

OCTOBER 2021

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MAGAZINE OF THE MARINES



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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW:

Maj Jasmin Moghbeli and LtCol Nicole Mann



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COVER: Marine astronauts Maj Jasmin “Jaws” Moghbeli, left, and LtCol Nicole “Duke” Mann, right, stand side by side at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas, following an interview with *Leatherneck*, June 22. Photo by NASA/Norah Moran. Copies of the cover may be obtained by sending \$2 (for mailing costs) to *Leatherneck* Magazine, P.O. Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134-0775.

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Letter of the Month

(Leatherneck will pay \$25 for a "Sound Off Letter of the Month" submitted by an MCA member or provide a one-year courtesy subscription to a non-member whose letter is selected.)

While reading my July issue of *Leatherneck* magazine, I was engrossed by the article "History of the 4th Marine Division." Imagine my surprise when I turned to page 23 and came face-to-face with a picture of my father, Technical Sergeant Clarence W. "CW" Fields. The picture is of a 105 mm howitzer caught at the precise moment it was fired, capturing the muzzle blast. My father is the Marine just left of center walking away from the gun.

There is an interesting story behind this picture of my dad. Somehow a 105 mm battery was not in its proper location and Dad went looking for it. As he went from battery to battery, he was continually waved farther up the line. Eventually, he found himself behind enemy lines all the way up to Motoyama Airfield No. 2. It is possible that he was the first Marine to step foot on the airfield. Trying to evade back to Marine lines, he was chased by a Japanese "knee mortar." In the dark he crawled up to a Japanese machine-gun bunker dispatching the two enemy soldiers with his .45. He stayed in the bunker until dawn when the bunker's field phone rang. Afraid someone would come to investigate why no one answered the phone, he disabled the machine gun and continued toward friendly lines. As he approached the Marine's forward lines, he was worried some itchy-fingered Marine would shoot him as he was in front of the lines, so he took off his skivvy shorts and waved then in the air from behind a rock.

Reporting back to his command he was thoroughly dressed down for not destroying his maps in the event he was killed or captured which showed the locations of all the gun batteries. I still have his battle map and the picture of my dad and the howitzer is incorporated into the wallpaper of the World War II exhibit at the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Triangle, Va.

My father was also a survivor of Pearl Harbor where he manned a .50-caliber machine gun that brought down two Japanese planes. At the time of the Battle of Iwo Jima, he was the senior wire chief for the 155 mm guns which

were attached to 5th Corps headquarters. His responsibilities were to design and string wire communications from the gun batteries, including the 105s back through the battalions all the way to 5th Corps.

Sgt Kenneth L. Fields
Columbia, Mo.

Afghanistan

Today marks a spot in Afghanistan's civil war where this country should not be part of the nation building of a country that has lost its will to become a viable nation among nations. For 20 years we have taught more than 3,000 Afghan troops to defend themselves and their nation. After a trillion U.S. dollars and more than 2,000 American lives, they have shown the world they have no resolve to fight to save their own nation. In this respect and in the perspective of our generals, President Biden has made the right decision.

As a warrior and a Marine, we have always fought for the right cause and the right reason. We fight and we win, but if their own troops do not want to fight for their own nation then why should we? This is not our fight. This is not our nation to die for.

The truth is we went there and died there to fight terrorists against this nation, our nation, and we did that, but we did not go there to fight for this country's civil war. That's on them. We, the American soldier, will always fight to our dying breath to defend those that cannot fight for themselves, but we will never fight for those who are capable of fighting for their nation and won't fight. So why should we? That is not who we are.

China and Russia can have this playground of war but don't tread on us or we will return. Iraq fought with us, and ISIS had no place to run because the Iraq Army fought for their nation and protected their people. That army was trained by us, with the will to fight for their country, and now protect it from outside influences that would destroy their nation if they could. We left Vietnam's civil war, and their army, trained by us, fought for their nation but lost. That is on them, not us. But to look at that country now, it has learned how to be a nation of peace which the world embraces for it is one nation now instead of two.

Eventually, North Korea will embrace peace, not war. South Korea will help the

North to heal its wounds of war and show them that there is a better way without war because all war does is kill the innocent people in the middle. That, my friends, is what the American soldier stands for, and that is something we will fight for. Because that is the American way.

As things unfold in Afghanistan's civil war and its takeover, even though the decision was the right one, President Biden's way of doing it is wrong. His total disbandment and disregard for the people of that country's support of us in our mission was entirely wrong and endangers their lives just through due process. The process in my humble opinion should have started May 1, 2021.

Cpl Robert C. LeBeau
USMC, 1966-1969
Stockton, Calif.

• While I didn't deploy to Afghanistan, I know many who did, including my son-in-law, an Army captain who returned from Afghanistan in early July. As the Commandant and Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps wrote in their letter on page 8, all who supported Operation Enduring Freedom should be proud of their service and know that they made a difference.

Cpl LeBeau, author of "Donut Hole: A Marine's Real-Life Battles in Vietnam," makes some good points, but what is indisputable to Marines everywhere is that we have to take care of the Afghans who helped us over the last 20 years, especially those who supported our efforts as interpreters and other support personnel. As I write this, less than a month has passed since the Afghan government fell, and the Taliban has taken control of the country. Like so many other Americans, I'm praying that the Marines, soldiers and other American servicemembers can evacuate as many of our friends as possible with no further loss of life.—Editor

Marines Lead by Example

Today I was at Brown Field in Quantico, Va., where the Marine Corps puts young people through the crucible of Officer Candidates School (OCS), to make Marine officers who will lead the Marine Corps—the motto is "ductus exemplo": lead by example. As I watched my daughter graduate, I could see myself 32 years ago. Same drill field, same barracks, same crazy tough drill instructors, yet a different, better Marine Corps. Listening

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to the parade sitting in the stands I had come full circle.

As always when I'm with Marines, I'm inspired and hopeful about our amazing country. We have come a long way. There were no women in my OCS graduation, but today, approximately 200 of the 680 Marine graduates were women. Within her graduating class, the diversity of America was represented like a beautiful quilt. Our colors are many, but in that formation, they were color blind. American Marines with heritage from every continent in the world. All religions were represented, the LGBT community was represented, yet no one identifies as any of those things in that moment. They are simply American Marines, and they were beaming with pride.

The speaker, Major General Donovan, told us the 24th MEU was heading to Afghanistan to evacuate the U.S. Embassy. Deeply saddened that we capitulated to the evil that is the Taliban and knowing what they will do to the women and children in the name of Islam, I felt ashamed. Yet as I looked at those Marines—Christians, Muslims, Jews and atheists—I was hopeful. One Muslim woman who my daughter told me about was allowed and encouraged to actively practice her religion during training. Another Marine's parents had put her up for adoption from Africa to come to America, the land of promise. In all of them I could see the phoenix rising from the ashes, the Constitution once again representing the fact that all people are in fact created equal. These young people were standing tall, volunteering to protect that principle to the world.

With a tear in my eye and *e pluribus unum* in my heart, my hope of America was again bright. God Bless the Marine Corps and God Bless the United States of America, *Semper Fidelis*.

Col Jim Wilmott, USMC (Ret)
Novato, Calif.

MCAS Futenma Well-Written And Researched

I commend Sergeant Kyle Daly for his thorough article, "Beyond the Fence Line: Understanding MCAS Futenma and Okinawa's Grievances," in the July issue of *Leatherneck*. It is well-written and researched. In 1969 and 1970, I was quartered in the Futenma BOQ while assigned to 3rd Force Service Regiment located at Camp Foster. This was a time when vehicles drove on the right side of the road, the U.S. dollar was the official currency, and the American general was the final authority on the island. Thirty years later I was able to enjoy an extended

visit when my son was stationed at the Naval Hospital on Camp Lester, Okinawa. Okinawa will always have a special place in my heart and mind. The memories are all good and I never experienced any hostility toward Americans.

The effort to move the air station north near Camp Schwab and Nago makes sense, especially when one considers that a new airfield would be more "state of the art" and the population density in that area is much lower. However, there are two important points to always remember. First, the existence of the airfield and the entire Marine presence is intended to maintain peace through deterrence, not to please environmentalists, politicians, and community activists. Second, we didn't start the war that brought us there.

Capt Joseph H. Doenges
USMCR, 1966-1971
Georgetown, Texas

• The order of these letters was not deliberate, but it worked out well. Sgt-Now-2ndLt Kyle Daly graduated from Officer Candidates School at the same ceremony that Col Wilmott mentions in the previous letter. The Leatherneck staff is very proud of Lt Daly and while we probably won't be seeing any new stories from this award-winning author in the near future, we're glad he was able to finish his exceptional article on MCAS Futenma before he left Okinawa for OCS.—Editor

USN Dental Corps

I just read the Sound Off letter from John Sanchez [August issue] concerning the Navy Dental Corps and what they have done for our Marines. The proudest moment of my life occurred in February 1968, while serving with 3rd Dental Co, 3rd Medical Bn, 3rd Marine Division, in RVN.

I wrote a very short article for *Vietnam* magazine which they published several years ago. It was about an incident that happened while serving at Cam Lo Hill. If at all interested just Google my name, Jon E. Schiff and the article "My War—Navy Dentist" will appear.

Col Jon E. Schiff, USAR (Ret)
Coronado, Calif.

5thMarDiv Article a Disappointment

I read your article, "History of the 5th Marine Division" in the August issue of *Leatherneck* magazine and was disappointed. I have a connection to this Division since I was 5 years old. In August 1945, I was pierside in San Diego with my mom and siblings saying goodbye

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to my dad, Lieutenant Colonel John A. Butler, as his 1/27 battalion passed by to board ship. That was the last living memory I have of my father who was killed in action and awarded the Navy Cross posthumously. He was one of the three infantry battalion commanders from the 5th Marine Division KIA on Iwo Jima. The commander of the Division service battalion was also KIA.

While your article covered a lot of details during the Division's short life and was accompanied with excellent photos, I believe it fell short of highlighting the uniqueness of this Division. It also omitted the date of its deactivation post World War II and its reactivation during the Vietnam War when it deployed the 26th and 27th Marines with two battalions of the 13th Marines to the war.

It was also omitted that the Division was heavily salted with veterans from the disbanded Raiders and Paramarine Battalions and veterans like John Basilone which were instrumental in training new men from boot camps and other assignments that had not yet seen Pacific combat. The Division, with this unique group of elite veterans and new men, trained for battle under the most able direction of Major General Keller E. Rockey for a period of 11 months before going into

battle. It was no accident that the Division had such a stellar performance on Iwo Jima, highlighted by the iconic second flag raising photo. Seventeen of the 27 Medals of Honor awarded on Iwo Jima went to Marines and corpsmen of the 5th Marine Division.

Their training at Pendleton from February 1944 to August 1944 and at Camp Tarawa from September through December 1944, gave the 5th Marine Division unprecedented unit cohesion and battle readiness, which was fortunate because they were sent to fight a ferocious dug in enemy determined to defend their homeland.

As a 10-year-old, I read Connor's History of the 5th Marine Division sent to my mother in 1949. I still have this well-worn book. I have been attending 5th Marine Division reunions since 1990, when I took my mother to a reunion and met a group of 1/27 survivors. In 2014, I was asked to host a reunion in Tampa and accept the Presidency of the Association, which I remained until 2018, when I resigned due to health issues. I remain on the Board of Trustees, attend reunions, and with my wife's help contribute what I can for the Association, which is the only Association of the three WW II Marine Divisions still standing.

I have also been a long-time reader of *Leatherneck* since my grandmother gave me a birthday subscription when I was 11 years old, that is more than 71 years ago. I will have to say that along with my disappointment in your 5th Marine Division article I am disappointed we no longer have book reviews in *Leatherneck*.

John Butler
Temple Terrace, Fla.

• While I'm sorry you were disappointed in our history of the acclaimed 5th Marine Division, we added an editor's note and an additional headline mentioning that the article was written in 1946 and only covered the Division through World War II hoping to avoid confusing our readers. The challenge we had with the original article was the breadth of accomplishments of the Division; we could have easily doubled the size of the article. Unfortunately, we didn't have the space for more than eight pages, but the original article can be found in its entirety in our archives online at www.mca-marines.org.

Thank you for sharing the story of your father and your last memory of him. And thank you for honoring him and the other Division veterans by your service with the Association.—Editor



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USMC VETERAN OWNED & OPERATED SINCE 1987



Cpl Larry D. Williams, "Echo" Co, 2nd Bn, 7th Marines, patrolling near Hill 190, Quang Nam Province, Vietnam in January 1968.

First Patrol in Vietnam

My first week with "Echo" Co, 2nd Bn, 7th Marines we were patrolling near Hill 190. This was probably one of my first patrols. In the photo (left) I am still wearing my stateside sateen utilities and had not yet been issued my jungle utilities although I am wearing my jungle boots. Notice on my backside at the waist is my poncho ready to use. This is the only remaining Vietnam photo I have. In 1984 I got upset with Vietnam and destroyed all the others.

Thanks again to the staff of *Leatherneck* for allowing me to share my stories. Thanks for sharing stories from other veterans from all wars. I'm sure your staff may think, at times, it is a thankless job, but be assured all of us read *Leatherneck* with enthusiasm and pride every month. Every one of you are doing a fantastic job at *Leatherneck*.

GySgt Larry D. Williams, USMC (Ret)
Yuma, Ariz.

Marines in the Pacific Volunteered

On page 68 of the August issue of *Leatherneck* a letter headlined, "Vietnam Veteran: Tell Our Story!" by Bill Aiello, incorrectly asserts, "About 70 percent of the Marines in World War II were drafted."

[continued on page 66]

COURTESY OF GYSGT LARRY D. WILLIAMS, USMC (RET)



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Lt Col Larkin Spivey, USMC (Ret)



LARKIN SPIVEY is a retired Marine and Vietnam veteran. He commanded Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines and Bravo Company, 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion in combat, and was a platoon commander in 2nd Force Reconnaissance Company prior to his Vietnam service. He was with the blockade force during the Cuban Missile Crisis, commanded the Guard Company at Marine Barracks 8th & I, and served at the White House. He also taught U.S. military history at The Citadel, and now writes full-time and resides in SC.



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
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18 August 2021

Marines,

As each of us tries to comprehend the speed and scope of events in Afghanistan this week, some may be struggling with a simple question: “Was it all worth it?” We see videos and photos, we read stories that bring back memories for some of us, and it becomes intensely personal. We value human life, and we want to believe that what Marines have done in Afghanistan made a difference. While Sergeant Major Black and I don’t presume to speak for you or your family, we would like to offer our thoughts, so you know where your senior leaders stand.

We both believe—without question—that your service was meaningful, powerful, and important. You answered the call to serve, proudly carrying the torch of so many generations of Marines before you. You put the good of others before yourself. You fought to defend your country, your family, your friends, and your neighbors. You fought to prevent terror from returning to our shores. You fought for the liberty of young Afghan girls, women, boys, and men who want the same individual freedoms we enjoy as Americans. You fought for the Marine to your left and the Marine to your right. You never let them down. You never, ever gave up. You lived with purpose, with intention. Whether you realize it or not, you set an example for subsequent generations of Marines—and Americans—by living our core values of Honor, Courage, and Commitment. Was it worth it? Yes. Does it still hurt? Yes.

Since 2001, Marines have served honorably and courageously to bring peace to the people of Afghanistan. You should take pride in your service—it gives meaning to the sacrifice of all Marines who served, including those whose sacrifice was ultimate.

Over the coming days and weeks, we encourage you to connect with your fellow Marines and their families—particularly those you served with overseas. This is a time to come together and give further meaning to our motto, Semper Fidelis. Let us remain faithful to our fellow Marines, faithful to our Marine families, and faithful to the memories of all who have sacrificed.

We are intensely proud to serve alongside you as your Commandant and Sergeant Major.

Semper Fidelis,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. H. Berger".

David H. Berger
General, U.S. Marine Corps
Commandant of the Marine Corps

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Troy E. Black".

