes to the fallen mean that much to them and the fact that they did not have to take off the bracelets in uniform was a chance to honor their fellow servicemembers.

Some Marines wear the bracelet because the person honored died trying to save them, Mceacher said.

"Part of our tradition is honoring Marines who have gone before us. Every time I see [my bracelet], I remember them, not just the guy whose name is on it, but all Marines in the past," Mceacher said.



Photo by Lance Cpl. F.J. Abundes

Honor bracelets are now authorized to be worn in uniform as a way of honoring fallen service members.

### NEWS BRIEFS

#### Commissary holiday hours

The Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island Commissary will have special hours for several of the upcoming holidays. On Nov. 11 the early bird hours are 7:30 a.m. to 10 a.m. and normal shopping hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Nov. 21 early-bird hours are 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. and normal hours are 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. The commissary will be closed Nov. 24 and 25.

For questions regarding the commissary, please contact Cynthia Six at 228-3727.

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# 236 miles for 236 years: RTR runs for the birthday



Photos by Lance Cpl. Javarre Glanton

While many commands celebrate the Marine Corps birthday with a gala event, the Recruit Training Regiment has taken the celebration a step further – a lot of steps.

From Nov. 8 through Nov. 10, members of each recruit training battalion in RTR took turns hitting the pavement to collectively run 236 miles in this unique celebration of the birthday.

Starting with the battalion commanders and ending with the battalion sergeants major, each runner ran three miles until the count reached 234, afterward the regiment ran the last two miles in a large formation run with every able recruit on the island.



## Ta-Tas take the trophy in powderpuff football



The Headquarters and Service Battalion powderpuff football team, the Ta-Tas, took first place in the first ever all-female intramural football league.

After going undefeated throughout the double-elimination tournament, the team successfully set a record against all of the teams during the monthlong tournament.

**Players:**  
 Staff Sgt. Mary Grasso  
 Staff Sgt. Cynthia Vasquez  
 Staff Sgt. Leigh Bibona  
 Sgt. Kira Chavez  
 Sgt. Alejandra Hernandez  
 Sgt. Christine Torres

Cpl. Ilieeia Tucker  
 Lance Cpl. Alexandra Stamateris  
 Lance Cpl. Aneshea Yee  
 Lisa Drake-Groleau  
 Jennifer Gamez  
 Emily Miller  
 Coach: Martin Grasso

### LANGUAGE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

coursework, language-learning system available to library patrons free and via web browser, Shipley said.

Transparent Language Online provides instruction for 80 languages

through pronunciation, speech, grammar, writing and vocabulary-building lessons. The program bookmarks wherever the user ends every session and is more interactive.

Some of the major features include: language and culture blogs, online social communities, inter-

active games and applications for a variety of smart phone devices.

Another reason Transparent Language Online was chosen was to use a continuous vendor across the Marine Corps for language studies.

Active-duty Marines already have access to one of

Transparent's programs, Shipley said. The collection of software, courses and services for language, regional knowledge and culture training is specifically designed to support the Corps' total-force training and professional military education efforts.

To use the program,

Marines must log onto MarineNet.

Marines stationed here should take up this opportunity to better prepare themselves for the future, said Rose Marie Kraus, librarian for the Parris Island Library.

If they end up being stationed in another country

or deploying, they have a bit of knowledge to build on, she said.

Anyone looking to use the new program has to register with the library and have no outstanding charges. For more information, contact the Parris Island Library at 228-1672.

### Chaplain's Corner

# Joy or sorrow, I got your back

**Navy Lt. Russell St. John**  
 4th Recruit Training Battalion Chaplain

Only chaplains deliver Red Cross messages on Parris Island. There are good reasons why that rule exists, but it means that chaplains deliver a lot of bad news. Sometimes a loved one dies, an unexpected illness or hospitalization occurs or a heartbreaking diagnosis is received. Rarely is the message good, so we comfort those who are hurting. But what about you? Would you be able to do the same if it were required of you?

In Romans 12:15, the apostle Paul writes, "Weep with those who weep." You might wonder why he has to say that. Compassion is a natural human attribute, isn't it? Who doesn't feel for a person who has just suffered a loss? But it's not that we don't feel compassion; it's that we don't know how to show it. Some of us get awkward around a grieving person. We don't know

what to say or do, and so we do nothing or we avoid such situations altogether.

In that context, Paul's words make for good counsel because he doesn't tell you that you have to do anything. He does not exhort you to fix the problem or to find a way to bring immediate relief. He simply says to join in the heartache and give that grief-stricken person a companion with whom to grieve. We can all do that, and it is stuff from which true friendships are made.

Learning to rejoice, however, is more difficult. Romans 12:15, in its fullness, reads, "rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep." And while I am no fan of delivering Red Cross messages, I find it harder to celebrate with another person than I do to weep with him. Why? It is because of jealousy. Has a friend ever been promoted? Received a compliment while standing next to you? Been married while you're

still single? Received an inheritance? Been given a gift that you would desire? Did you, with a full heart, rejoice with your friend, or did you find it hard not to covet the very thing your friend had just received? Jealousy can turn the best of us into a lousy friend.

And that is why Paul's counsel is timeless. While compassion, and therefore weeping, come naturally to us, so does jealousy, and we need to learn to rejoice with others. It is a rare person who can take genuine joy in the accomplishments and successes of another, but if you are that person, your friendship will be cherished above others.

So, take this biblical counsel to heart, and learn both to weep with those who are weeping and to rejoice with those who are rejoicing. You will forge stronger bonds of friendship, and the people around you will learn that they can count on you and trust you whether in times of sorrow or in times of joy.

## THE PARRIS ISLAND BOOT

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# Lowcountry looks back on its past

Lance Cpl.  
Javarre Glanton  
Staff Writer

Nearly 1,400 people showed up to the first shoot and salute celebration commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Port Royal Nov. 5 at the Port Royal Plantation.

The Battle of Port Royal, covering Hilton Head Island as well as Port Royal, was one of the first and one of the largest amphibious battles of the Civil War, fought in Port Royal and Hilton Head Island, S.C. Union forces comprised of U.S. Army and Marines blockaded Confederate forces to cut off shipments of cotton and other exports.

Seventy-seven U.S. Navy ships, 19 of which were battle ships, arrived on the scene the morning of Nov. 7, 1861.

"It had a nominal impact on the war just because its sole purpose was a supply base," said Will

Dopp, event coordinator and World War II veteran. "This is just the story of the Battle of Port Royal."

The celebration lasted five hours and featured a colors ceremony, a bugler, cannon fire, a rifle salute and a re-enactments of Civil War scenes.

"We've been working on this since January," said Will Dopp, event coordinator. "It was great to see it all come together."

During the program, the speakers explained the intent of the battle and the effects it had on the fledgling war at the time.

"People were interested," Dopp said. "People who live here had friends come from all over, because Americans are interested in learning about the Civil War."

Several members of the local community volunteered to be a part of the re-enactment portions of the celebration.

"At first I thought re-enactments were silly and stupid until a friend



Photos by Lance Cpl. Javarre Glanton

Civil War re-enactors fire a period-correct cannon Nov. 5 at the Port Royal Plantation in Hilton Head Island, S.C. The ceremony was in honor of the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Port Royal fought during the Civil War.

handed me a musket and told me to shoot it," said Dave Smoot, Parris Island Museum display curator and participant of the re-enactments. "That was 35 years ago – since then I've been hooked."

Smoot, who was a surgeon for the occasion, bore high expectations

for the event when he first heard about it.

"I hope people will see that the movies are just the movies – this will be the closest you can get to the real thing short of being shot at," said Smoot, of Roanoke, Va.

"I wanted people to walk away from this knowing that as far as

the country is concerned there is no problem so big that it can't be solved peacefully," Smoot said. "If they would've known the end result of the Civil War before they started it, they would not have even started."

The event concluded with the playing of taps, retirement of the col-

ors and closing remarks from keynote speakers.

"I believe we were able to tell the story of the Battle of Port Royal in a meaningful way," Dopp said. "Our residents and guests left with a full understanding of the battle and its role in the history of Hilton Head and the lowcountry."



Civil War re-enactors stand in platoon formation while a bugler plays a song. The re-enactors stayed in tents at the fort the previous night to make the experience more authentic.



A camp fire warms up visitors and participants of the 150th commemoration of the Battle of Port Royal on the windy morning Nov. 5.



Civil War re-enactors stand in platoon formation while a bugler plays a historic song at the Port Royal Plantation's Historic Fort Walker in Hilton Head Nov. 5.