Troy E. Black
SgtMaj, U.S. Marine Corps
Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps



MARINE RESERVE

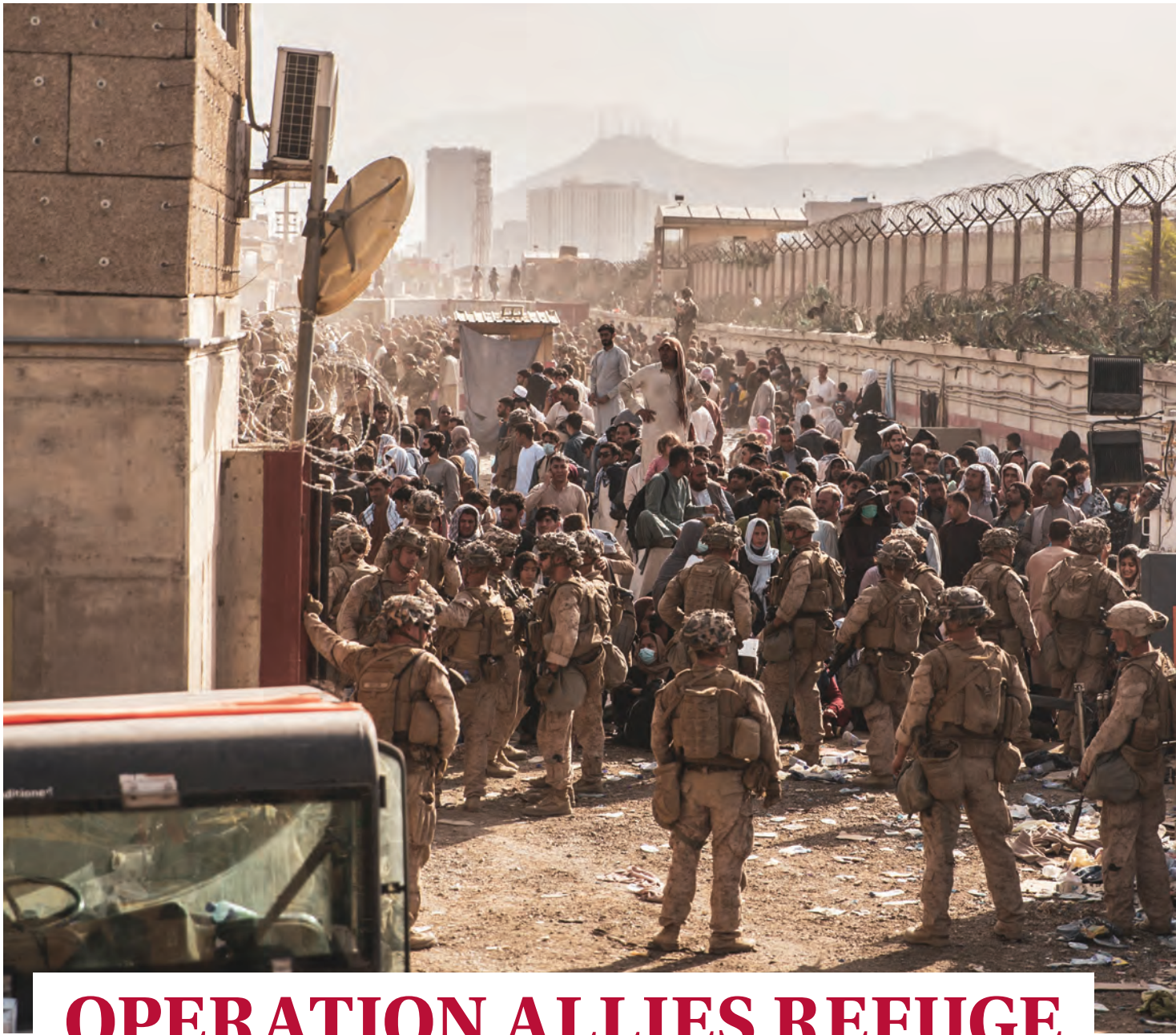


IT'S WHO YOU ARE

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OPERATION ALLIES REFUGE

Marines Provide Security, Support Evacuation Amid Taliban Takeover

Compiled by Sara W. Bock

As the Taliban captured Afghanistan's capital city of Kabul Aug. 15, forward-deployed Marines with the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, based at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, N.C., and Bahrain-based Marines with Task Force 51/5 were among the first troops to arrive at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul and the Hamid Karzai International Airport to secure those areas and assist the Department of State with an orderly drawdown of designated personnel. Evacuees included American civilians and Afghan interpreters who served with American servicemembers during Operation Enduring Freedom. By Aug. 20, they were among more than 5,000 U.S. troops on the ground in Kabul, participating in the largest noncombatant evacuation operation

in U.S. military history, according to the Department of Defense.

Their mission became a deadly one on Aug. 26 when a suicide bomber attacked the airport's crowded Abbey Gate, killing 13 U.S. servicemembers and at least 60 Afghan civilians and wounding numerous other servicemembers.

(Editor's note: See In Memoriam on page 64 for details.)

On Aug. 30, just before midnight, the last U.S. troops left Afghanistan, effectively bringing an end to America's longest war.

In a DOD statement, Marine Corps General Frank McKenzie, the commander of U.S. Central Command, credited the "determination, the grit, the flexibility and professionalism of the men and women of the U.S. military and our coalition partners who were able to rapidly combine efforts and evacuate so many under such difficult conditions."



Left: Marines with SP MAGTF-CR-CC provide assistance at an evacuation control checkpoint at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, Afghanistan, Aug. 21.



SGT SAMUEL RUIZ, USMC

Above: A Marine with the 24th MEU offers fresh water to a child awaiting evacuation from Kabul, Afghanistan, Aug. 20.



CAPT WILLIAM URBAN, USN

Above: Gen Frank McKenzie, the commander of U.S. Central Command, directs operations with BGen Farrell J. Sullivan, the commander of Task Force 51/5, at Hamid Karzai International Airport, Aug. 17.



1STLT MARK ANDRIES, USMC

Left: At Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, Marines assigned to the 24th MEU await a flight to Afghanistan on Aug. 17.



SGT ISAIAH CAMPBELL, USMC

A Marine assigned to the 24th MEU processes an evacuee at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, Aug. 15.



SSGT VICTOR MANCILLA, USMC

A Sailor attached to a Marine Corps unit checks two civilians during processing through an evacuee control checkpoint at Hamid Karzai International Airport, Aug. 18.





SGT SAMUEL RUIZ, USMC

Sgt Nicole L. Gee walks alongside young Afghan children as they prepare to board an evacuation flight out of Afghanistan, Aug. 24. Gee was one of 13 U.S. servicemembers supporting the evacuation who were tragically killed by a suicide bomber just outside the Hamid Karzai International Airport on Aug. 26.



SSGT VICTOR MANCILLA, USMC

Right: A Marine assigned to SPMAGTF-CR-CC lets an Afghan child try on a helmet while awaiting evacuation from Kabul, Afghanistan, Aug. 22.

Left: Marines secure the perimeter of Hamid Karzai International Airport, Aug. 20.



GYSGT MELISSA MARNELL, USMC



SRA BRANDON CRIBELAR, USAF

A Marine oversees the boarding process for Afghan evacuees, Aug. 19. The DOD supported the State Department in the departure of U.S. and allied civilian personnel from Afghanistan and helped evacuate Afghan allies safely until the U.S. officially ended its military presence in Afghanistan on Aug. 31. 🇺🇸

THE HILL

By Aaron Kirk

Editor's note: The following is an excerpt from "The Hill: A Memoir of War in Helmand Province" by Aaron Kirk. Kirk served as an infantry squad leader in Helmand Province, Afghanistan in 2011. While we were wrapping up this issue of the magazine, the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan was unfolding, making the timing of this piece even more relevant. On page 10, there is a collection of photos taken during the withdrawal and on page 64, we published the names of the servicemembers who were killed during the operation.

*Garmsir District,
Helmand Province, Afghanistan
2011*

I am scraping furrows in the ground, searching for a bomb. The device in my hands is called a sickle. Some call

it a Holley stick, after the gunny who invented it. It's a 6-foot-long piece of bamboo with a dull iron hook on the end. An opium farmer sold us the hook. We found the bamboo by the river. We used duct tape and nails to attach the

sickle part to the bamboo part. We used a rock to grind the edge off the sickle blade. Now the sickle pulls up wires but doesn't cut them.

You don't want to cut the wires.

I draw 2-foot by 2-foot Xs. I make sure the Xs intersect. I pull from far to near, left to right, then right to left. I make sure not to drop the sickle blade too heavily in the soft dirt. I move forward slowly. I step only where the Xs cross.

"Clear," I say to the guy behind me.

I backtrack through the cleared path. He takes my place. He carries a metal detector, and as he starts off in



CPL COLBY BROWN, USMC

Marines from 3rd Squad, 2nd Platoon, Co C, 1/3 move away from Patrol Base KT-4, Garmsir District, Helmand Province, Afghanistan in 2011.



Marines from Co C, 1/3 patrol near an Afghan National Army outpost in Nawa District, Helmand Province, Afghanistan, in 2010.

AARON KIRK

in line. Number five. Four men in front of me, three behind. Sometimes more behind me, but never more in front, unless I'm clearing or walking up to investigate something. Five is the best place to control. Six is my interpreter, Jack, walking a little too close, but I let it go. Seven carries the big radio that can reach our platoon back at Patrol Base Durzay. Eight is an Afghan National Army soldier in green camouflage.

I pull my knees up a bit more as my boots sink into the mud. I step on furrows. I ruin the work of whoever plowed the field.

The movement would have tired me a thousand fields and a hundred patrols ago, but now it is routine. My head moves side to side, noting walled compounds in the distance, rows of planted trees between every three or four fields, a motorcycle driving along a dirt road.

I turn and walk backwards for a moment. Though I am burdened by body armor and kit, I move with agility, like a jungle cat, choosing my steps carefully. I shrug my shoulders against the weight of my plate carrier. Check my radios, black and green. Rifle, safety on. Night vision monocular in its pouch. Casio on my left wrist, Garmin GPS on my right. Map and notebook in the slim kangaroo pocket for easy access.

an uncleared direction, he swings the metal detector's head back and forth, back and forth, rhythmically, stepping with each swing. His eyes scan not just the ground in front of him, but also the path ahead, which is not a path at all but open field.

We don't walk paths.

His pace is measured but not slow. He misses very little.

I remain stationary as his team leader, my number two, walks up and grabs the Holley stick from me. Wordlessly, routinely, he takes his place 5 yards behind the sweeper. He guides the sweeper. He nudges him this way and that, grunting rather than speaking. Another Marine passes, a medium machine gun on his shoulder, belts of ammunition across his chest. Tribal tattoos. He carries the Animal Mother vibe. Full Metal Jacket. Except, unlike Vietnam, he also carries 30 pounds of ceramic body armor and Oakley sunglasses.

Ten yards later a wiry, hairy man with a backpack trudges by. I hear the

**I pull from far to near,
left to right, then right to left.
I make sure not to drop the
sickle blade too heavily in
the soft dirt. I move forward
slowly. I step only where
the Xs cross.**

hum of the electronic Thor device he's carrying. The hum means it's working. The fact that we haven't been blown up with a radio-controlled bomb also means it's working. His neck is bright red, burned by the device's signal-blocking radiation. He'll get cancer someday, we're all sure of it, but at least we know the Thor is working. I also know it's working because it blocked my radio check with the Hill a few minutes ago before we cleared the goat-trail intersection. We don't walk trails, but sometimes we clear the intersections. Usually the sickleman does it. Sometimes I do it so he doesn't have to. Sometimes the Thor isn't working.

Ten yards after the Thor-man I fall

A Marine patrol approaches Patrol Base KT-4 in Garmsir District, Helmand Province, Afghanistan, in 2011.



COURTESY OF AARON KIRK

Rucksacks and equipment from Marines of Co C, 1/3 in a house the Marines occupied during Operation Mosharak, Marjah, Afghanistan, February 2010. (Photo by Aaron Kirk)

*There are four men in front of me.
I am a walking casevac neline.
Any moment now.
I am a bundle of nerve endings.
I won't hear it. One step, two step,
one step, two step.
I expect explosions.*

We do not walk where others walk. We do not walk trails. We do not walk paths. And yet with every step I expect blinding flames and deafening noise. I brace for ringing ears. I think about the instant I will be blown up. I am certain it will happen. I fear the earth erupting, and I know it is inevitable. In some ways, I long for it. Every second of every patrol, I wait for the ground to move. It doesn't matter how many bombs we find safely. There's always another one.

Four men, four chances to step on something before I do.

Our ranger-file formation stops. Nobody speaks. We take a knee and alternate facing left and right as the sickle-man pulls at something up ahead. I check my map. We're 200 meters from the third village of the day. I need to speak with the village elder before we can return to the Hill. I like him. He's not as bad as the one I met an hour ago.

I check the position of the sun. Midday. There will be *naan* bread and chai tea for us.

We rise. We walk.

We near the edge of the village. There are children playing outside of a house with tall brown mud walls and a blue door. They run to us, and as they do, they cross a footbridge and I begin to relax.

One less canal to ford.

A bridge is the perfect place to die. But today, because seven or eight children cross this bridge, it means we can cross it too. As we cross, children surround the four-man. One grabs his arm, tugging at his sleeve, trying to hold his hand. Four-man obliges.

They walk the bridge together, and as they do the child looks up at him and extends his other hand. Four-man smiles and pulls a blue pen out of his drop pouch. The child's eyes light up. He grabs the pen with orange, henna-dyed fingernails. We are safely across the bridge.



The author during a patrol in Garmsir District, Helmand Province, Afghanistan, 2011.

COURTESY OF AARON KIRK

On the other side we walk toward a small town square. There are people—men—around. People mean we can walk on the road without sweeping. So that's what we do, being careful to stay on hard-pack. Old men and young men in brown *dishdashas* and sparkling skullcaps smoke Pine cigarettes and smile at us from under a single metal awning. The mosque in the square is just another smooth-sided mud house with a red-and-yellow door and a megaphone-speaker mounted on a 20-foot stick. The outdoor prayer area is a raised mud bowl with edges. We don't sit on it.

Instead, my men flop down in a ditch and on walls around the square and on the edge of a well. They take off their helmets and their backpacks and rest their rifles against their legs or the ground. The machine gunner casually

relaxes into a position with a clear field of fire down the road.

"Jack, Nate, let's go inside," I say. I look at the corpsman. "Doc?"

He's a few feet from a cozy-looking wall with shade. He turns back to look at me. It's his turn for tea.

"You want to come inside?" I ask.

"Nah, I'm ... I'm good," he says. He reaches the wall and turns around. He pulls his bulky medical backpack off one strap at a time and lays it at his feet. Following the rest of the squad's example, he leans against the wall and slumps down slowly, haltingly, until he is seated on a ledge, his rifle buttstock-down in the dirt, his hands inside his flak jacket, chin in the air, breathing in heat that permeates even the shadows.

Jack, my interpreter, and Nate, the Marine who was carrying the Thor, join

I spend the time it takes for the village elder to arrive thinking about the relative danger of sitting in a village versus walking in fields. I reassure myself that we're perfectly safe relaxing in this mud town.

me in walking toward the house with the blue door. Nate leaves the Thor by the sickle-man. He turns it off to save the battery. I hope it works when we leave.

The village elder prefers to meet me in this small outer house. A few kids linger by the door. I nod to Jack. He speaks to them in Pashto. They speak back. He gives one of them a pen. The kid runs toward a compound at the edge of town. We wait by the door, smoking cigarettes.

I spend the time it takes for the village elder to arrive thinking about the relative danger of sitting in a village versus walking in fields. I reassure myself that we're perfectly safe relaxing in this mud town. Nobody is going to shoot at us here. Nobody can blow us up inside the village. The edges of this little hamlet should be part of the safe zone, too. They *have* to be. These farmers would know if there were a bomb nearby. How



COURTESY OF AARON KIRK

The author with a MK 153 shoulder-launched, multipurpose assault weapon inside an Afghan house during Operation Moshtarak, February 2010

could they not? After what happened before? After all their promises?

I would know if someone planted a bomb in my backyard.

Or would I?

I am not dead yet.

But I will be soon.

Not yet.

The village elder appears from around the corner of the building. I take off my right glove to shake his withered hand. He is white beard and leathered skin and decades of war and a pilgrimage to

Mecca. I am a 21-year-old from Colorado with a Blink-182 tattoo on my calf.

I say hello about four different ways in Pashto and he reciprocates. I make sure to smile. He motions to the house. We walk together, slowly, my interpreter on his other side, another Afghan leading us, Nate behind me, smoking a cigarette. The door to the house is small and creaks when we open it. The sole window holds no glass, but there are two metal bars crossed in the middle. I can't tell if they're for decoration. A child

Marines from Co C, 1/3 patrol in Garmsir District, Helmand Province, Afghanistan, in 2011.



CPL COLBY BROWN, USMC



CPL COLBY BROWN, USMC

The author and members of his squad, including an Afghan National Army Soldier, cross a canal in Garmsir in 2011.

rushes past me to grab some pillows from the corner and spread them on the floor. As the child runs out, we sit across from the elder, Jack to my left, Nate to my right. I keep my body armor on and lay my rifle across my lap. I reach for the pack of smokes I keep in my left shirt pocket but find it empty. The village elder offers me one and I accept.

I tell him *thank you* in Pashto.

He nods and smiles. What a pair of souls we are.

"It doesn't matter what I say to you," I say in English, smiling and waving around the room. Jack translates something into Pashto. It's probably not what I said because the village elder responds kindly.

"I really wish you would tell me who put that bomb on the road over by The Hill," I remark. I sigh. "It really bums me out that none of you guys will tell me that."

Jack looks at me quizzically. I give him a certain expression and he translates something into Pashto. The village elder talks this time. He goes on for some time. I turn to Jack.

"He says he likes the American patrols. He says there are no Taliban here."

"Great," I say. "That's great." I wonder if we should get smokes at the bazaar on the way back.

"He wants to know when you are going to leave."

"Why? Tell him I asked why he wants to know that." Jack translates. The elder speaks for even longer this time.

"He says the land around The Hill belongs to him."

"So?"

"He says he can't farm it while you are there."

"Why not?"

Jack says something in Pashto. The elder responds.

"He says people are afraid to go near the base. There is a lot of noise during the night."

I think for a long moment.

"Tell him we'll be gone in like, four months," I finally say.

"Are we supposed to tell him that?" Nate asks.

I shrug. "I don't know. Maybe not."

Jack relays my message. The elder's face seems to brighten.

There is a light knock at the door and two children enter, one carrying a plate of bread, the other a teapot and hard candies.

"Jack, tell him I said thanks for the tea."

Jack is drinking tea. He hasn't taken off his sunglasses. He tells the kid. Another smile. Another hand wave.

We sit in silence for a few moments and enjoy the respite from the sun.

Why am I here?

I am here because I have to be. Because of counterinsurgency. Because presence patrols and key leader engagements. I think the elder is here because I have a gun.

He's not a bad guy. I don't think he's Taliban. But I couldn't really say he's on my side, either. Not after what happened.

Speaking of which.

"Jack," I say. "Does he have any more information about who put that bomb by the bridge when we first got here? Did he ever find anything out about that?"

Patrol Base KT-4, Garmsir District,
Helmand Province, Afghanistan, 2011



AARON KIRK

Jack asks. The elder, as expected, shakes his head no.

“Of course, he doesn’t know anything,” Nate says. “Why would he? He just runs the place.” I concur with Nate’s assessment.

“Well, thanks anyway,” I say.

I place my tea back down on the saucer. “Jack, tell him we’re leaving.”

We get up and gather our gear. After we exit the house, I shake the elder’s hand. I shake the hand of the other Afghan man who was in our meeting and didn’t say a word. He is black-haired. He, too, has orange fingernails.

“I just want you to know,” I say, pulling him close, placing my other hand on top of the hand I’m shaking, smiling broadly. “I don’t blame you. I blame your leadership.”

Nate snorts. The politely confused Afghan thanks me and does the Pashtun hand-flip. We wave goodbye and walk toward the men. I point my finger in the air and make a few circles as the squad stands up and gathers its gear. I pull out my green radio.

“KT-4, Two-Three Actual, over.”

“This is KT-4, over.”

“Roger, Two-Three is moving, returning to base.”

“Roger, copy Two-Three RTB en route to the Hill, over.”

“Roger, solid. Out.”

We walk out of the village the opposite way we came in, single file, an expanding Slinky, 10 yards of dispersion between each of us. We avoid the bridge we don’t cross anymore and instead walk through the canal a few dozen meters downstream. The canal is too wide to jump and has water in it. I sigh as I slide down the embankment and land in murky water. I am soaked to my knees. My boots pull mud from the canal bed. I pull on sawgrass and haul

**As I swing wide around
the corner of a crumbling
compound wall, I get a
clear view of a great tan
mound of dirt rising from
the flatness around it.**

myself up the opposite side. I kick the mud from my boots and hope they dry before we get back. I’m not optimistic.

The way back to the Hill is more of the same. Rugged microterrain, dirt-piles to trip on. Date trees and field after field of poppies. The occasional wild dog. The spaces between the fields are covered in a knee-high yellow grass

that turns green as it approaches canals that have water.

As I swing wide around the corner of a crumbling compound wall, I get a clear view of a great tan mound of dirt rising from the flatness around it. Even at a mile’s distance I can make out its features: sheer cliff on one side, gentle slope on the other. On top, sagging Hesco barrier walls, camouflage netting, fire from the burn pit. My pulse quickens, the way it does every time I see it. My palms sweat as I think about all the steps I still must take before I get there. And as quickly as it appears, the landmark recedes, hidden behind compound walls, leaving in its place only a burning mental image and a familiar name:

Patrol Base KT-4.
The Hill.
Home.

Author’s bio: Aaron Kirk served as an infantry Marine from 2008 to 2012, deploying twice to Helmand Province, Afghanistan. He participated in Operation Moshtarak and conducted counterinsurgency operations in Nawa, Marjah and Garmsir district. A lifelong writer, “The Hill” is his first book and it can be purchased on Amazon, Barnes & Noble or through his website, Memoirsofagrunt.com

Marine Shares His Story, Predicts Brighter Future for the Next Generation of Afghan Refugees

By Capt Seree Chang, USMC

The recent stories coming out of Afghanistan are heartbreaking. The image of a helicopter evacuating American citizens from the U.S. Embassy in Kabul gave me a sense of what my grandfather must have felt when the United States evacuated the U.S. Embassy in Saigon in 1975.

The military cargo aircraft at the Hamid Karzai International Airport, surrounded by desperate Afghans, brought back painful memories for the hundreds of Hmong Americans who had witnessed an airplane taking off from a Vietnamese airport without them. My family was one of those left behind after the fall of Saigon in 1975.

It is my hope that my story can be shared with all the Afghan refugees fleeing political persecution, from a country they once called home. Their journey to a new life in a new country is the start of their pursuit of the American dream. My story is an example of that dream. I am a refugee who fled political persecution, and I am a captain in the United States Marine Corps. This was possible due to the United States granting my family political asylum because my grandfather pledged allegiance to and fought on behalf of the United States during the Secret War.

Recently in an auditorium at the Army Logistics University (ALU) in Fort Lee, Va., the cadre spoke to a room full of Army captains, international officers and three Marine officers including myself. We were all attending the Logistics Captains Career Course and were halfway through the six-month course. They asked, “Who is currently staying at the Holiday Inn Express on post? Please raise your hand.”

I hesitantly raised my hand. I looked around and noticed that I was the only officer who was not an international officer staying at the Holiday Inn Express on post. The cadre continued, “If you are staying at the Holiday Inn Express on post, you have 96 hours to vacate ... for the Afghan refugees that are inbound to the United States.”

There was an immediate sense of curiosity throughout the auditorium. The cadre spoke about America’s moral obligation to bring all Afghan nationals to the United States who, in one way or another, assisted the United States military during the 20-year war in Afghanistan. This includes interpreters, contractors and their families. He answered questions regarding the upgraded Force Protection Condition (FPCON) status, increased security posture surrounding ALU, and general concerns about the relocation of the Afghan refugees to Fort Lee.

As the conversation continued in the auditorium, my mind immediately went somewhere else. Somewhere else, back in 1991, when my family immigrated to the United States as political refugees from a war that has long since been a secret from the history books taught

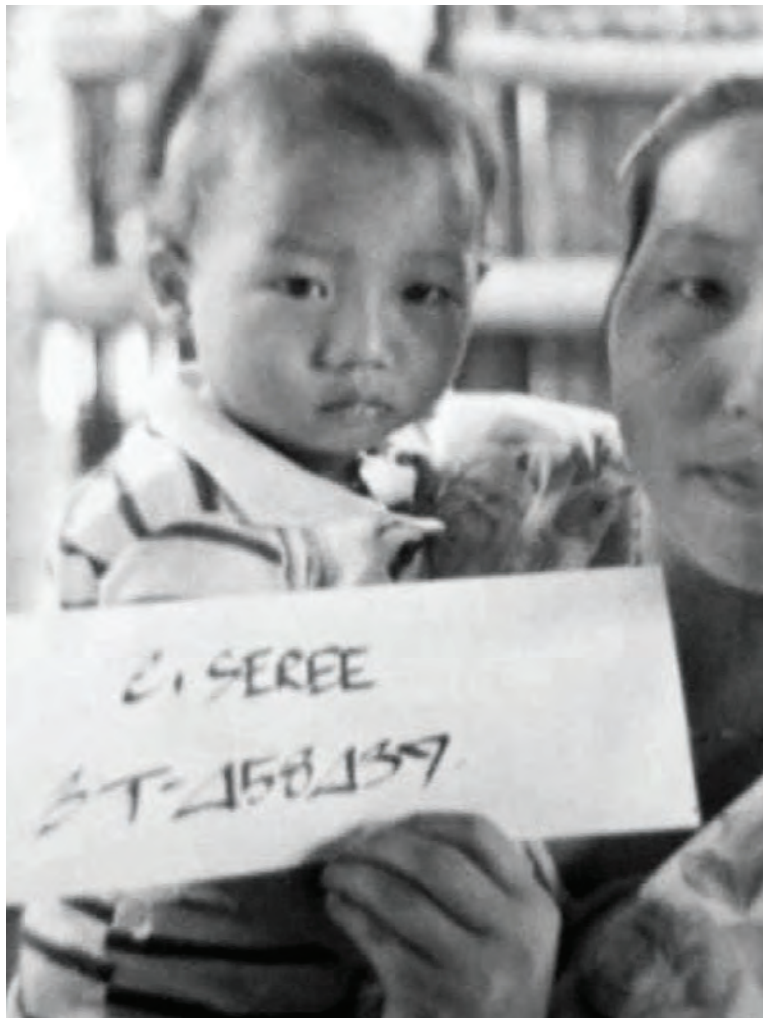


In 1991, Seree Chang (above) was a toddler living in a U.N. refugee camp in Thailand. His family immigrated to the United States as political asylum seekers in 1991. Today, he is a Marine captain (left) currently serving at Camp Johnson, N.C.

throughout schools in America. In the shadow of the Vietnam War, it was simply a war known as the Secret War.

When the Vietnam War began in 1961, the United States was involved in another war within the neighboring country of Laos. This war involved the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Laotian government, and the nomadic Hmong people that lived within the mountainous regions of Laos.

The Hmong people are an indigenous ethnic group that live all throughout Southeast Asia. This includes Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. The Hmong people have no official country, no official government nor do they have an official flag. This was presumably one of the reasons why the CIA started to recruit, train and provide military weapons to more than 19,000 Hmong men to



Seree Chang's mother, Khou Thao, holds up a sign displaying her young son's refugee number at a U.N. refugee camp in Thailand in 1991.

fight on behalf of the Americans against the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and the Laotian communist group, "Pathet Lao," during the Vietnam War.

This secret CIA-sponsored operation involved counter attacks and guerilla warfare against the NVA and the Pathet Lao along the portion of the Ho Chi Minh trail that enters into Laos. The Hmongs aligned themselves with the United States to stop the spread of communism through Southeast Asia. It was there that the Hmong soldiers conducted counter attacks against the NVA and Pathet Lao, rescued down American pilots, and assisted in intelligence gathering.

One of those Hmong soldiers recruited by the CIA was my grandfather. His primary job was intelligence gathering along the Ho Chi Minh trail. His involvement with the CIA sealed my family's fate to the mercy of the United States. It was his decision that ultimately brought my family to the United States.

When the United States withdrew from the Vietnam War in 1975, they left the Hmong soldiers who fought alongside the Americans to fend for themselves. Vietnam fell into the hands of the Vietnamese Communist Party and two years later Laos fell to the communist party supported by the Vietnamese Communist Party. The Hmong people were left to fend for themselves against two countries that saw them as traitors for fighting alongside the United States. Fearing persecution and retaliation, the Hmong people hid in the jungle of Laos and Vietnam after the United States withdrew their troops. Their only escape was to cross the Mekong River into United Nations refugee camps in Thailand.

One of those Hmong soldiers recruited by the CIA was my grandfather. His primary job was intelligence gathering along the Ho Chi Minh trail. His involvement with the CIA sealed my family's fate to the mercy of the United States.

My grandfather knew that if he remained in the jungle of Laos, the Laotian communist military would find him and my family. The consequences would be death. Fearing certain death, my grandfather decided to trek west toward Thailand. My family eventually crossed the Mekong River into Thailand and settled in a United Nations refugee camp called Ban Vinai. While in the camp, I was given a refugee number. That number was BT-57-39. We remained there until 1991 when the United States finally granted asylum to my family.

Although I do not remember much of the events leading up to my family's relocation to the United States, I can only imagine that back in 1991, there was a young military officer who had to give up his hotel room to accommodate my family's journey to the United States. Just as I had to give up my hotel room to accommodate the next family of refugees fleeing political persecution.

My hope is that this article will inspire the young Afghan refugees who were lucky enough to be granted political asylum to come to the United States to live the American dream. It is also my hope that if I can live the American dream after swapping my refugee number BT-58039 to O-3E in the United States Marine Corps, the possibilities for the next generation of Afghan Americans are endless.

Editor's note: All photos are courtesy of Capt Seree Chang, USMC.

Author's bio: Capt Chang has served in the Marine Corps for more than 12 years. He is currently an instructor and company commander at the Ground Supply School, Marine Corps Combat Service Support Schools, Camp Johnson, N.C. 🇺🇸

In Every Clime and Place

Compiled by Sara W. Bock

NORFOLK, VA.

Marines Rehearse Response To Destructive Weather Crises

Marines and Sailors with the 2nd Marine Logistics Group and II Marine Expeditionary Force supported a destructive weather mission rehearsal in support of Defense Support of Civil Authorities (DSCA) requirements at Naval Base Norfolk, Va., July 19-23.

The exercise certified the rapid embarkation of Marines and Sailors with the II MEF Maritime DSCA Task Force (MDTF) aboard the Norfolk-based USS *Arlington* (LPD-24), a *San Antonio*-class amphibious transport dock, to validate deployment requirements in preparation for future destructive weather events along the East Coast.

The II MEF MDTF is designed to respond to a destructive weather crisis within 96 hours in support of civilian authorities and is made up of elements from the Marine Corps Installations East region.

“Mission rehearsals and other exercises similar to what is happening this week in



LCPL SCOTT JENKINS, USMC

LCpl Jonas Cantu checks the vehicle loading plan aboard USS *Arlington* (LPD-24) during a DSCA mission rehearsal at Naval Base Norfolk, Va., July 21. The rehearsal provided an opportunity for participating Marines and Sailors to prepare for potential missions during the 2021 hurricane season.

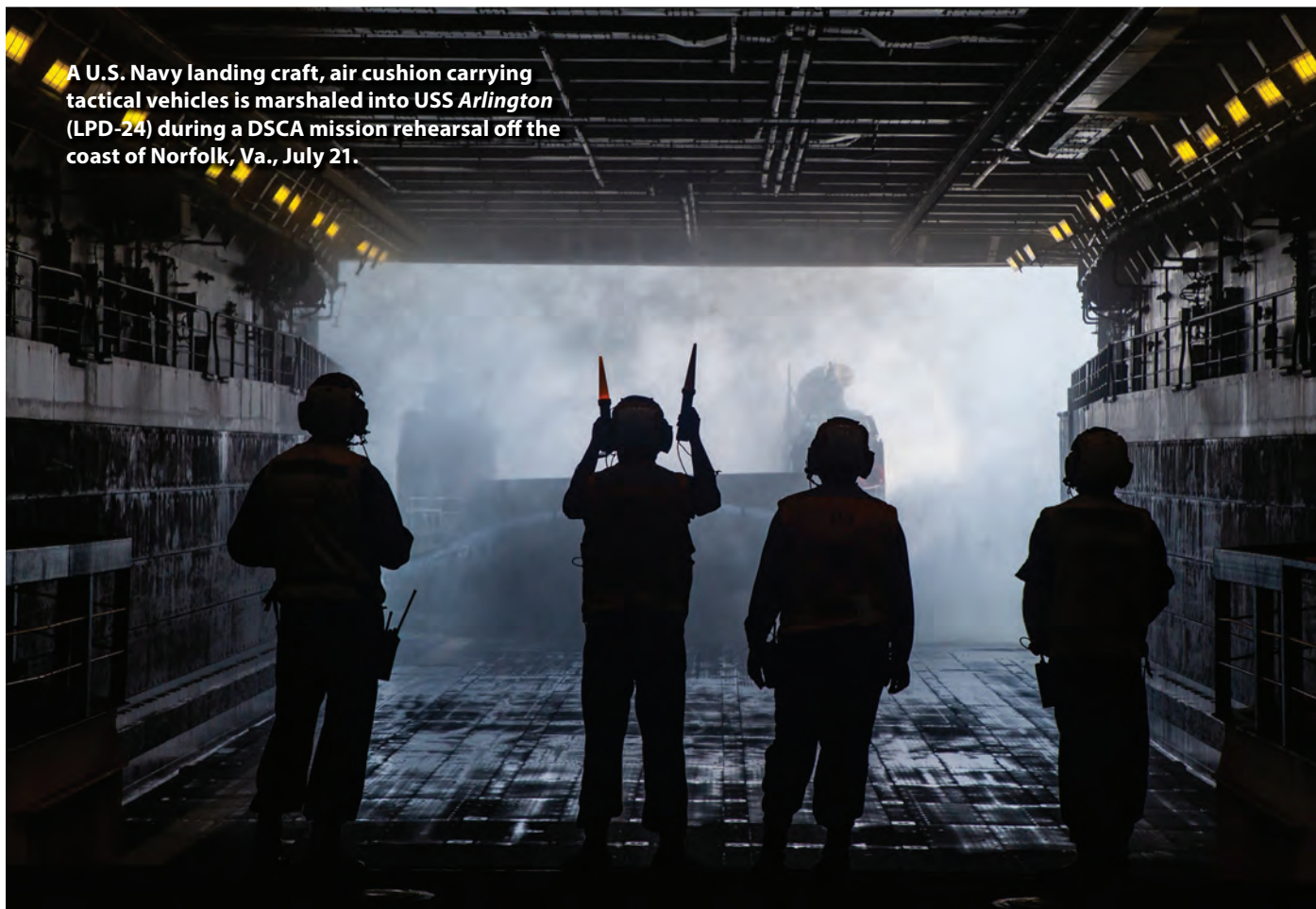
Norfolk, help fine-tune our readiness ... and ultimately enable our ability to provide rapid aid to afflicted populations,” said the commanding officer of CLB-22, Lieutenant Colonel Luke A. Sauber, during the exercise.

Aside from exercising logistical pro-

cedures for a DSCA mission, Marines worked with Sailors from USS *Arlington*, Expeditionary Strike Group 2, and Navy Expeditionary Combat Command to refine expeditionary naval command and control capabilities.

1stLt Kevin Stapleton, USMC

A U.S. Navy landing craft, air cushion carrying tactical vehicles is marshaled into USS *Arlington* (LPD-24) during a DSCA mission rehearsal off the coast of Norfolk, Va., July 21.



LCPL SCOTT JENKINS, USMC



SGT ANDY MARTINEZ, USMC

SAN DIEGO
Marine, Coast Guardsmen
Work Together During
Ship-to-Shore Comm Exercise

A four-day exercise at Coast Guard Sector San Diego, Calif., brought together 13 Marines with Marine Wing Communications Squadron 48, Marine Forces Reserve, and the crew of Coast Guard Cutter *Haddock*, July 22-25.

“We try to maintain partnerships between the services,” said Coast Guard Commander Roy Slapkunas, the chief of response and air station operations officer for Coast Guard Sector San Diego. “In December of 2020, the Advantage at Sea was signed by the Chief of Naval Operations, the Commandant of the Marine Corps and the Commandant of the Coast Guard; it talks about the three seagoing services utilizing each other’s strengths in order to present a more efficient and effective missionary force.”

The Coast Guard Integrated Amphibious Exercise (CGIAX) was created in part by Marine Corps First Lieutenant Kuba Waskowski, the operations officer of MWCS-48 Detachment A, in order to better prepare Reserve Marines to fight in austere environments and ensure freedom of the seas.

“The U.S. Coast Guard is a part of the U.S. military—they do not operate any differently just because they fall under the Department of Homeland Security,” said Wasowski. “They were incredibly helpful and extremely open to the idea of this exercise from the very beginning.”

During the exercise, Marines utilized a variety of equipment to effectively communicate using high frequency, very high

frequency and ultra-high frequency radio waves in an unconventional manner.

“I have learned quite a bit during this diverse training opportunity, particularly equipment from sections I don’t normally get to work with,” said Lance Corporal Vincente Bojorquez, a network administration with MWCS-48. “I’ve gotten to work with transmissions [radio operators] for the first time, and I even got the chance to do radio checks and work with different call signs. It has been very beneficial to me, and I feel I have become a more well-rounded Marine.”