Drew Laughlin, mayor of Hilton Head and other members of the government, speaks to a crowd of hundreds of people at the event Nov. 5.

# The stuff of Legend

## Depot mascot completes recruit training

Lance Cpl. Michael Rogers  
Staff Writer

A single tear rolled down the brown and white wrinkles of Pfc. Legend's face as Staff Sgt. Timothy Peterson, his senior drill instructor, awarded him his Eagle, Globe and Anchor.

Pride and determination could be seen in the puppy-Marine's face as he received a firm pawshake and a small word of praise from Peterson.

The new Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island mascot, Legend, graduated from recruit training with Platoon 2093, the honor platoon of Hotel Company, 2nd Recruit Training Battalion, Nov. 4.

Legend graduated as a meritorious private first class for his exemplary performance, Peterson said.

Although Legend graduated recruit training with honors, he didn't immediately adapt to the new lifestyle.

"When he got here he had a big head on his shoulders and thought he knew exactly what



Photo by Lance Cpl. Michael Rogers

Rct. Legend, the new depot mascot, sits at the position of attention on the famed yellow footprints, waiting to begin his long arduous journey to earn his Eagle, Globe and Anchor.

was going to happen," Peterson said. He started off as the guide, the head recruit in the platoon, but was relieved when he was caught starting fist fights in the bathrooms.

During the time Legend wasn't in a position of authority, his performance degraded.

"When he wasn't in a leadership position, he didn't know how to follow," Peterson said.

Although Legend's aggressive attitude and

war-like demeanor may serve him well in his future career as Marine, recruits learn to subdue their bravado during boot camp. Marines are expected to follow just as well as they lead.

After rigorous training and some old-fashioned drill instructor tough love, Legend was finally able to add discipline to his repertoire.

The mascot's true colors showed during the infamous Crucible, the final obstacle standing between recruits and the Eagle, Globe and An-

chor, according to Pvt. Shane Wendling a fellow graduating Marine from Platoon 2093.

His leadership skills and determination helped them through the hardest of times, Wendling said.

One such instance of Legend's Crucible heroics was during an event known as Noonan's Rescue. In this event recruits assault a simulated machine-gun bunker and extract their wounded comrades while under heavy enemy fire.

When it was Legend's team's turn to assault the bunker, several of Leg-

end's teammates where wiped out by the machine gun. As a simulated casualty, recruits can't move on their own and have to be extracted by still-living teammates.

"He ended up carrying half of our group during Noonan's Rescue," Wendling said. "We wouldn't have made it through without Legend - not at all."

Now, as a newly reformed dog bearing the Corps' emblem, Legend will serve as Parris Island's mascot until the end of his enlistment.



Photo by Lance Cpl. Michael Rogers

Rct. Legend growls and shows his sharp teeth as he grips a rope, ready to swing across a ditch at the confidence course during his recruit training.



Photo by Lance Cpl. Michael Rogers

The wind ruffles the standing hairs on the rump of the scared puppy. Rct. Legend faces his fear of heights at the confidence course at Leatherneck Square during recruit training.