Despite CGIAX being created to meet

Marines with MWCS-48 take down a Very Small Aperture Terminal system during CGIAX at Coast Guard Sector San Diego, Calif., July 25. The squadron enabled ship-to-shore communications with the Coast Guard in support of a notional amphibious operation.

one of many squadron-level mission essential tasks, MWCS-48 plans to continue expanding this unique training opportunity and increase the scope of the maritime exercise.

“This exercise was intended to be looked at as the basic architecture to support the Tri-Service Maritime Strategy, Advantage at Sea,” said Wasowski. “This is the basics. You often hear Marines say, ‘Crawl, walk, run.’ This is the crawl phase: We have shown that it can be done.”

LCpl Ashley Corbo, USMC

TABUK, SAUDI ARABIA
Saudi, U.S. Forces Complete
Amphibious Training

U.S. Marines and Sailors assigned to the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit and *Iwo Jima* Amphibious Ready Group completed bilateral theater amphibious combat rehearsal (TACR) training with the Royal Saudi Land Forces in Tabuk, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, June 26.

TACR training began June 7, when U.S. naval forces conducted amphibious assault exercises. The three-week event included live-fire training, parachute jumps, explosive ordnance disposal ranges, medical drills and convoys.

“Training alongside our Saudi partners



SSGT MARK MORROW, USMC

Marines and Sailors with the 24th MEU assess the status of a simulated patient during casualty response training as part of a TACR in Tabuk, Saudi Arabia, June 15. TACR integrates U.S. Navy and Marine Corps assets to exercise a range of critical combat-related capabilities, both afloat and ashore.



MAJ THOMAS PERNA, USMC

Col Brian Ecarius, the senior representative from U.S. Marine Corps Forces, South, addresses a group of U.S. and partner nation Marines and Sailors during a question-and-answer session as part of the annual Multinational Amphibious Planning Conference in Ancon, Peru, July 16.

was a rewarding experience,” said Colonel Eric D. Cloutier, the commanding officer of the 24th MEU. “This bilateral exercise has collectively strengthened Saudi and U.S. military readiness and reinforced our common interests of security and stability throughout this region.”

TACR training integrates Navy and Marine Corps assets to practice and rehearse a range of critical logistics, aviation and ground combat-related capabilities, both afloat and ashore, highlighting the expeditionary and quick-response capabilities of the MEU.

As an inherently flexible maneuver force, capable of supporting routine and contingency operations, the presence of the ARG/MEU demonstrates the United States’ commitment to regional partners and maritime security.

Capt Kelton Cochran, USMC

ANCON, PERU

Multinational Partners Share Tactics For Amphibious Exercises

U.S. Marines were among those in attendance at the Peruvian Marine Corps’ second annual Multinational Amphibious Planners Conference at the new International Amphibious Training Center in Ancon, Peru, July 16.

Partner nation naval infantry representatives from Peru, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Uruguay and the United States gathered to share experiences, tactics and lessons learned related to amphibious operations. The collection of regional partners briefed and discussed topics on amphibious capabilities, emerg-

ing threats, and organizational changes and challenges, all of which allowed participants to share institutional knowledge to enhance partners’ capabilities throughout the Latin American and Caribbean region.

“Discussing key topics with our partners about how each of us operate allows us all to benefit while developing our relationships and becoming more interoperable,” said Major Matthew Paull, U.S. Marine Corps Personnel Exchange Program officer with the Peruvian Marine Corps. “Being alongside like-minded naval infantries and having educated discussions is extremely important.”

The International Amphibious Training Center was established in 2019 to create a facility that serves as the model for Latin American and Caribbean partners to train and enhance their amphibious capabilities through education and practical application.

The training center aims to serve as the amphibious center of excellence, ultimately allowing Peruvian naval forces to export security not only for countries in the Western Hemisphere, but with hopes of expanding their professional and institutional knowledge globally.

The primary objective of this Multinational Amphibious Planning Conference was to maintain and develop the professional relationships of amphibious forces in the hemisphere while having a meaningful dialogue on key aspects of amphibious operations, planning considerations and most important, interoperability.

“Our vision toward the future is to

have an integrated task organization with the purpose of being the most flexible, rapid, secure and effective response of our country against any kind of threat, natural disaster or crisis,” said Peruvian Navy Captain Eduardo Diaz, commander of the Peruvian amphibious brigade. “Also, we look forward to being part of a multinational amphibious task force to fight against our common threats and to support the endangered communities who are suffering as a result of a disaster.”

The conference also covered topics on naval integration, amphibious force design, the current and future operating environment and how naval infantries are designing capabilities to operate effectively. Members of the Peruvian naval infantry, as well as servicemembers from Argentina, Brazil and the United States who are embedded as Personnel Exchange Program officers in the Peruvian Navy, presented briefs during the conference, which inspired multinational discussion.

“Interoperability with partners while acknowledging each of our strengths and areas to improve is essential to the success of our naval cooperation,” said Colonel Brian Ecarius, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, South’s senior representative at the conference. “Peru has done an outstanding job at developing a capable amphibious force and cultivating an environment of partnerships and professional education through its International Amphibious Training Center.”

Maj Thomas Perna, USMC



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A Leader Who Molds You

By Sgt Carlos A. Ramos, USMC

Editor's note: The following article is an honorable mention from the 2021 Leatherneck Writing Contest. Major Richard A. "Rick" Stewart, USMC (Ret) sponsored the contest, which is open to enlisted Marines through the Marine Corps Association. Upcoming issues of Leatherneck will feature other honorable mention entries.

I joined the United States Marine Corps for several reasons. I grew up with two parents—a mother who stayed home and maintained the house, and a father who was an illegal immigrant who did whatever he could to get us by. We lived in a terrible neighborhood where seeing gangs and drugs was part of our social norm. My dad was always gone, and my brothers usually ganged up on me and if I didn't do whatever they told me to, I would get beat up. This resulted in me not having much of a leader or role model in my life as I grew up.

Don't get me wrong; my dad has the biggest heart and would do anything for his family, and I would be lucky to be half the father he was to us growing up. I'm talking about a leader who is not only there to make sure you're taken care of, but a leader who molds you and prepares you for what's to come. A leader who takes you outside of your comfort zone to help you grow—someone like Gunnery Sergeant Roberto Devor, whom I met a year after I joined the Marine Corps in 2015. GySgt Devor is an outstanding leader who brings great motivation, empathy, and discipline to his Marines.

GySgt Devor joined the Marine Corps on June 10, 2013. No, that is not a typo. GySgt Devor has been meritoriously promoted multiple times. He was meritoriously promoted to lance corporal on Sept. 9, 2013, again to sergeant on Nov. 2, 2015, and just recently meritoriously promoted to gunnery sergeant on Jan. 2. GySgt Devor has always been a hard worker and has done his best to look out

for the Marines under his charge. Before writing this essay, I reached out to him and asked a few questions to help build up the topics I wanted to discuss. When I asked what he did differently from his peers to be selected so many times for meritorious promotions, he said he was never afraid of owning up to his mistakes, taking the blame and putting himself out there. He volunteers as much as he can and always carries humility everywhere he goes.

I believe a big part of GySgt Devor's success is the way he works just as hard to take care of the Marine as much as he does the mission. He believes Marine leaders have two tasks—mission accomplishment and troop welfare. He says, "We cannot have a success in mission without

**I believe a big part of
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the welfare of a Marine. Marines are hard chargers." According to Devor, "Marines can deal with bad leaders for a time, but they will eventually break, refuse to push harder and the mission will suffer." There are times when a leader has to put the Marine first in order to get the best outcome in the assigned mission. I experienced this firsthand back in 2018 when then-Sgt Devor was my platoon sergeant.

When we worked together at Marine Air Support Squadron 3 (MASS-3), I was going through hard times with my family that may not have been considered "family emergencies" in the Marine Corps' eyes; however, Devor went out of his way and did everything he could to make sure my family and I were taken care of. It was

October 2018 when I received a call from my sister saying that our father had been deported. My world came to a brief pause as I had a million thoughts going through my head. "What's going to happen to my 13-year-old sister who just started high school? Is my mom going with him? What will my family think of me since I'm in the military, is there anything I can do?"

After a few minutes, the only thing I could think of was to call Sgt Devor. He empathized with me and assured me that I would be with my family soon. It wasn't even an hour before he submitted a leave request for me that allowed me to go back home and be with my family during that hard time. I was able to help my mom pack as she followed my dad's journey back to Mexico. My 13-year-old sister would not be afforded a good education there, so Sgt Devor helped me do whatever I had to in order to get temporary custody of my sister and have her move in with me and my family. Although she was only with us for a short amount of time, Sgt Devor made sure she was taken care of. That meant the world to me, and I know my family appreciated it especially since it was only a two-hour drive for my mom to pick up my sister on the weekends and take her to be with our dad.

The day I got that call from my sister, I'm sure we had something going on at work. Devor knew whatever it was, the mission would not suffer if I had to take a few days off to take care of a family emergency. I'm positive there has been several situations like this throughout the military, but whether or not the individual's leadership handled the situation the same, I cannot say. I just know that I am forever grateful for the leadership that I had at the time. GySgt Devor has not only shown me how to express empathy to my Marines, but also how to instill discipline into them without having to belittle or abuse the power that comes with rank.

Everyone wants to belt up in the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP), whether for promotions or for personal



COURTESY OF SGT CARLOS A. RAMOS, USMC

Cpl Carlos A. Ramos, left, and then-Sgt Roberto Devor attend a going away celebration for Sgt Devor at Del Mar Beach on Camp Pendleton in 2019. Devor had just received his second red tab for the Marine Corps Arts Program.

discipline and pride, but not everyone is willing to put in the work. Then again, you also have those instructors who run you into the dirt but don't give you a reason as to why you're doing the crazy things that makes you lose the motivation and drive to belt up in the course that you had in the beginning. GySgt Devor is a Martial Arts Instructor/Trainer (MAIT), and when I asked him what inspired him to get involved with MCMAP, he said, "I have a lot of reasons that MCMAP is important to me; my brother started me on this before I was even a Marine. He served for 13 years, and for more than 10 of them, he was an Instructor in the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program. I saw him evolve as not only a Marine, but as a man and a father. It put him in a position to constantly challenge Marines to be better, train on a massive scale, and develop on his leadership with a wide range of Marines. We rely on a three-legged approach in MCMAP (physical, mental, and character) and that helped him change the way he approached situa-

tions in his personal life. I had a lot of other leaders in the program who taught me what to do and what I didn't want to do if I was ever given the opportunity. With the three-legged approach, GySgt Devor trained us hard physically and mentally, and it was not easy at all. With that being said, it did help us build character, discipline, and most importantly those that were on a course with him will NEVER refer to a MCMAP technique as a "move." While enrolled in his courses, you never left a training day questioning what the purpose of that day's training was. You left a better Marine than when you walked in that day. GySgt Devor has belted up over 60 Marines (not including multiple belts) and 13 Martial Arts Instructors. Although his courses are challenging, students grow as Marines leaders. GySgt Devor is all about challenges.

GySgt Devor graduated Recruiters School back in December 2019. When I asked what made him want to be a recruiter, he said, "I wanted to be a recruiter for an opportunity to help others in a sit-

uation that they needed to get away from. Also, it was a challenge. Out of every SDA [special duty assignment], no one ever talked about how much they loved recruiting. Everyone talks bad on recruiting, so I was like f--- it. Let's do it. It was a chance to filter what comes into the Corps and change lives at the root." GySgt Devor has been dominating his SDA and as a production recruiter, has recruited a total of 32 individuals in 11 months. As a station commander, he has facilitated the entry of 88 individuals into the delayed entry program and has made a total of 69 Marines thus far. I don't know what his everyday schedule looks like, but I have heard stories from my leadership about how long your days are on recruiting and how stressful the assignment can be. However, GySgt Devor is not one to make excuses. He shows up and gets the job done alongside his Marines.

It's great to know that I have had the honor of serving with such great leaders and mentors such as Staff Sergeant Israel Prater, SSgt Juan Pablo, Sgt Joshua Barbian, and many more that I would love to discuss. Though they wear different ranks, all have had an impact in my professional and personal life. In my final questions to GySgt Devor, I asked about his reasons for success and what motivated him to keep going. He responded humbly with, "I'm successful because of the Marines I have. Plain and simple. I train with them and grind with them and they trust me to look out for them. Their success individually is what keeps me motivated. I love seeing them get rewarded, promoted and advancing in their personal lives. That is what makes me get out of bed in the morning day after day. I am a product of the amazing Marines that I have served with and have had the pleasure of mentoring."

My family and I are thankful for all Gunny Devor has taught me and done for me. He has made me a better leader, and everything I received from him, I will take with me everywhere I go and with everyone I meet, whether that's in the Marine Corps or out in the civilian world. Thank you, GySgt Devor, for allowing me to dedicate this essay to you. Semper Fidelis.

Author's bio: Sgt Carlos A. Ramos was born in Los Angeles, Calif., and joined the Marine Corps on Sept. 14, 2015. He was stationed with Marine Air Support Squadron 3 from 2016-2019 and is currently assigned to Marine Tactical Air Control Squadron 18 in Okinawa, Japan, as a platoon sergeant.

“This is My Rifle”

From the Hill Fights in Vietnam to Today: The History of the M16

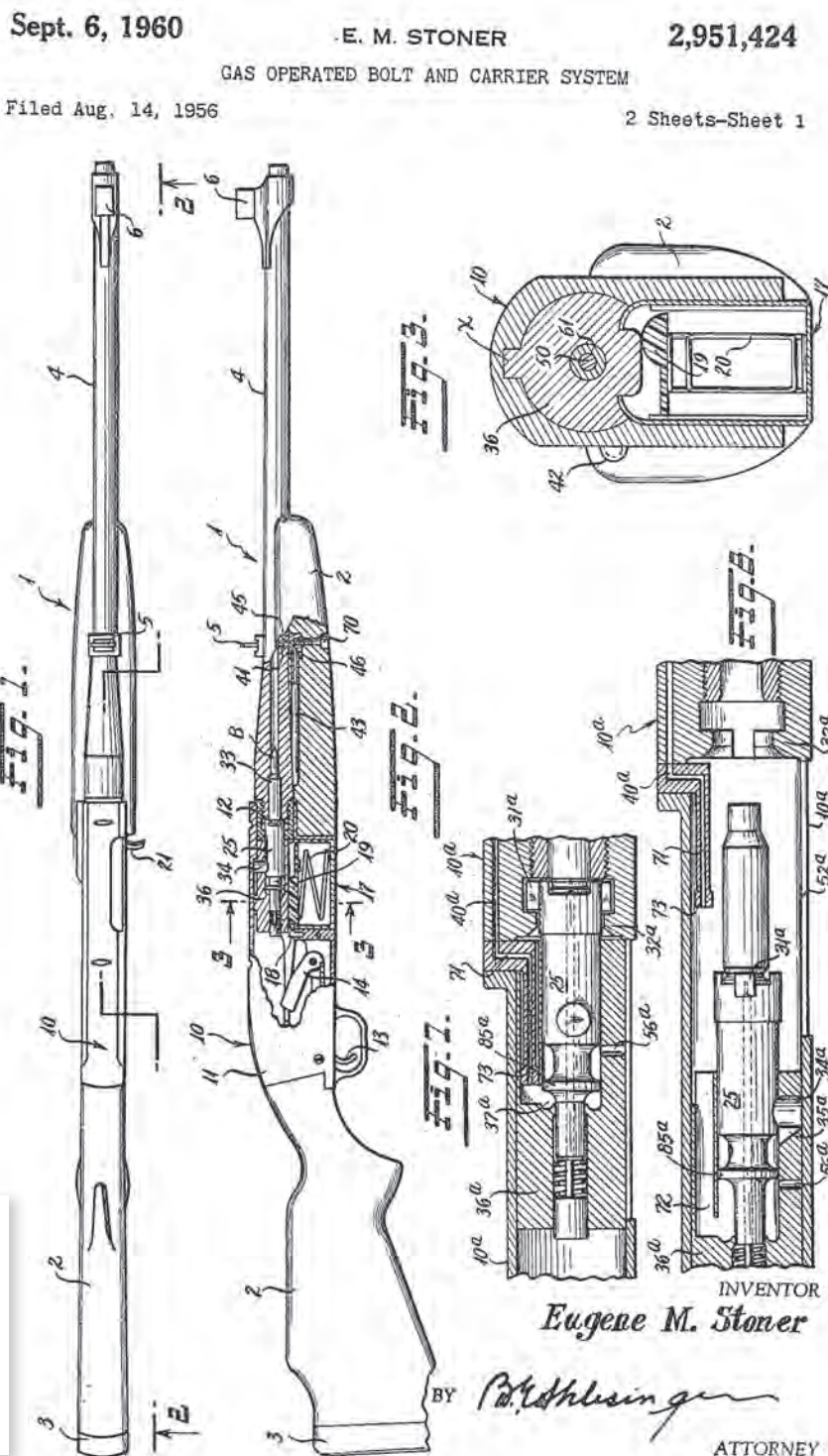
By Sam Lichtman

The date, April 30, 1967. The place, a few miles northwest of Khe Sanh. The 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 3rd Marine Division are preparing to assault Hill 881 and dislodge the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) forces emplaced in fortified bunkers on the hill. With 105 mm artillery at their backs and the new M16 rifles in hand, it seems like nothing can stand in their way as they attempt to take the hill.

Within just a few short hours, however, nothing is going according to plan. Because the defenders on the hill are more numerous and far better dug in than anticipated, the air strikes and artillery bombardment preceding the assault have had little practical effect. To make matters worse, Marines have been experiencing serious problems with their high-tech M16 rifles—critical malfunctions are causing them to seize up in the heat of combat. It seems nearly inconceivable that the U.S. military would issue fatally flawed equipment, but the Battle of Hill 881 and several other conflicts during the Vietnam War serve as grim reminders that it did indeed happen.

So, why were soldiers and Marines using rifles that often malfunctioned in battle? To understand how and why this happened, we need to travel more than a decade back in time and thousands of miles away to a small office complex in Hollywood, Calif.

Drawings from Eugene Stoner’s original patent for the hybrid gas system used in the AR-10, AR-15, and other weapons. Often referred to as “direct impingement,” this arrangement is also known as an “internal piston,” as the bolt and bolt carrier together perform the functions of a true gas piston found in more conventional designs.



The first AR-15 was an impressive weapon for its time. It was demonstrated to have better reliability and accuracy than the M14 while being nearly two pounds lighter. The new .223 ammunition was much lighter and produced less recoil than 7.62 NATO.

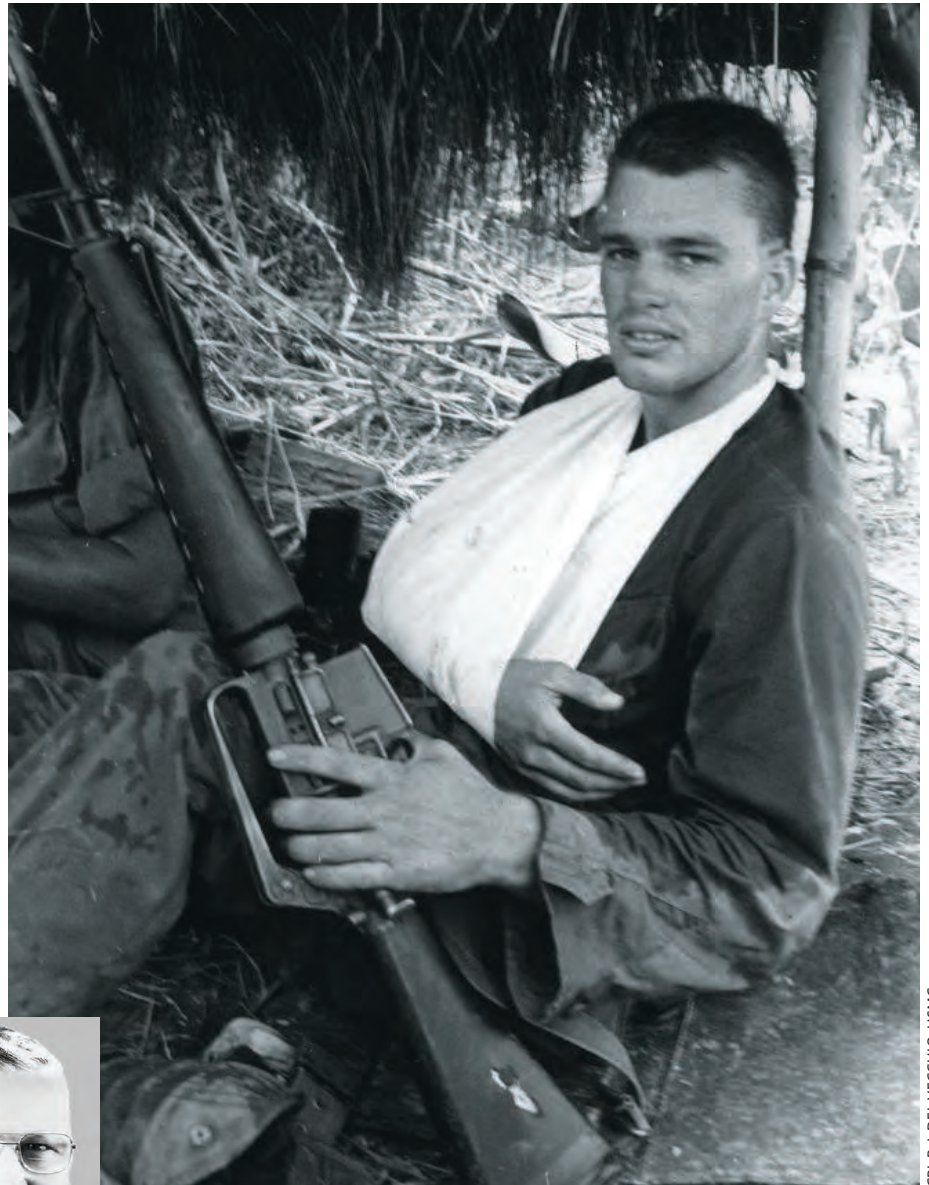
Fairchild Airplane and Engine Company created its ArmaLite division in 1954 to design and produce firearms. As a subsidiary of a major aerospace contractor in the 1950s, ArmaLite's designs were unconventional and highly innovative. Where a rifle was traditionally constructed out of a milled or pressed sheet steel receiver mated to a steel barrel in a wood or metal stock, ArmaLite's AR-1, AR-5, and AR-7 rifles made heavy use of space-age materials like aluminum and fiberglass.

In the mid-1950s, ArmaLite engineer Eugene Stoner designed a revolutionary new military rifle he hoped would replace the venerable M1 Garand. Stoner's rifle, designated "AR-10," was a radical departure from conventional designs. Its barrel, operating components, and stock were all arranged in a straight line, transferring recoil directly back into the shooter's shoulder and minimizing muzzle rise on full-auto. With its aluminum receiver, fiberglass furniture, and composite barrel, the AR-10 was a full pound *or more* lighter than any of its more mainstream competitors. Unfortunately, military trials showed that the AR-10 was perhaps too far ahead of its time, and without years of refinement behind it, the rifle suffered a number of teething troubles which couldn't be corrected quickly enough to prevent its disqualification from the trials. The U.S. Army would ultimately go on to adopt the T44E4 prototype, essentially just an improved M1, as the M14 rifle.

But all was not lost for Eugene Stoner and ArmaLite. The Department of Defense was investigating a small-caliber, high-velocity rifle cartridge concept based on research and testing from the Aberdeen Proving Grounds in the early 1950s, and they wanted ArmaLite to help develop the new ammunition and a lightweight rifle to fire it. While Stoner worked on the design for the projectile itself, ArmaLite engineers L. James "Jim" Sullivan and Robert Fremont worked with Remington on the design for the case. What they came up with was a more powerful version of the .222 Remington capable of propelling a 55-grain full-metal jacket projectile at an astounding 3,250 feet per second from a 20-inch barrel.



Eugene Stoner



CPL R.J. DEL VECCHIO, USMC

PFC Tommy Gribble displays his M16 rifle, which was hit by a round from an enemy AK-47 on Sept. 6, 1968. The round pierced Gribble's forearm, passing between both bones, then smashed through the Marine's rifle stock. Gribble, assigned to Co I, 3rd Bn, 5th Marines, was walking point during a patrol in Vietnam when the round hit.

To go with this new so-called ".222 Remington Special" or ".223 Remington" ammunition, Sullivan and Fremont created a new rifle based on the AR-10. It used the same operating principle and retained many of the same desirable features as its predecessor, but testing showed that the new prototype was capable of superior accuracy and reliability. They called it the AR-15.

The first AR-15 was an impressive weapon for its time. It was demonstrated to have better reliability and accuracy than

the M14 while being nearly two pounds lighter. The new .223 ammunition was much lighter and produced less recoil than 7.62 NATO, allowing infantrymen to carry twice as many rounds and fire accurately in both semi-automatic and fully automatic modes. A 1959 test by the Army showed that a squad of five to seven men armed with AR-15s was just as effective as an 11-man squad armed with M14s.

Despite its lighter weight and lower recoil, the new high-velocity ammunition



A Marine armed with an M16A1 checks in with his command post via field radio during Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada, Oct. 25, 1983.

produced devastating wounds in soft targets. Whereas conventional rifle bullets had the potential to pass through their targets and leave behind small wound tracks, high-velocity projectiles had a tendency to fragment shortly after impact. Jim Sullivan would later recount an informal test at a shooting range between a conventional 7.62 NATO rifle and an .223-caliber AR-15 wherein the ArmaLite employees shot at jerrycans filled with water. The full-power rifle punched a hole straight through a can—the bullet went in one side and out the other, leaving nothing behind but a pair of holes. The AR-15, firing ammunition nominally half

as powerful, caused a can to explode from the sudden shock. Battlefield reports later confirmed the lethality of this effect on enemy combatants.

The AR-15 showed great promise as a combat rifle, but it couldn't have come at a worse time. The Army and Marine Corps had just adopted the M14 after 12 years of development and amid a great deal of controversy; they weren't about to go out and order hundreds of thousands of AR-15s. Furthermore, top generals were extremely conservative about small arms designs, and the AR-15 was easily the most innovative and unconventional rifle of its time. By this time, ArmaLite was on

the verge of bankruptcy. Years of work on the AR-10 project without a major contract to show for it had left the company in deep financial trouble, and the Army passing on the AR-15 was the final nail in the coffin. ArmaLite was finally forced to sell the rights to the AR-15 to a larger and more established arms manufacturer. Colt quickly snapped up the new design and began shopping it around to militaries around the world, as well as creating its own version lacking the fully automatic functionality for the civilian market.

The initiating event that led to the AR-15's popularity in military service for the past half-century and counting was not an elaborate multi-year military R&D program, but a backyard barbecue party.

July 1960. Richard Boutelle, former president of Fairchild (ArmaLite's parent company) is hosting an Independence Day party in his backyard. Among the high-powered friends on the guest list are Colt representative Robert Macdonald and legendary Air Force General Curtis LeMay. Eager to show off the capabilities of the AR-15, they offer to let Gen LeMay test the new rifle on some watermelons. A few magazines and a lot of pulp later, LeMay is so impressed by the rifle that he immediately places an order for 80,000. At that time, Air Force security personnel were still using the M2 Carbine. A variant of the M1 carbine, it was popular with troops when it was adopted during the Second World War, but by the early 1960s the design was beginning to show its age. The airmen still using it appreciated its light weight, but the carbine lost much of its lethality and accuracy beyond about 100 yards.

Congress delayed LeMay's order, but other top officials soon came to realize why he was so enamored with the new rifle. After another brief round of trials, the AR-15 entered service with the United States Air Force and United States Army special forces. It would see its first combat use by American advisors in a bush war that was just beginning to heat up in the small, relatively unknown country of Vietnam.

The United States Army and the Marine Corps went into the Vietnam War using the M14. According to conventional American military doctrine of the time, infantry combat would take place at long range, therefore accuracy was king. The M14 worked well with this theory, firing

ArmaLite was on the verge of bankruptcy. Years of work on the AR-10 project without a major contract to show for it had left the company in deep financial trouble, and the Army passing on the AR-15 was the final nail in the coffin.

Marines during Operation Desert Storm deployed with M16A2 rifles and M60E3 machine guns.

the powerful 7.62×51 mm NATO round with an effective range farther than most people can identify a man-sized target. However, the jungles of Vietnam were suited to a very different kind of combat, a kind of combat with which the NVA and Viet Cong insurgents were intimately familiar. The thick brush and rugged terrain reduced visibility and obscured targets from view even at relatively close range, forcing combatants much closer together and making conventional long-range marksmanship all but impossible at times.

In an effort to simplify logistics, U.S. military officials had intended the M14 to replace most of the small arms in the inventory. However, the rifle was too light and too powerful for fully automatic fire to be useful, yet too long and heavy for effective use in close-quarters combat. NVA soldiers, by contrast, were using Soviet-designed rifles supplied by communist China, namely the AKM—an improved variant of the AK-47. Lighter and much more compact than the M14, it fired the 7.62×39 mm Soviet cartridge. Sacrificing effective range to achieve lower recoil, the AKM could be fired in bursts with reasonable accuracy. These traits suited the AKM perfectly for



LEATHERNECK FILE PHOTO

1950-1953 Maj Melvin M. Johnson, USMCR tests small caliber, high-velocity rifle concepts

1962 U.S. Air Force orders 8,500 AR-15s

1963 Special Operations units begin using AR-15s in Vietnam

1965 U.S. Army begins issuing XM16E1 to units in Vietnam

1967 M16A1 enters service

1969 M16A1 officially replaces M14

1983 U.S. Marine Corps adopts M16A2, becoming the first service to do so

1997 U.S. Marine Corps adopts M16A4

2014 U.S. Marine Corps begins replacing M16A4 with M4 as standard issue

2017 U.S. Marine Corps announces formal plans to completely replace M16 with M27 IAR

1957 AR-10 participates in U.S. Army trials

1958 First AR-15 prototype is completed by ArmaLite

1959 ArmaLite sells rights to AR-15 to Colt



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE MARINE CORPS

Key Dates in Development Of the M16 Rifle



PFC Ricardo King, 3rd Bn, 1st Marines, cleans his early-pattern M16 aboard the helicopter assault ship USS Valley Forge (LPH-8) along the coast of Vietnam, Dec. 19, 1967. Early M16s required careful maintenance to withstand the humid jungle environment of Vietnam.

poorly trained soldiers fighting in the jungle, allowing them to overwhelm even seasoned American combat veterans through sheer volume of fire. Furthermore, the M14 suffered from an unexpected problem of its own—in humid conditions, its wooden stock would swell and place uneven pressure on the barrel, causing the rifle's point of impact to shift dramatically.

The AR-15 could not have come at a better time for the United States military. Initial testing suggested that it surpassed the M14 in accuracy, reliability, and projected combat effectiveness, so the only thing left to do was bring it into service with the Army and Marine Corps. Yet another round of military trials resulted in the AR-15's official adoption as the M16 rifle in 1964. Contracts were signed, hands were shaken, and Colt began converting its civilian tooling for the military variant. Within a few years, the first M16s began to show up in the hands of U.S. military advisors and special forces operatives in theater.

Initial combat reports were positive. Its light weight and high volume of fire suited it well to the dense jungle environment of Vietnam, and the enemy quickly learned to fear the so-called "black rifle." According to co-

CPL M. J. COATES, USMC



Marines of C/1/3 move out on an early morning patrol in Vietnam, 1969. (Photo by Cpl Philip R. Boehme, USMC)

But the question remained: what had happened to the rifles? What went wrong? This revolutionary new piece of technology that had promised to give American fighting men a decisive advantage now appeared to have cost many men their lives.



LCPL MIGUEL A. CARRASCO JR., USMC

designer Jim Sullivan, enemy combatants wounded in the arm or leg by the new M16 would often die from blood loss due to the fragmentation effect of the projectile. One of the M16's first trials by fire was at the Battle of Ia Drang in November 1965. Elements of the U.S. Army 5th and 7th Cavalry, numbering approximately 1,000 men total, were able to repel nearly three times their number in hardened veterans from the NVA.

When Marines were first issued the M16, its lethal reputation preceded it. But what they didn't know was that it would soon develop a reputation for a very different kind of lethality.

All of this brings us back to the Battle of Hill 881. Some combat reliability problems with the M16 had begun to show, but the Marines of 3rdMarDiv didn't know about any of this. They found out as soon as their rifles began jamming in combat. The rifles ran extremely dirty, causing the delicate mechanics inside to seize up at the most inopportune times. Furthermore, spent casings would often get stuck in the chamber with no way to knock them out except by disassembling the rifle *while*

under fire or by shoving a cleaning rod down the barrel. And the rifles weren't issued with cleaning kits.

The so-called Hill Fights ended in a strategic American victory. The North Vietnamese were pushed out and the U.S. Marines were able to secure the area around Khe Sanh. But the question remained: what had happened to the rifles? What went wrong? This revolutionary new piece of technology that had promised to give American fighting men a decisive advantage now appeared to have cost many men their lives. The answer lies in a place almost no-one would immediately think to look—the military acquisitions system.

Recall that the M16 had been designed around the 5.56×45 mm M193 cartridge designed by ArmaLite and Remington. It was loaded with thin sticks of so-called "Improved Military Rifle" gunpowder, specifically IMR 4475, supplied by Du Pont Chemical. In Army testing, the ammunition yielded an average muzzle velocity around 3,150 feet per second—blisteringly fast, but about 100 feet per second lower than the specified velocity.

Riflemen of Co K, 3rd Bn, 5th Marines are armed with M16A2s for a house-clearing mission in Fallujah, Iraq, in November 2004. The corpsman, second from the left, is carrying a Benelli M1014 semi-automatic shotgun.

In order to remedy this perceived problem, the Army had Remington switch to a different type of gunpowder, known as WC846, supplied by Olin Mathieson. The pressures and velocities looked just fine on paper, but like with many things, the devil is in the details. The new powder came in the form of small grains, coated in a special chemical blend to improve shelf life. The only problem was that the Army, thinking the powders to be interchangeable, *didn't test the rifles with the new ammunition*. The new powder placed additional strain on the M16's gas operating mechanism, and the protective coating left chalky deposits inside the rifle's delicate internals. A seemingly simple change to the ammunition was able to multiply the rifle's failure rate by six without anyone noticing.

The Marines of the 2/3 and 3/3 didn't

Hardliners continued to deride the futuristic-looking rifle with its small-caliber ammunition and plastic furniture contract-made by Mattel. But most of all, what the M16 showed the world was that the assault rifle paradigm was the way of the future.



SGT ZACHARY A. BATHON, USMC

Carrying the M16A2, Marines from Combat Engineer Plt, Battalion Landing Team, 2nd Bn, 2nd Marines, 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operation Capable) place explosives on a Ba'ath Party Regime Symbol outside the Qalatsukar secret police station, Iraq, Nov. 19, 2011.

know any of this. What they did know was that their fancy new rifles, which had been billed as “self-cleaning,” ran so dirty that they often stopped working—sometimes after only a few rounds. Without training on how to clean the rifles and no cleaning kits to do so anyway, the chalky residue clogging up the rifles became a deadly problem.

As if that wasn't bad enough, the humid jungle environment of Vietnam created

microscopic deposits of rust inside the barrels and chambers of the M16 rifles. Once the invisible rust pitting in the chamber of a rifle was severe enough, cases would begin sticking inside without any way to remove them.