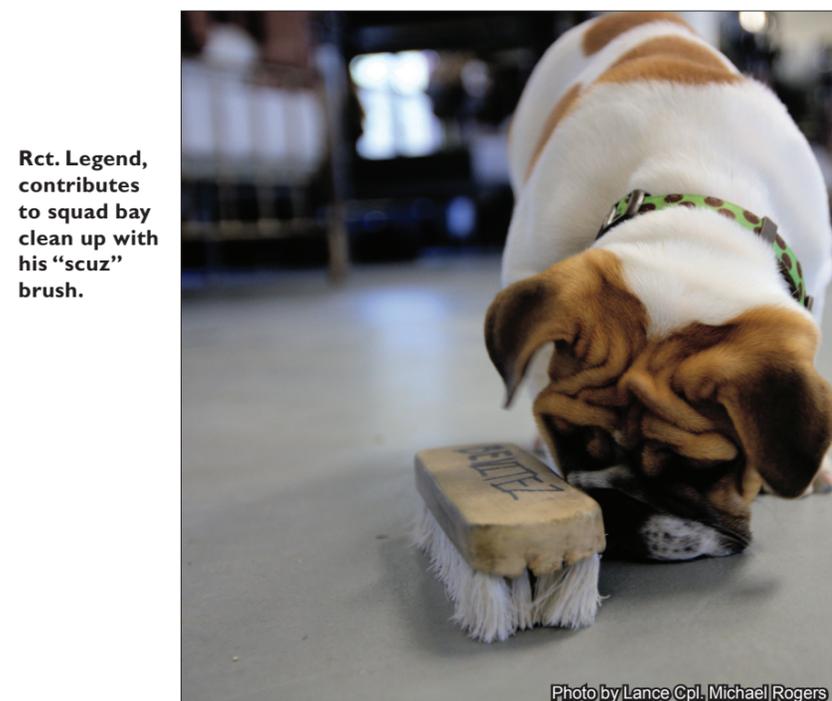


Photo by Lance Cpl. Michael Rogers

Rct. Legend, contributes to squad bay clean up with his "scuz" brush.

Staff Sgt. Timothy Peterson, senior drill instructor of Platoon 2093, Hotel Company, 2nd Recruit Training Battalion, orders Rct. Legend to get on line in his squad bay during the third phase of training.

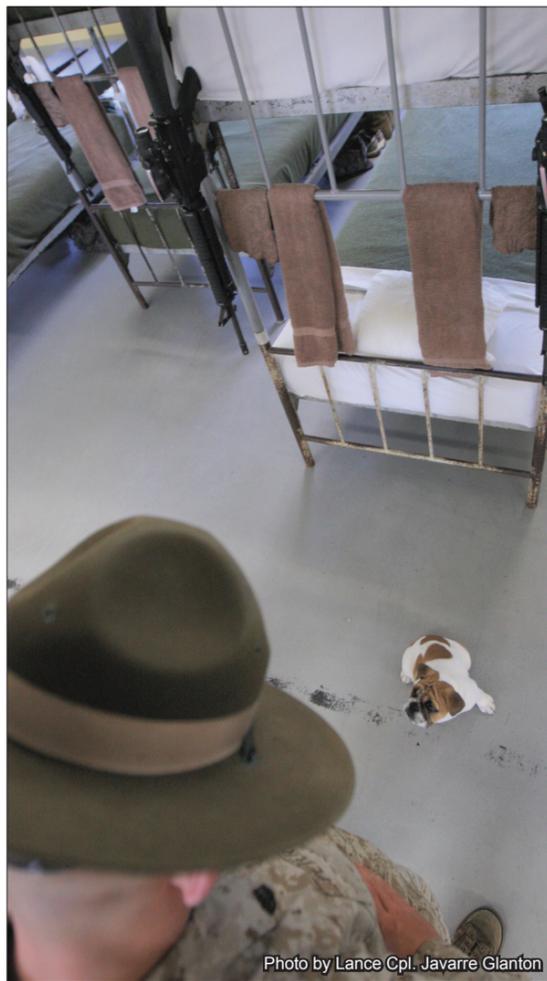


Photo by Lance Cpl. Javarre Glanton

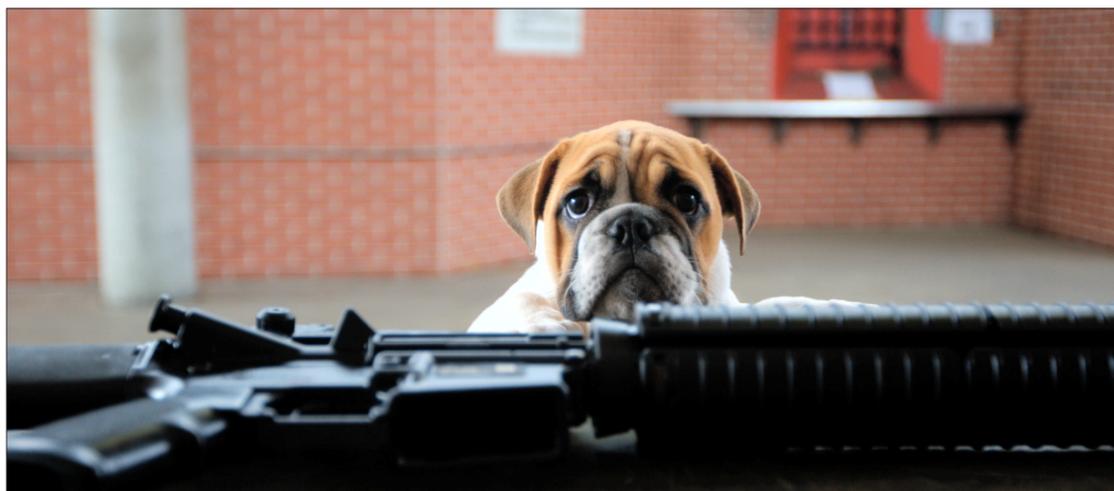


Photo by Lance Cpl. Javarre Glanton

The look of intimidation shows on Rct. Legend's face as he thinks of a name for his new rifle during his first week of boot camp.