When the M16's numerous problems began to surface, Congress had a field day. A committee, led by Congressman Robert Ichord of Missouri, set out to identify the causes and solve the problems

to get American soldiers and Marines a weapon that wouldn't get them killed. The corrosion problem was the easiest to fix. All barrels and bolt carrier groups rolling off the production line at Colt would be coated in a thin layer of chromium metal, preventing the underlying steel from rusting. The fouling issue, however, was a little bit more difficult. Du Pont had long since stopped manufacturing IMR 4475, and the military desperately needed large supplies of ammunition as soon as possible. Contrary to the Ichord committee's recommendation to immediately switch back to the old powder, the new powder was reformulated slightly and the rifle's recoil buffer system redesigned to accommodate it. The most controversial change of all was the addition of the forward assist. This button on the side of the receiver was designed to engage with scalloped cuts on the side of the bolt carrier to allow it to be forced into battery. Eugene Stoner and the other ArmaLite engineers who had designed the system were vehemently opposed to this change—testing showed that failures to feed were only worsened by forcing the action closed. Nevertheless, these changes were incorporated by Colt onto the next pattern of M16 rifle, the M16A1.

The reliability problems all but disappeared when the M16A1 entered service, but the damage to the rifle's reputation was done. Hardliners continued to deride the futuristic-looking rifle with its small-caliber ammunition and plastic furniture contract-made by Mattel. But most of all, what the M16 showed the world was that the assault rifle paradigm was the way of the future. When the Warsaw Pact began issuing select-fire intermediate-caliber rifles like the AKM, military strategists in the West had derided it as a “peasant's weapon,” designed to maximize the combat effectiveness of a poorly trained conscript army. What the M16 proved was that even the best-trained fighting forces in the world could take advantage of the lighter weight and higher volume of fire provided by this revolutionary new weapon.

In the 1970s, NATO member countries began developing their own 5.56 mm rifles and tinkering with the ammunition to optimize it. The Belgian SS109 cartridge, based on the earlier American M193 but with improved penetration on hard targets,

was adopted by most of NATO as standard. When the Marine Corps requested an improved version of their rifle in response, Colt modified the M16A1 slightly to create the M16A2, which entered service in the early 1980s.

With the A2 variant, the M16 had finally fully matured. It used a different barrel for better accuracy and compatibility with a wider variety of ammunition types. The sights were made more adjustable, improving the individual rifleman's ability to hit targets at long range. Even though most infantry combat thus far during the 20th century had taken place at 300 meters or less, a rifleman armed with an M16A2 could reliably hit man-sized targets out to at least twice that.

The M16's final evolution in Marine Corps service was the M16A4. Taking a cue from the civilian aftermarket, the M16A4 is essentially just an M16A2 with enhanced modularity. The rear sight and carry handle assembly was made removable so an optical sighting system could be mounted, dramatically increasing the rifle's combat effectiveness. The currently issued Trijicon TA31 RCO can mount to this rail with two thumb screws, a far cry from the intricate machining required to mount optics on previous service rifles.

The round plastic handguards were

Recruit Jared C. Seeland, Plt 3229, "Kilo" Co, 3rd Recruit Training Bn reloads his M16A4 Service Rifle in the standing position at Edson Range, Weapons and Field Training Bn, Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif., Nov. 24, 2014. (Photo by Cpl Jericho Crutcher, USMC)



replaced by long segments of MIL-STD-1913 rail, where Marines could attach a variety of accessories to fit almost any kind of mission. Even after the Army switched to the shorter M4A1 carbine, the Marine Corps continued using the M16A4 until a few years ago. With its longer barrel, the M16 is able to reliably hit targets, well past the effective range of the M4. While the M27 IAR has already replaced the M16A4 in frontline infantry units, hundreds of thousands of M16 rifles are still in Marine Corps inventory and will continue to see use for many years to come.

Editor's note: This article is the first in a series of features detailing the small arms U.S. Marines have used since 1775. What were your experiences like with your issue weapons? Do you have a favorite one you would like to see featured next? Let us know at leatherneck@mca-marines.org.

Author's bio: Sam Lichtman is a college student and licensed pilot. He works part-time as a salesman and armorer at a gun store in Stafford, Va., and occasionally contributes content to Leatherneck. He also has a weekly segment on Gun Owners Radio. 🦁



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Pushing the

Astronaut LtCol Nicole Mann gives a thumbs up from inside the mockup of NASA's Orion spacecraft at Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas, in July 2019. (Photo by NASA/Bill Ingalls)

“There’s not this sense of competition in the office for any of these missions or these spaceflights because it’s so much bigger than us. This is human exploration. It’s not just about NASA. It’s not about the individual person.”

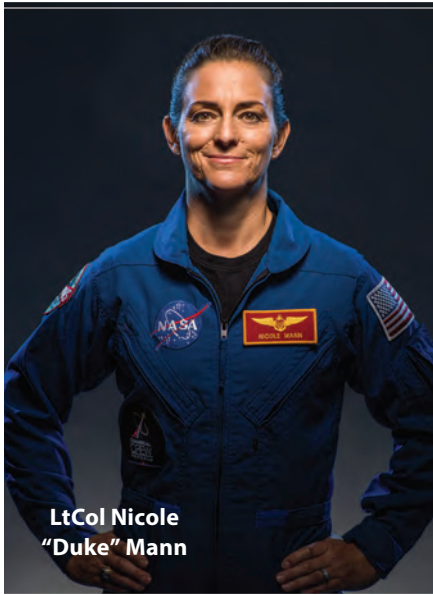
—LTCOL NICOLE “DUKE” MANN

Marine Corps Maj Jasmin Moghbeli is pictured in front of a T-38 trainer aircraft at Ellington Field near NASA's Johnson Space Center shortly after she was named to NASA's 2017 astronaut candidate class.



NASA/ROBERT MARKOWITZ

Boundaries



COURTESY OF NASA



NASA/BILL INGALLS

Marine Astronauts Nicole Mann and Jasmin Moghbeli Are at the Forefront of Space Exploration

By Sara W. Bock

When NASA released the names of its 18 Artemis Team members—those eligible for the planned return missions to the Moon—in December 2020, the only two active-duty Marines in the astronaut corps, both of whom happen to be female, made the list.

“One of These Astronauts Will Be the First Woman on the Moon,” the headlines read, as the names of the nine women selected to the Artemis Team were plastered across social media platforms and news outlets. And while it would be easy to assume that some degree of rivalry might exist between Lieutenant Colonel Nicole “Duke” Mann and Major Jasmin “Jaws” Moghbeli in that regard, it’s nonexistent: They laugh as they say their ideal scenario would be to take that historic step together.

“There’s not this sense of competition in the office for any of these missions or these spaceflights because it’s so much bigger than us. This is human exploration. It’s not just about NASA. It’s not about the individual person,” said Mann as she sat next to Moghbeli during a June phone call with *Leatherneck* from NASA’s Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas, where they train for future missions. The pair of Marine aviators, both graduates of the United States Naval Test Pilot School, talked at length about their training, how the Marine Corps prepared them for the rigors of spaceflight, and what an exciting time it is to be at NASA. The agency is working with commercial industry on crew transportation to the International Space Station and beyond, has its sights set on human exploration of Mars, and continues to ramp up its Artemis program, which aims not only



PATRICIA SMITH

LtCol Mann, left, and Maj Moghbeli, right, the only two active-duty Marines in NASA’s astronaut corps, visit with LtGen Eric Smith, center, Deputy Commandant for Combat Development and Integration, at Marine Corps Barracks Washington, D.C., May 14.



USMC

Moghbeli, who became an AH-1W Super Cobra pilot after earning her wings as a naval aviator, flies a CH-46E Sea Knight in Kuwait during a 2010-2011 deployment. As a graduate of Naval Test Pilot School, Moghbeli has piloted approximately 25 different types of aircraft.



NASA/JOSH VALCARCEL

As an astronaut candidate, Moghbeli, pictured here in April 2018, underwent training in T-38 engine maintenance at Ellington Field in Houston, Texas.

to put the first woman and next man on the Moon, but also to set up a sustainable base camp with people living and working there so they can take what they learn there to apply to similar missions to Mars in the future.

Both astronauts talk about being pleasantly surprised upon their arrival at NASA—Mann in 2013 and Moghbeli in 2017—at how the more experienced astronauts would set aside time in their busy schedules to mentor and advise them.

“I was nervous because you have all these people that come from very different backgrounds, and really only about 25 percent military, so a lot of civilians with PhDs and all these crazy experiences,” said Mann. “But then you realize that it’s so incredible to work together on a highly functioning team

where everybody is focused toward mission accomplishment and everybody is there to support and help each other out because we have this common goal ... You have that sense and that feeling certainly in the Marine Corps. I was maybe a little worried that I wasn’t going to have that at NASA, and I was so happy when I arrived here to find that we certainly do have that camaraderie and that goal of mission accomplishment.”

Mann, a 1999 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and F/A-18 Hornet pilot, flew combat missions in Iraq and Afghanistan before becoming a test pilot and has accumulated more than 2,500 flight hours in 25 different types of aircraft. She earned a master’s degree in mechanical engineering from Stanford University in 2001 and is slated to pilot the first crew flight test of the Boeing

This preflight image from Feb. 6, 2019, shows Mann, fellow NASA astronaut Mike Fincke and Boeing astronaut Chris Ferguson during spacewalk preparations and training inside the Space Station Airlock Mockup at NASA’s Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas, in preparation for the crew flight test of the Boeing Starliner. Ferguson has since been replaced on the crew by NASA astronaut Barry Wilmore. (Photo by NASA/Robert Markowitz)



Becoming an astronaut wasn't a lifelong dream for Mann, a California native, who said the idea didn't even occur to her until after she was already flying in the Marine Corps and had returned home from her first deployment.

Starliner spacecraft. The Starliner, like the SpaceX Crew Dragon first commanded by retired Marine Colonel Doug Hurley, is another asset that will help enable the return of human space travel from U.S. soil. The Starliner flight test, which was initially scheduled for July 30, was delayed due to a valve issue and at press time had not yet been rescheduled.

Becoming an astronaut wasn't a lifelong dream for Mann, a California native, who said the idea didn't even occur to her until after she was already flying in the Marine Corps and had returned home from her first deployment. "I didn't have it all figured out, but fortunately the opportunities presented themselves and I was able to take hold of them," she said.

Conversely, Moghbeli's dream of being an astronaut began while growing up in Baldwin, N.Y., when she selected Russian cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space, as her topic for a sixth-grade report. When she presented her report in character, wearing a costume, it was the first time she remembers saying she wanted to be an astronaut—and her interest only grew from there.

"I remember begging my parents to send me to Space Camp," said Moghbeli of NASA's youth program in Huntsville, Ala. "It took a couple years for me to wear them down and they eventually sent me. As I learned more and more, it just kind of reaffirmed what I wanted to do."

Selected by NASA in 2017, Moghbeli earned her undergraduate degree in aerospace engineering at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps in 2005. She flew more than 150 combat missions in Afghanistan as an AH-1W Super Cobra pilot, earned her master's degree in aerospace engineering from the Naval Postgraduate School and was a test pilot assigned to Marine Operational Test and Evaluation Squadron (VMX) 1 at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Ariz., at the time of her selection as an astronaut candidate.

The first-ever Iranian-American astronaut in NASA history, Moghbeli, who was born in Germany, is an immigrant who became an American citizen as an elementary school student



NASA/JOEL KOWSKY

Mann, far left, stands with fellow NASA astronauts after a United Launch Alliance Atlas V rocket with the Boeing Starliner onboard was rolled out to the launch pad at Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida, Dec. 18, 2019. Two days later, the Starliner's first uncrewed orbital flight test departed for the International Space Station as an end-to-end test of the system's capabilities.

and cites her parents and older brother as her role models. She was inspired to join the Marine Corps not solely in pursuit of her dream to become an astronaut but also because of her family's history serving in the Iranian military and the stories she grew up hearing her grandfather tell about his service.

Not yet assigned to a specific mission, Moghbeli spends her days—none of which are ever the same—training in a wide array of skills and capabilities from flying the T-38 supersonic trainer to operating robotic arms and preparing for spacewalks and extra-vehicular activities in the neutral buoyancy lab.

"There is no typical day," said Moghbeli, who emphasized that at NASA, training is continuous. "I think that's one thing that a lot of us love about this job if you can call it a job. There isn't a typical day as an astronaut because you're going to be in space with a fairly small crew of people, and you have to be the maintainer, you have to be the doctor, you have to be the scientist. You have to be a little bit of everything, and so because we're preparing for that, no day really looks the same."

Though Mann is currently focusing her efforts on preparing



Moghbeli undergoes water survival training at NASA Johnson Space Center’s Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory in Houston, Texas, in 2017. (Photos by NASA/James Blair)



“Something the Marine Corps has gotten us used to is mentally to stay in the game when you’re being pushed to your limit physically.”

— MAJ JASMIN “JAWS” MOGHBELI

for the Starliner crew flight test, she continues to train broadly so she’s prepared for other future missions. She describes a recent week during which she flew in the T-38, and the next day did some manual flying of the Starliner in the morning and flew the robotic arm in the afternoon—all of which require very different flying techniques.

“I remember it used to stress me out in the beginning because you had so many different things you were going to do, and so many different skillsets to jump between. I wanted to be 110 percent prepared for everything that I needed to do,” said Mann. “But some of what NASA teaches you is that you need to be able to figure out this training evolution without being 100 percent prepared. Space is going to throw problems at you and challenges that you just need to be able to adapt and deal with.”

It’s this exact ability to adapt and overcome that both Mann and Moghbeli credit the Marine Corps with instilling in them, as well as with preparing them for the physical and mental demands of astronaut training and eventual space travel.

“Something the Marine Corps has gotten us used to is mentally to stay in the game when you’re being pushed to your limit physically,” said Moghbeli, who, along with Mann, referenced

the neutral buoyancy lab—a huge training pool used to simulate microgravity—as one of the most mentally challenging training exercises required of them thus far.

“During that training evolution, which is usually about six hours long, you’re working against the pressure of the suit,” said Mann. “It’s like a marathon for your arms and hands.”

“I had been warned beforehand, ‘Hey, it’s going to be like a marathon, that’s how draining it is physically,’” Moghbeli echoed, describing her first experience in the lab. “And sure enough, I got in there for the first time, and they were absolutely right. But because I had that background from my Marine Corps training, mentally I was able to kind of stick with it the entire time and push through.”

When asked what skills and traits they learned in the Marine Corps that they rely on today, the duo mentioned public speaking, teamwork and a focus on mission accomplishment. They also emphasized that their shared experience as Marine Corps test pilots has proven vital, particularly at this moment in NASA’s history.

“This is the most new spacecraft we’ve had coming on the line ever in the history of human spaceflight, and so having that

Mann flies the WB-57 aircraft during a spaceflight readiness training class. (Photo courtesy of NASA)



test pilot background to be able to look at these different spacecraft and evaluate them, determine the human-vehicle interface, whether that works well or not, how all these things carry over” is vital, said Moghbeli.

Mann said that the ability to compartmentalize in high-stress scenarios is something that she’s carried over from her time in the fleet.

“You’re going to learn something new, and you might not be good at it when you first learn it, but it’s incredibly important that you master that skill—whether that be on the rifle range or flying a jet in combat or landing on an aircraft carrier. Whatever it is, it’s so important that you master that skill because other people are relying on you to execute so that we can accomplish the mission,” said Mann. “Sometimes you’re going to screw something up ... and hopefully you learn these lessons in training, but when that happens, how do you respond? Because the war is going to continue, or the mission in space is going to continue. You need to be able to compartmentalize that struggle that maybe you had, and now focus on the next piece of the mission and still be able to execute.”



Above: Standing in front of an Orion mock-up in the Johnson Space Center’s Space Vehicle Mock-up Facility, Mann speaks to a special media-day crowd in August 2013 after her selection to the 2013 class of NASA astronaut candidates. (Photo courtesy of NASA)

Mann also credited much of her success to her mentors in the Marine Corps who led by example and her commanding officers who supported her in pursuing a career as an astronaut even if it meant making decisions that took her away from the “expected” career path that many pilots strive to follow.

“It was so important that those leaders in my life had those discussions with me, and especially at a young age, that ‘Hey, it’s OK. You don’t need to fit this perfect mold. You’re going to be more of an asset to the Marine Corps if you’re personally satisfied and engaged in following your dreams and your home life is making you happy.’ So I look back on that and appreciate that,” said Mann, who is married to a retired Navy F/A-18 pilot she met in flight school in Pensacola, Fla. The couple, who spent years as dual active-duty pilots, have a 9-year-old son.

Moghbeli and her husband, an aerospace engineer she met shortly after she moved to Houston, recently started a family when they welcomed twin girls less than a year ago. Both her parents and her husband’s parents recently relocated to the Houston area, which she says has been a huge help, and she emphasizes how supportive her husband is of her career.

As they navigate challenging careers and the demands of

Mann spent three days in the wilderness participating in land survival training in Maine in 2013, during the first phase of the extensive training program that turns astronaut candidates into full-fledged astronauts.



Above: Aboard USS Enterprise (CVN-65), Mann, an F/A-18 pilot, prepares for a combat mission in Afghanistan in 2007.





Moghbeli, center, is pictured with her fellow 2017 astronaut class members in August 2019. (Photo courtesy of NASA)

As they look to the future, both Mann and Moghbeli reflect on the elite group of Marine astronauts whose legacy they strive to uphold.

family life, both Mann and Moghbeli stress that they’ve come to terms with the fact that there’s no such thing as finding a “perfect balance” because certain things need to be prioritized at different times. “It’s that kind of continual balance, and just tweaking of that based on what’s happening in your life and what your priorities are at the time that you need to just modify as you go through,” said Mann.

Both Moghbeli and Mann come across as very humble about their accomplishments; but given how competitive the application process is—and that they’re among only 25 Marines ever to be selected as astronauts—it goes without saying that their accolades are numerous and their potential is endless.

When recruiting for its 2017 astronaut class, NASA received a record-breaking 18,000 applications. Moghbeli described the rigorous selection process, which includes multi-day visits to NASA where applicants go through a physical and medical screening and a series of interviews to assess technical background and ability to work with others.