# Exchange of fire: Australian, Marine artillerymen bond over bombs

Lance Cpl. Sarah Dietz

Twentynine Palms

TWENTYNINE PALMS, Calif. — The Marines of 3rd Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment, shared much with the fellow artillerymen of the Australian Army's 1st Brigade, 8th/12th over the last two months.

From exchanging knowledge to campgrounds in each others' homeland, the two units have formed bonds of brotherhood and trust that go beyond their primary mission of artillery.

It all started with Operation Golden Eagle in August, where the Marines took a monthlong trip to Australia to learn about the M198 howitzer used in the Australian Army.

"I grew up on those [howitzers]," said Staff Sgt. John Harwood, section chief of Gun Six, Battery L, 3/11. "It wasn't new to me, but my Marines had to learn how to fire the gun."

This was the first time many of the Australian soldiers worked with Marines; the similarities among the military branches were enormous.

"They were the same as us," said Australian Lance Bombardier James Thatcher, a detachment commander.

They work the same and joke the same,

he said.

After the month of training in Australia, the Marines came home, only to see their new comrades on their turf in the Twentynine Palms ranges nearly a month later.

This time, it was the Marine's turn to teach the soldiers about their M777 howitzer, the primary howitzer used in the Marine Corps and a weapon the Australian Army has recently incorporated in its artillery units.

"It uses the same [ammunition] but is a different gun," said Australian Bombardier Matt Powers, section chief. "It has a lot more computers and technology in it. This has been great for hands-on experience and the Marines are awesome teachers."

Aside from knowledge and experience, the two nations gained something invaluable - a brotherhood.

"We picked up right where we left off [after Operation Golden Eagle]," Thatcher said. "It feels like we are a team now. It all started back in Australia and we finished it here. These guys are my mates."

"We're so close and really tight," said Cpl. Nicholas Noe, recorder for Gun Six.

There isn't much of a culture gap, and the comrades will definitely keep in contact with each other, he added.



Photo by Cpl. Andrew Thorburn

Marines with Battery I, 3rd Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment, work with Australian soldiers with 1st Brigade, 8th/12th, to align Gun Five on the firing line during cross training in support of Enhanced Mojave Viper Oct. 26 at Quackenbush ranges in Twentynine Palms, Calif.



Photo by Pfc. Ali Azimi

Marines and Australian soldiers, work in tandem to fire the M777 howitzer during cross training in support of Enhanced Mojave Viper, Calif., Oct. 26.



Photo by Pfc. Ali Azimi

Marines of Gun Six, Battery L, 3rd Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment, work with soldiers of the Australian Army to fire the M777 Howitzer held in Twentynine Palms Nov. 1.

Photos by Lance Cpl. Javarre Glanton



Recruits with Alpha Company, 1st Recruit Training Battalion, prepare their gear in order to find the next box on the land navigation course Nov. 4 at Elliot's Beach. The land navigation course recently relocated to Elliot's Beach from Page Field in order to make the course more difficult.

# LAND NAVIGATION COURSE GETS RELOCATED

**Lance Cpl. Michael Rogers**  
Staff Writer

The land navigation course, which teaches the most perishable skill as some call it, has been relocated and made more challenging for recruits at Parris Island.

The land navigation course used to be taught and practiced in the wooded areas of Page Field, now it is held in a similar, but larger, area of Elliot's Beach.

"It's about five times the size of the last course," said Staff Sgt. Joseph R. Stoess, drill instructor for

Alpha Company. The change came at the request of the Infantry Training Battalion staff from Camp Geiger, N.C.

They wanted to make sure they had progressive training, Stoess said. Recruits learn basic land navigation at Parris Island, become Marines and take leave before the School of Infantry and the majority of new Marines forget what they learned in recruit training.

The change is a step toward cementing the knowledge further into new Marine's sets of skills. Many

recruits, as well as Marines, question why they learn the skill at all with technology such as global positioning systems at their disposal.

Stoess said, from experience in an infantry background, that even with GPS and other similar technologies, there is always a use for a compass.

"When (forward deployed) sometimes you don't get a resupply when you need it," Stoess said. "And with GPS you have to rely on batteries."

"Now that we've changed it, I think we'll see great results," Stoess said.



A recruit looks at his map of Parris Island to find his next grid point during the land navigation course.



Recruits work together to plot their direction during the land navigation course.



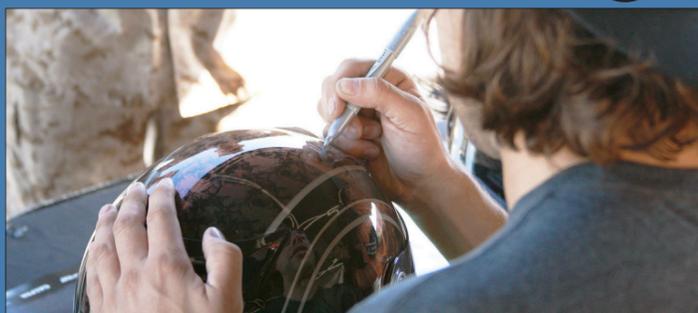
Photos by Cpl. Erin Tansey

# Stunt riders blow smoke at the exchange

Nick "Apex" Rocha and Ernie "E-Dub" Vigil, professional stunt riders, gave a demonstration at the Parris Island Marine Corps Exchange Nov. 3 from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. every half hour.

During each performance, the riders did a variety of tricks including headstands on the moving bike, wheelies, 180-degree stops and riding backward for long periods of time. When not performing, the riders signed autographs and stayed by the exchange for Marines, families and visitors.

Rocha and Vigil will also be performing at Camp Lejeune, N.C., and other places along the East Coast.



# Victory in Nawa: standing on the cusp of transition



Photos by Cpl. Jeff Drew

Marines with 1st Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment, patrol alongside Afghan National Army soldiers from 1st Kandak, 1st Brigade, 215th Corps. The security forces spent four days patrolling 30 miles across the district.

## Cpl. Jeff Drew

2nd Marine Division (FWD)

NAWA DISTRICT, Helmand province, Afghanistan – They arrived early by vehicle convoy to the small Afghan National Army outpost named Dangar in the northern part of the district. Marines and sailors with 1st Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment, stood beside their Afghan counterparts, ready to depart for the four-day, 30-mile trek that lay before them.

The hike would be difficult. Each man carrying more than 60 pounds of body armor, food and water would be tested. Their mental and physical endurance challenged, but if Afghans and Marines have anything in common, it's their ability to endure.

The walk joined Afghan Lt. Col. Gul Ahmad, commanding officer of 1st Kandak, 1st Brigade, 215th Corps, and Lt. Col. Tyler Zagurski, commanding officer of 1st Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment, in a patrol across the district to speak with local residents and key leaders, assessing problems and celebrating successes along the way.

"The Nawa Victory Walk will show that Nawa is safe and secure," said Zagurski, a Mercer Island, Wash., native. "The markets are open and the security forces are welcome to walk and greet people and celebrate Nawa's progress."

The Nawa district stands right on the cusp of transition, according to Zagurski. The district is scheduled to be the first area to transition full security responsibility to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in the central Helmand River Valley because of its progress in security, governance and development.

Mine-Resistant-Ambush-Protected vehicles forged ahead of the patrol offering additional security along the route. With the vehicles on track, the patrol began, footsteps moving from a thick rocky carpet lining the interior of the patrol base to a gravel road. A crisp fall wind blew, providing temporary comfort to the security forces pushing down the road. They reached their first stop before many could break a sweat.

A lavish Afghan home rose before the combined forces. Inside, lush pillows and intricate carpets lined the floor, yet each decoration paled in comparison to the smile stretching across the face of Haji Janan as he welcomed the Afghan soldiers and Marines into his home.

Janan, a local elder in the Haynak area of the district, knows the pain of war. He spoke of his time fighting the Russians during their invasion of Afghanistan and displayed his scars, a constant reminder of his time fighting with the Mujahideen. As he spoke, brightly dressed children ushered in hot chai tea, bowls of mangos, and plates of nuts and candy.