“It’s a very lengthy process,” Mann added. “I was surprised at how many different things that we did during that interview process. There’s a formal interview, there’s some teambuilding, technical activities that you’ll do, there’s some social events—and really because they’re trying to get a glimpse of this ‘whole person’ concept during that time. I was a little surprised by how much emphasis they put on your ability to work well with others, especially those that aren’t the same Marines that you’re usually training alongside.”

“And there’s a lot of waiting in between interviews hoping that you’ll get another call,” Moghbeli chimed in with a laugh. “I think they drag it out a little bit on purpose!” Mann said.

While they’re in a unique position in that they are technically active-duty Marines whose work at NASA will keep them in Houston long-term, both Mann and Moghbeli are proud to be part of the Marine Corps family and strive to maintain a strong relationship with their service branch.

“We have had great support from the Marine Corps from an



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Mann is seated at the capsule communicator (CAPCOM) console in Houston’s Mission Control Center during the release of the SpaceX Dragon cargo vehicle from the International Space Station, July 3, 2017.



NASA/JOSH VALCARCEL

Moghbeli is helped into a spacesuit prior to underwater spacewalk training at NASA’s Johnson Space Center Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory in April 2018. The training event, which both Moghbeli and Mann describe as physically draining, requires a level of mental strength that they said they learned in the Marine Corps.



Mann is lowered into the Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory (above) during a spacewalk training session in May 2014. Prior to her selection as an astronaut, Mann served as a developmental test pilot (right) with Air Test and Evaluation Squadron 23 at Naval Air Station Patuxent River, Md. (Above photo courtesy of NASA)

administrative perspective as well as from aviation, and we really enjoy doing any type of outreach events that we can in making sure that we continue to involve the Marine Corps in human exploration so that Marines are aware of what we're doing," said Mann. "It'll be interesting to see as this space domain expands and more people in the world are involved in it, what specifically the Marine Corps' role will be in the space domain."

Do either Moghbeli or Mann have their sights set on returning to the fleet and jumping back into the cockpit as Marine aviators? For now, they both say they're focused on doing the work of preparing for spaceflight but it's an idea that neither of them is willing to rule out.

"The Marine Corps is a very important part of both of our lives, and for me I can say very strongly that the Marine Corps is kind of what led me here and prepared me to do this job," said Moghbeli.

As they look to the future, both Mann and Moghbeli reflect on the elite group of Marine astronauts whose legacy they strive to uphold.

"There haven't been a ton of Marines in the astronaut corps, but you've seen them at the forefront of human exploration and really leading the way," said Mann, referencing John Glenn, the first Marine astronaut and first American to orbit Earth; as well as Doug Hurley, who commanded the first Crew Dragon flight to the International Space Station. Soon, Mann will take her own turn in pioneering when she takes part in the first Boeing Starliner crew flight test. She finds herself particularly inspired by the myriad ways that space travel has improved the human race and will continue to in the future.

"What we learn about ourselves and about our home planet,



USMC

and things we can do to take care of Planet Earth, and some of the technologies that we develop for spaceflight—how they benefit humans back on earth," said Mann. "Of course, there's this inspirational part of it too—inspiring young kids to dream, to work hard in school, to study math and science and to be involved ... I think as you see us moving forward with Artemis to the moon and eventually to Mars, I think you'll see a uniting of the world that we have not seen in a long time," she added.

For Moghbeli, there's no limit to what can be learned in space, and she's excited to be a part of it as she awaits her first mission assignment.

"You don't know what you're going to learn when you explore, but we can look back and say every time humankind has pushed the boundaries further and explored, we've always gained from it, and we've seen that in our human exploration of space so far as well," said Moghbeli. "I think that's bound to continue happening as we go further."

Editor's note: To read more Leatherneck stories about the Marine Corps' pioneers in space exploration, go to mca-marines.org/article-collections.

Staff NCOs Use Littoral War Game To Hone Critical Planning Skills

Marines attending the Advanced Course at the Camp Hansen Staff Noncommissioned Officer Academy (SNCOA) engaged in a littoral war game on Camp Hansen, Marine Corps Base Camp Smedley D. Butler, Okinawa, Japan, July 29.

Using predictive analytical tools, critical decision making and feasibility of support, the students simulated various sea-based operations and strategies. The littoral war game is used as a tool to challenge students' previous ways of leading units and encourage them to improve their decision-making skills against a simulated enemy.

"The littoral war game uses structured assumptions with realistic effects," said Gunnery Sergeant Sven George, an advanced course faculty advisor at the SNCOA. "It allows the students' minds to think and be ready to adapt and adjust to the simulations within the game."

George explained that the game allots a specific amount of time and resources the students have to accomplish a set mission. He said that there are constant variables and challenges, such as simulated typhoons, that challenge students' decision-making skills.

The 27 students were separated into two groups to begin the war game, each facilitated by a faculty advisor. As the challenges of the game increased with time, the students began to combine their knowledge and experience to reach a final goal.



LCPL ALEX FAIRCHILD, USMC

GySgt Bruce Jones strategizes during a littoral war game on Camp Hansen, Okinawa, Japan, July 29. Using predictive analytical tools, critical decision making and feasibility of support, students attending the Advanced Course at the SNCOA used the game to simulate various sea-based operations and strategies.

According to Gunnery Sergeant Bruce Jones, the substance abuse coordinating officer with Headquarters and Support Battalion, Marine Corps Installations Pacific, the most challenging but valuable part of the exercise was learning from each other's diverse backgrounds and experiences.

"Each of us had a specific role to play which forced us to think outside of the

box and take a step out of our military occupational specialty comfort zone," said Jones, who explained that his team worked together to accomplish seven different missions from a simulated Marine Expeditionary Unit commander. He said that the interjections and challenges created a unique form of chaos that brought his team together to make decisions and accomplish the mission.

"It's all about keeping leaders on their toes," said George. "With this simulation, there is risk and reward. You have to come together as a team of staff noncommissioned officers, make decisions and accomplish the mission."

The SNCOA Advanced Course is a seven-week course that uses the Socratic method, a form of cooperative argumentative dialogue based on asking and answering questions to stimulate critical thinking, and is the final step in enlisted professional education.

LCpl Alex Fairchild, USMC

Staff NCOs attending the Advanced Course at the Camp Hansen SNCOA collaborate and engage in a littoral war game designed to improve their decision-making skills against a simulated enemy, July 29.



LCPL ALEX FAIRCHILD, USMC

GySgt Richard Ison, aviation life support coordinator with Marine Wing Headquarters Squadron 1, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, makes a strategic move during a littoral war game utilized by students at the SNCOA, Camp Hansen, Okinawa, Japan, July 29.



LCPL ALEX FAIRCHILD, USMC



Left: Staff NCOs discuss their strategy for the littoral war game at the Advanced Course, SNCOA, Camp Hansen, July 29.

LCPL ALEX FAIRCHILD, USMC

LCpl Jaden Murry, a Marine assigned to CLB-7, MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, Calif., looks in the mirror at his new 3D-printed acrylic dental prosthesis at Naval Medical Center San Diego, June 11, following the jaw reconstruction surgery he underwent there last November.



PO3 JACOB L. GREENBERG, USN



PO3 JACOB L. GREENBERG, USN

Navy Hospital Corpsman First Class Clayton Campbell, a maxillofacial technologist assigned to Naval Medical Center San Diego's dental department, checks the fit of an acrylic dental prosthesis for LCpl Jaden Murry in the hospital's maxillofacial laboratory, June 11. The prosthesis was used in the Defense Department's first-ever immediate jaw reconstruction with 3D-printed teeth.

Marine Continues Recovery After Jaw Reconstruction Surgery

A Marine who underwent the Defense Department's first-ever immediate jaw reconstruction surgery using 3D-printed teeth in November 2020 recently returned to Naval Medical San Diego, Calif., where the surgery was performed, to receive an acrylic dental prosthesis, June 11.

Lance Corporal Jaden Murry, assigned to Combat Logistics Battalion 7 at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center

Twentynine Palms, Calif., had nearly his entire lower jaw removed because of an aggressive tumor. It was reconstructed with a segment from his fibula, a bone in the lower leg.

"I wasn't too nervous," Murry said of the innovative procedure. "Even though I hadn't been in a hospital since I was 3, I knew I was in good hands. I had to put all of my faith and hopes in the hands of strangers. I had to trust them all."

Navy Lieutenant Justin Odette, one of

the medical center's oral and maxillofacial surgery chief residents, and Navy Lieutenant Commander Daniel Hammer, a maxillofacial surgical oncologist and reconstructive surgeon, were members of the multi-department team of surgical specialists who performed the procedure on Murry.

"All of the providers worked as a team to keep his recovery on track," Hammer said. "We were able to safely remove his tracheostomy tube within a week of the surgery, and it was then we knew he was making strides in the right direction."

The tube is placed in a hole in the patient's neck to use for breathing when there is concern about the patient's airway during the post-operative period.

Murry said the doctors kept his family informed throughout the planning process and during the operation itself.

"My mother called Dr. Odette with questions I wouldn't have thought to ask, and my grandfather assured me everything was going to be all right," Murry said. "He calmed me down and put my mind at ease. Dr. Odette and Dr. Hammer have been very good at passing information to me and my family."

As Murry continued to heal after the surgery, the doctors tested his healing process with his new lower jaw.

"To see him swallowing, speaking, walking and not using a tracheostomy tube one week post-surgery was a huge victory," Hammer said.

PO3 Jacob L. Greenberg, USN

Inside Acquisition: How the G/ATOR Enables Corps to Modernize, Adapt

Force Design 2030 details the vision of the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General David H. Berger, for maintaining the relevance of the Corps in the new age of great power competition.

Developed to enable the Marine Corps to adapt and outmaneuver its adversaries, Force Design 2030 outlines the Commandant's goals and blueprint for ensuring that America maintains its competitive edge. Critical to this effort is one of the Marine Corps' latest and most advanced systems yet, the Ground/Air Task-Oriented Radar (G/ATOR), managed by Program Executive Officer Land Systems, Marine Corps Systems Command.

Initially fielded in 2018, the G/ATOR is an expeditionary, multifunctional radar system providing Marines with increased accuracy, tactical mobility and reliability over legacy systems. Replacing five of the Marine Corps' legacy systems, the G/ATOR can support various missions, depending on the "block" of software used on a single hardware platform.

G/ATOR Block 1 provides air defense

Marines with 12th Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division monitor the performance of the G/ATOR system at MCAS Futenma, Okinawa, Japan, Aug. 10, 2020. The G/ATOR allows Marines to see farther distances and is used to locate enemy weapon systems.

and surveillance capabilities, while Block 2 supports artillery operations. The system represents a key Marine Corps sensor capability.

“G/ATOR is designed to be flexible enough that the system can be used in different modes in support of different missions,” said Chief Warrant Officer 3 Jack Linke, capabilities integration officer for G/ATOR Block 1 at Marine Corps Combat Development Directorate. “In the past, artillery—the [G/ATOR Block 2] Marines—had a separate radar. We, the [G/ATOR Block 1] Marines, had our own separate radar for air-breathing and missile targets. G/ATOR lets us accomplish both those missions with far better accuracy than either of us had before with our legacy systems.”

The G/ATOR enhances the Marine Corps’ ability to perform counter-fires and air defense, such as defending against cruise missiles and unmanned aerial systems. It provides real-time radar



CPL SAVANNAH MESIMIER, USMC

measurement data to Marine Corps communication and sensor networks, such as Common Aviation Command and Control System, Composite Tracking Network and Advanced Field Artillery Tactical Data System.

The G/ATOR’s interoperability with naval systems and transportability make it a critical component to achieving Force Design, said Linke.

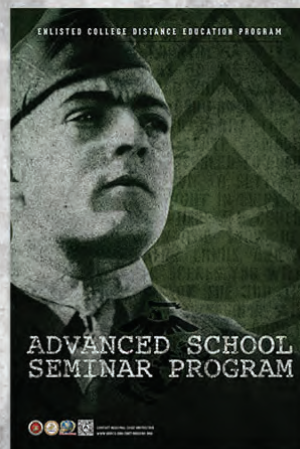
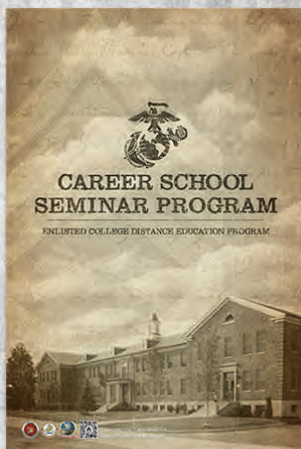
“G/ATOR increases our ability to work together with the Navy and other joint forces in a way that we have not been able to in the past,” said Linke. “G/ATOR makes many of the things the Commandant talks about in Force Design possible, especially with regard to our interoperability with the Navy.”

Last year’s Advantage at Sea joint strategy between the Navy, Marine Corps

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and Coast Guard notes that significant technological developments and aggressive military modernization efforts by America's rivals have challenged the joint forces' unfettered access to the seas in conflict.

Maritime power is an essential element of Force Design and the National Defense Strategy. The G/ATOR enhances sea-based air defense sensors and command-and-control capabilities. This provides the naval and joint forces with an expeditionary radar and cruise missile detection capability that extends battlespace coverage.

The G/ATOR's expeditionary design enables Marines to transport it using a smaller footprint and set it up more quickly and efficiently than its predecessors. These features are critical during the Marine Corps' shift to expeditionary advanced base operations (EABO), said Linke.

"When it comes to EABO, being able to take a radar off a ship, set up quickly and go is critical for those sorts of operations," said Linke.

The G/ATOR's modernized capabilities also are an asset to Marines responsible for returning fire if engaged by the enemy.

"It's an expeditionary radar system that tracks enemy [indirect fire] at much greater range than our legacy system," said Chief Warrant Officer 5 Wayne

Cooper, capabilities integration officer for G/ATOR Block 2. "The G/ATOR more than doubles the range capability from our previous system."

The radar's increased range also supports the Marine Corps' ability to fight inside an adversary's sensors and weapons engagement zone, facilitating sea denial in support of fleet operations. During missions, the G/ATOR can provide support to multiple areas, including separate islands, without having to "hop around" to different locations, said Cooper.

Ultimately, with the Corps' allies and partners, the G/ATOR will help the Marine Corps control key maritime areas to project power and compromise adversaries' objectives.

"The G/ATOR is a key enabler because it allows us to have and keep situational awareness, even in a changing threat environment," said Cooper. "It's the system of choice, and the system we're going to use in major combat operations, in stability and security operations, in transition to counterinsurgency operations. So when we talk about it being a key enabler for the Marine Corps in the joint force, it's utilized in all of those spectrums."

Because the hardware of the G/ATOR remains the same across different functions, the potential capabilities of the system are endless.

"I think the biggest benefit of this system is that it has the potential to be upgraded in the future," said Joe Blackstone, G/ATOR product manager at PEO Land Systems. "Being able to implement software changes and enhancements on the same hardware really provides that additional flexibility."

In July, Blackstone said the program office was gearing up to deliver its last low-rate initial production and first full-rate production system. The program office is also focusing on improving sustainment methods and further enhancing the radar's capabilities.

"The program office has been investigating hardware and software improvements to give Marines even better situational awareness," said Blackstone. "We're testing the bounds of the system, the software limits, and seeing how we can expand on that."

The G/ATOR exemplifies the Marine Corps' intent to rapidly pursue new capabilities and concepts to ensure it remains a capable naval expeditionary force in 2030 and beyond. Innovative radar systems such as G/ATOR are designed to help the Marine Corps continue to serve as the nation's premier naval expeditionary force-in-readiness for years to come.

Ashley Calingo



The G/ATOR system, pictured here in Okinawa, Japan, in August 2020, is a key element of achieving the Commandant's Force Design 2030 and does the combined work of five of the Marine Corps' legacy radar systems, providing air defense and surveillance capabilities as well as support for artillery operations.

CPL SAVANNAH MESIMER, USMC

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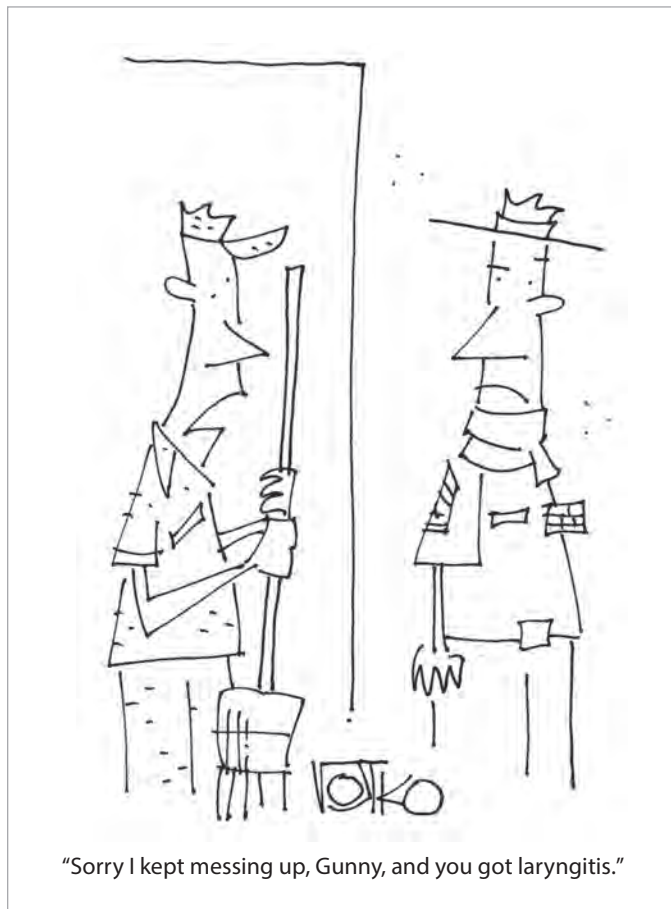


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"As long as it goes 'bang' it's working fine."