Janan passionately described his dislike for the insurgency and explained the difficulties of eradicating poppy growth in the area, which insurgents use to fund their activities. He explained the money made from one acre of poppy is equal to approximately 100 acres of wheat. He suggested the cultivation of cotton, but admitted it is often expensive to grow. He plans to grow wheat and tomatoes this coming season, but to do so Janan pressed the importance of security for Nawa.

"Security is our first priority," said Janan. "When the Marines leave, I think it will be fine, because now it's the locals against the (insurgents) too."

The officers took their leave after several cups of tea, but not before Janan could offer a promise.

"I am strong in this friendship; anything I can do, I will help," said Janan. "I can see you are strong in this friendship – this will be an honest friendship."

"I can always use honest friends," replied Zagurski.

The Afghan soldiers and Marines pushed on down the road. Flak jackets began to dig into their shoulders and water ceased to quench their thirst, but they defied the heat one step at a time.

Shortly after leaving Janan's house, the security detachment passed a brightly colored graveyard. Men, women and children walked along gravel roads and on dirt paths in between the ornately decorated graves. Suddenly, a distant blast broke the low hum of English and Pashto conversation. Someone had detonated an improvised explosive device and sporadic machine-gun fire riddled the air.

Afghan Local Police patrolmen, Afghan National Army soldiers and Marines pushed forward toward the danger, providing a heavily armored and confident barricade between the gunfire and the residents ducking for cover. Screams pierced the air, disrupted only by the crackling gunfire as groups of children in search of safety raced past the advancing fighting force.

The ALP ran ahead of the Marines as they moved between mud compounds and crumbling walls. The security forces pushed hundreds of meters out into the more desolate desert area in search of

the waning gunfire. The attack had been brief, the aggressors fleeing the scene before they could be apprehended. The incident highlighted the unique nature of the district. While security forces have driven insurgents away from the more-densely populated areas of Nawa, there are still remote areas of the desert where Afghan forces and Marines are eradicating the dwindling insurgent presence.

Local Afghan security forces began an investigation into the incident and the patrol continued on its journey. The troupe made its second stop at patrol base Sphin Ghar shortly after its unexpected detour. Major Abdul Latif, commander of the 4th Tolai, similar in size to a Marine company, welcomed them and had a meal prepared for the visiting patrol. Rice, various meats, spiced vegetables and beans filled their plates while the officers discussed security in the area.

Filled and refreshed, the commanders and their security detail continued on – the setting sun presenting a deadline for the day's movement. They passed canals and farmers working in their cornfields. When they rounded their final turn for the day, a white guard post peaked the horizon, offering solace for the weary group.

In total, the service members hiked more than 14 kilometers before 5 p.m. The Marines stripped their body armor once inside the protective walls of precinct Loy Kolay, an ANA security outpost. Soaked in sweat, they broke out a volleyball and played a game before calling it a night, knowing full-well they had a 12-kilometer hike the following day. What adventures the next day would hold – only time would tell.



Sgt. Maj. Patrick Tracy, sergeant major for 1st Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment, Sgt. Preston Davis, personal safety officer for the battalion commander, and Lt. Col. Tyler Zagurski, commanding officer, observe possible targets downrange through rifle scopes at the sound of gunfire in the distance.

# Sicily-based Marines climb Europe's tallest active volcano

**Cpl. Jad Sleiman**

Marine Forces Europe

NAVAL AIR STATION SIGONELLA, Sicily — On the evening of Oct. 23, the peak of Mount Etna burned a deep red, spewing streams of flame and lava hundreds of feet in the air.

On the morning of Oct. 25, about 20 Marines with Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force 12 scaled its slopes.

"This is definitely one of the coolest things I've ever done in the Marine Corps, climb a volcano," said Cpl. James Bailey, a Security Cooperation Team Tactics-2 motor transport assistant chief from Baltimore.

SCTT-2 is one of four specialized Marine teams in Italy as part of a newly formed unit tasked with mentoring African militaries dealing with regional terror threats. Their time spent in between missions, leaders have stressed, doesn't have to go to waste.

The hike was designed to teach the Marines a lesson in the rigors of operating in a mountainous environment. Small groups of Marines continue to tackle the climb as operational demands allow.

"It's definitely more strenuous than doing marches at low elevation on level ground," said Gunnery Sgt. David C. Ash, a Charlotte, N.C., native and assistant

team leader.

It's a winding four-mile hike to the top, relatively short by Marine Corps standards, but the Marines step off on the movement already on level with normal cloud cover with a 3,600-foot climb ahead of them.

Petty Officer 1st Class Ian Anderson, a team corpsman from Murrell's Inlet, S.C., warned the Marines that their breaths wouldn't count for as much on the stratovolcano as they would closer to sea level.

"The oxygen is diffuse, so your body has to work harder to perfuse your red blood cells," he explained, noting that U.S. Olympic runners typically train in Rocky Mountain states to make their workouts more challenging.

Making matters worse were the hefty loads each Marine carried. During one rest break, a group of French retirees on vacation easily passed the team. "How many kilos?" asked one, pointing to a Marine's bulging pack. After fumbling with the English to metric conversion: "About 40," he replied.

The trail itself, at times hardly recognizable as such, presented its own challenges. Smiling tourists waved eagerly from passing suspended ski lifts as they floated effortlessly upward while the Marines slipped and stumbled for

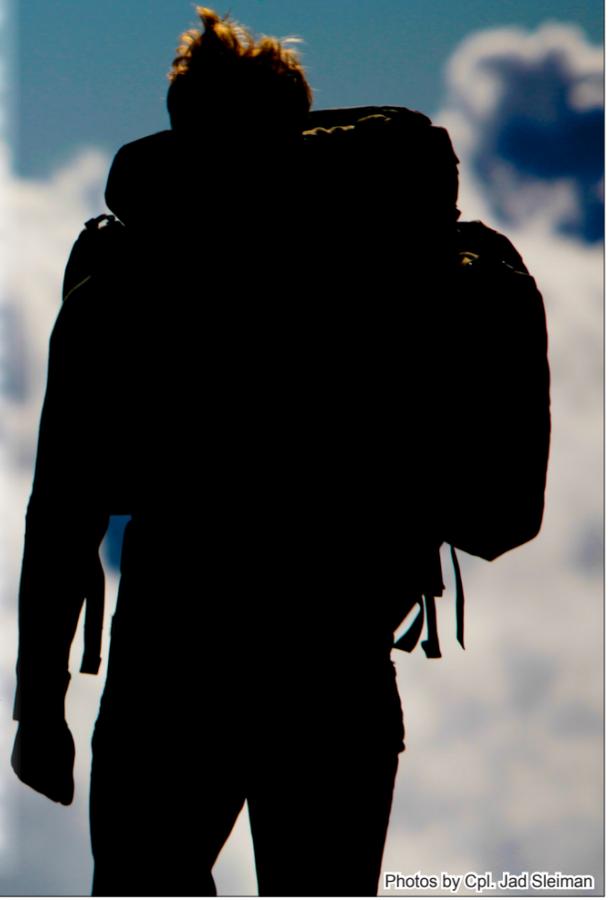
footholds in shifting black sand and rock. Snow clung to shadowy crevices along the route. Still, one corpsman made his way past them in a short-sleeve collared shirt, warmed only by his own constant exertion.

"When you take one step forward and slide two steps back," said Bailey, "you just look up, and think, 'it's never gonna end.'"

At 8,800 feet Sicily disappears under a carpet of clouds, providing the Marines with a view usually reserved for ascending airline passengers. It's at this elevation that the team dropped their packs and established satellite communications equipment with Naval Air Station Sigonella and a team in Africa before starting the final push.

As the first of the Marines reached the highest point in the path at about 9,600 feet they saw the smoldering, sulfur yellow crater that marks volcano's peak. They also saw something none of them expected: grandparents and their grandchildren, young couples, dozens of cheerful, clean visitors bundled tightly in winter coats streaming out of the monster-truck wheeled buses that shuttled them up.

Speckled with black sand and sweating through warming layers, the Marines took the road less traveled.



Photos by Cpl. Jad Sleiman



**Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force 12 Marines trudge through the black sands of the slopes of Europe's tallest active volcano, Mount Etna, Oct. 25. The hike was designed to teach about 20 Marines with SPMAGTF-12's Security Cooperation Team Tactics-2 a lesson in the rigors of operating in a mountainous environment.**