"I was in the head. Did I miss anything?"



"Yeah, Gunny, both sides of all 24 aircraft painted."



"War games are a lot easier on the computer."

Hubba Hubba for the Heroes

Story by PFC John Murphy, USMC

My friends in the 1st Division, long accustomed to shifting tides and faces, are having trouble adjusting themselves in China. The people are just too friendly. Since the affair of Guadalcanal in August 1942, Marines have been getting rifle fire instead of handshakes and now they find the whole situation is reversed.

The little booklet, "A Guide to North China," issued to troops just before they left Okinawa, admonished them to drive hard bargains with the Chinese. The men were told that when a local asks 50 cents for a product, he actually expects to receive no more than a quarter. Friendly members of the foreign population in Tientsin advise Marines never to pay more than one-fourth his asking price.

But the Marines can't see their logic. How, they ask, can you bargain with a rickshaw puller who asks only a nickel to transport you 2 miles? In fact, they are more than a little reluctant to enter a rickshaw at all when it isn't motivated by a bicycle. The American just doesn't like the idea of paying a man for the work of a

horse. Not an infrequent sight in Tientsin is a smiling driver in the seat of his rickshaw, a Marine furiously propelling the bicycle.

In the Chinese port town of Tangku where we first saw China, we watched in wonder while Chinese danced on stilts, drum and bugle corps played noisily, if not prettily, and harried police struggled to keep back throngs of the curious. A 5-cent rickshaw ride through Tangku brought to our noses for the first time the smells and odors which we have come to accept as peculiarly Chinese.

At Tangku, we narrowly averted trouble of a sort when Chinese attempted to push us into a building in which Japanese

**A Marine out of the Pacific
doesn't know in what way
to react when he suddenly
finds himself being cheered
by a half-million wildly
enthusiastic Chinese.**

were quartered. It was there, too, that we learned something of the local enthusiasm for parades. Most of the city was in uniform, not the least gaudy of which were worn by postal and railway clerks.

A Chinese train carried us the 30 miles from Tangku to Tientsin and for many Marines it was the first such ride in two years or more. The route was lined with cheering, saluting Chinese and a captain with a gift for impassioned oratory made a speech concerning the reception awaiting us in Tientsin.

"We have been informed," said the captain as his men gathered around him in hushed silence, "that a great reception has been prepared for us in Tientsin. The city has a population of a million and a half; perhaps 100,000 will be there to greet us.

"The Chinese expected us early this morning and they have been waiting since 7 a.m. Almost 12 hours. But they are said to be a patient people.

"In America," continued the captain, trembling a little at his own importance, "we have a number of adjectives which mean very much to us. Wonderful ... lovely ... beautiful ... glorious ... and many others. But important as they are, they



Marines are welcomed as they parade through Tientsin, China, October 1945.



USMC

in no way describe the feelings of the Chinese toward us.

“To them, we, who live on the other side of the world, are everything that is good. All our adjectives together couldn’t describe the love that the Chinese have in their heart for us.

“For that reason,” he concluded, “we must make a good impression when we arrive. Every man will be at his best, every man dressed the same. I insist and demand that my company make a sharp appearance. Otherwise, I can assure you that there will be plenty of close-order drill in China. That’s all.”

A Marine doesn’t like a sermon, nor does he care to be talked down to, but the captain’s speech, despite its defects, got good results. Men jokingly asked for handkerchiefs and wiped away imaginary tears, but at the same time packs were being rearranged and helmets dusted a second time.

At Tientsin’s depot, we found a unit of Chinese troops standing stiffly at attention, a couple of blaring bands and the usual milling mob of Chinese. Men shifted uneasily under a heavy load of gear while young officers called them to attention, accomplished a facing, and marched them forward a few paces. This type of thing went on for about an hour before the men suddenly found themselves

The men of 1stMarDiv (above) in Tientsin Street. Cpl Richard W. Miller (below) bargains with a Chinese civilian for a ride in his rickshaw, Sept. 30, 1945. The image was among 23,000 discovered by Chinese historian Zhang Dongpan in 2006 in the U.S. National Archives and Records Office.



A.J. GLOSS

hurried out of the station and scrambling for places on wood-burning Chinese trucks.

The parade that followed was beyond the experience of everyone. There were feelings, but nobody knew just how to define them. A Marine out of the Pacific doesn’t know in what way to react when he

suddenly finds himself being cheered by a half-million wildly enthusiastic Chinese. The proper thing seemed to be to smile until the face was a little lopsided and to wave until the arm was limp. The orders had said to wear the pack, helmet and rifle throughout the parade, but that’s a lot of weight for a two-hour ride. Soon trucks

To halt in the streets was an open invitation to further adulation. The Marine rifle had to be examined by every soldier, the combat knife was a subject for apt wonder, and the American wrist-watch was an instrument of unbelieving magnificence.

were littered with gear and Marines were tackling the reception with new vigor.

Two Marines in our truck kept reaching into the crowd and coming up with pretty girls. The first to join us was a little Chinese lass, nattily clad in a light grey suit.

“You’d better put her down,” warned a buddy of the big Marine who had abducted her, “you’ll cause an international incident.”

“Ah, she don’t wanta get down,” was the reply.

The girl smiled her approval.



USMC

Marines in Tsingtao, China, during Operation Beleguer between 1945 and 1949.

“Are you worried?” she asked the big Marine.

“No,” answered the surprised Marine.

“Do you speak English?” the big Marine continued.

“Probably better than you do,” came the quick, confident answer.

Soon another girl appeared in our truck, this one a misty-eyed Russian who spoke broken English.

“We are so glad to see you,” she cried,

“but why have you been so long? We have been waiting since 7 this morning.”

Our party had reached Tientsin’s depot at 6:30 p.m. A Marine crowded up the Russian lass and kissed her swiftly, but surely. “Fellows,” he announced solemnly, “I’ve just had my first kiss in China.”

The girl blushed prettily. “And I’ve got a date with her tomorrow night,” added the Marine. “She’s got a husband who works around here someplace, but she’s going to



USMC

Leathernecks of the 7th Marines guard a train on the Tientsin-Chinwangtao Railroad.

ditch him. Boy, I'm signing over!"

This was the Marine Corps' big day, but somehow the Army had been the first to arrive. Soldiers with Air Corps patches rushed to shake Marine hands and answer cries of "How's liberty?" One tall, handsome soldier had the perfect reply. He merely turned to the pretty girl standing beside him and hugged her mightily.

"Can you beat that," said a disgusted voice, "the Doggies have been here only one day and already they have liberty."

"Yeah," said another, "and probably all the women, too."

The Tientsin reception was only the beginning. The cheering crowds have been consistent. Marines continued to be dogged by admiring, curious throngs and the trucks that rolled through Tientsin attracted cheers and much clapping of hands long after they should have ceased to be a novelty. When a reconnaissance party of 40 visited Tang Shan, a mining city about 60 miles north of Tientsin, over 100,000 cheering people were waiting to receive them. Two days later a battalion entered the same city and the throng, redoubled, lined a long parade route.

Marines by this time had had almost one parade too many. They responded to the second Tang Shan reception like robots. Smiles were frozen, hands waved automatically.

"Sometimes," said a sad-eyed leatherneck, "I wish these people weren't so damned glad to see us. All I want is to get off someplace where it's nice and quiet. I'm tired of being a hero."

The opinion was widely shared.

The Chinese aptitude for parades and demonstrations is not only overwhelming, but a little alarming. The day after the battalion's arrival in Tang Shan the entire city turned out again to celebrate a national holiday, the Double Tenth, or the 34th anniversary of the Chinese Republic. Americans watched in wonder while Chinese gaily paraded model airplanes, bombs, trains and various characters apparently designed to drive away evil spirits. Now the Marine is beginning to wonder when the Chinaman takes time out from his parades to earn a living.

The Marine who went into the streets of Tang Shan did so with the knowledge that he was sacrificing himself to the Chinese public. His every step was dogged by a throng varying in size from 50 to 200. He was saluted by every Chinese soldier or policeman, his hand was shaken by every Chinaman who learned to say "hullo" or "hubba hubba Joe," and his back was sore from vigorous pounding.

To halt in the streets was an open invitation to further adulation. The Marine rifle had to be examined by every soldier,

the combat knife was a subject for apt wonder, and the American wristwatch was an instrument of unbelieving magnificence. This rapt Chinese audience watched for every smile and the Marine who playfully tousled a child was in a split second a local hero.

The American cries of "umbriago," "gung-ho," and "hubba hubba Joe" invariably are greeted by waves of laughter, and they are fast becoming bywords among the Chinese.

The educated local citizen, while a shade more reserved, is equally anxious to converse with his Allied visitors. He has a great thirst for learning and knowledge, and he plies every willing Marine with countless questions. Invariably he confesses that he has heard and read only Japanese propaganda for the past four years, and now he is anxious to get the truth.

Many of the questions follow the same pattern. What was your first impression of China? How do you like China? Did you come from Okinawa? Did you fight in the front lines? Did you kill a Japanese? What do you think of Russia? Of England? Who is your favorite movie star? How do you like President Truman? Why was General Stilwell recalled? Is the Japanese soldier a good fighter? How are Japanese prisoners being treated?

Our Chinese friends are frankly surprised at our mild treatment of the Japanese. They hail our prosecution of war criminals as "the best news in four years." They respect us greatly for our achievements in the Pacific, but marvel at the youth of our troops.

When the Chinese contrast our methods to those of the Japanese, they say, "You do things so differently." A citizen tells you that he was confident from the beginning that America would triumph, but "not so soon." His darkest hour, he admits, came with the American defeat in the Philippines. He thinks that perhaps it would have been best if Japanese troops had been beaten on Chinese soil, even at the cost of destroyed cities.

"So many Japanese would have been killed," he smiles.

He tells you that he hopes his nation someday will be a united democracy, but he cringes at the size of the task.

"There is so much to do," he explains. "We must make use of the opportunity that victory has given us."

The Chinese have opened their arms, their hearts and their homes to America's fighting men. And while the American has become accustomed to such great friendliness, he won't be surprised if he finds only a Marine band and a few relatives when his division docks in the United States. 🦖

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SEA STORY OF THE MONTH

Corps Education

We all learn about the Marine Corps in different ways. As young men and women, we learn and form opinions from Marines who have served, friends of Marines and family members, and eventually we build our knowledge and begin to understand the institution in our own way.

In the early 1980s, a buddy of mine had just completed Officer Candidates School (OCS)

While walking to the lot, his girlfriend noticed a lone Marine walking around the perimeter of another parking lot.

at Quantico, Va., and was commissioned a second lieutenant.

At the time, each company at OCS had a small parking lot where candidates could park their cars for the duration of training. These few small lots were a short walk from the parade deck where my buddy's family and his girlfriend had just witnessed OCS graduation and commissioning, and it was time for him to retrieve his car. While walking to the lot, his girlfriend noticed a lone Marine walking around the perimeter of another parking lot.

Girlfriend: "Who's that?"

Lieutenant: "It's a candidate on guard duty making sure the cars stay safe."

Girlfriend: "How long does he have to walk around the lot?"

Lieutenant: "I'm not sure, but usually about four hours."

Girlfriend: "What's that on his back?"

Lieutenant: "A radio."

Girlfriend: "At least he has something to listen to; I mean, if he can get a good station."

My buddy then explained about the radio. We all get our Corps education one way or another.

Col Bill Morgan, USMC (Ret)
Destrehan, La.

The Mail Call I'll Never Forget

I was at MCRD San Diego with Platoon 360 in September 1965. The three things I will always remember are the steel buckets in which we received our initial "bucket issue," the footlocker, aka locker box, and living in the Quonset hut. We used the steel bucket as seats and the locker boxes for work benches for spit shining dress shoes, polishing our boots and brass, and cleaning our M14s. There were no Corfam shoes nor anodized brass back in the day. And of course, we lived for mail call and hearing from our folks.

Before boot camp, I had attended high school in Kailua, Hawaii, on the windward side of Oahu, and some of my fellow students included Marine Corps dependents from MCAS Kaneohe. One of the dependents, Rob Brown, and I became great friends throughout our junior and senior years. Rob's dad was Colonel L.E. Brown, a Marine aviator assigned to "K-Bay." The colonel swore Rob and me into the Marine Corps on April 24, 1965, at Pearl Harbor. We both went to boot camp with Rob in 2nd Battalion and me in 3rd Battalion.

Mail call usually happened while we were sitting on our upside-down steel buckets on the "platoon street" working on our gear. One of the two junior drill instructors usually conducted mail call in alphabetical order. When called, we were to stand, say, "Sir, here Sir," run up, grab the mail between our clapping hands, then turn and return to our bucket after saying, "By your leave, Sir."

One day, mail call was done in alphabetical order as usual, but I had not been called. Then, with his infamous evil grin, Corporal Hewitt, one of our DIs, called me up while slapping two letters in his hand. As I went to get the letters, Cpl Hewitt pulled them away and I was told to stand fast. As he walked by me with that grin, I was instructed to report to the duty hut. When I arrived at the duty hut, I did the mandatory three raps on the door and announced my intention to enter. That's when I heard in a sing-song voice, "Who is it?" I repeated the procedure and was told to enter. I centered myself on the senior DI's desk at the position of attention. Sergeant Weidmeyer was slapping my letters in his hand as I stood there. He asked if I recalled on the first day if we were asked if we were related to any Marine Corps officers. I replied, "Sir, yes Sir." He then asked who Col Brown was. I told him how I knew him to which he replied, "We call that related." I said, "Sir, yes Sir." He had me open and read the letter aloud that was from Mrs. Brown, Rob's mother. The second letter was from my mother. He had me fold the letters and put them in my left breast pocket of my utilities.

"Now comes the fun," he said and told me to run myself into the wall lockers in the duty hut, then into the bulkhead and then I was to throw myself into the sand pit. I did as instructed. Sgt Weidmeyer exited the duty hut and told me to get on my feet. I wish I had a camera to capture the looks on the faces of the rest of the platoon. I returned to my bucket and went back to whatever it was I was doing.

In my next letter to Mrs. Brown, I asked her to please refrain from using the address label with the colonel's name on it.

At graduation a couple of months later, we were dismissed, and I joined my

Then, with his infamous evil grin, Corporal Hewitt, one of our DIs, called me up while slapping two letters in his hand.

family for photos. I felt a slap on my shoulder, and it was Sgt Weidmeyer. He smiled and said, "Give the colonel my regards," and walked off.

Sgt John H. Allen
USMC, 1965-1974

Fountain Valley, Calif.

Building No. 2

In June 1960 I was a private first class in 53rd Rifle Company, USMCR, in Charleston, S.C. I was ordered to Mine Warfare and Demolitions School at Camp Lejeune, N.C. The orders did not specify where I was to check in, but my brother was stationed there and he gave me directions. I located the building he had directed me to and went

inside. The sergeant waved away my manilla envelope full of orders, handed me a packet of papers, told me to complete the forms and return them to the desk.

I found a place at a table filled with Marines filling out forms. One of the Marines tapped my envelope and asked what the hell I was doing there if I had orders. I told him why I was there, and he told me that the men in that room were doing the paperwork necessary before they shipped out to the Med. He advised me to get the hell out of there. He had no idea where the Mine Warfare and Demolitions School was but said were he in my position he would go to Building No. 2 and ask for help there.

At Building No. 2 a corporal stood guard at a lectern immediately inside the door. I told him my problem and he saw an opportunity to have a bit of fun with a stupid reservist. He pointed to the large staircase and told me to go upstairs and ask for help.

It was late afternoon on the Friday before the Memorial Day weekend. As I wandered about the hall, I encountered a gentleman in his 50s with thinning silver hair. He was wearing a skivvy shirt and trousers with suspenders hanging down from the waistband. He had a towel around his shoulders and had apparently been shaving. He asked if he could help me. I told him I was lost. "Come along," he said as he led me into an office. He examined my papers, made a few phone calls and got directions for me. He drew a map to Courthouse Bay, the location of the school I was to attend, then said we would leave together.

I nearly wet my pants as he pulled on a shirt with two stars on each collar point. I gasped and apologized for disturbing him. He insisted that his position put too much distance between him

and the Marines in his command. It was his pleasure to deal personally with a youngster needing help.

I noticed him giving the eye to the corporal who had sent me upstairs. The look on the corporal's face suggested he might have wet his pants. Research reveals the general to have been James P. Berkeley.

Dr. David O. Whitten
USMCR, 1957-1963
Sullivan's Island, S.C.

R&R at Khe Sanh

During the spring of 1967, I was the radio chief for Communications Co, H&S Battalion, 3rd Marine Division at Phu Bai, RVN. I had just been approved for in-country R&R at White Beach when the communications officer told me that I'd have to go to Khe Sanh and install the equipment for a covered (encrypted) voice circuit between there and the combat information center at Phu Bai. I advised him of my R&R, and he asked, "Is there anybody who can do it better?" I picked one of our radio technicians, we checked out the necessary equipment and departed early the next morning in hopes of returning that evening in time to make my R&R.

As the saying goes, "If something can go wrong, it will." One piece of our gear was not functioning as it did the night before. I told the radio tech to hop on the next flight out and get back with working equipment ASAP. Again, if something can go wrong, it will. For some reason, Khe Sanh was closed to all air traffic, in or out, until further notice. The closure lasted three days, the same as my R&R.

On the third day I borrowed a jeep and went to the air strip to await the arrival of my technician and equipment. I was parked behind a jeep on the tarmac with a young Marine driving. The next

plane to land was a C-130 whose passengers were Lieutenant General Victor Krulak and General William Westmoreland.

They disembarked and were walking across the tarmac about 20 yards in front of me. The other jeep's driver was calmly taking

LtGen Krulak did a column half right and headed toward him. The young driver froze, not knowing what to do.

pictures when LtGen Krulak did a column half right and headed toward him. The young driver froze, not knowing what to do. The general pulled the lens cap from the Marine's camera, handed it to him, paused for a picture, did a left face and strolled over to where GEN Westmoreland was waiting.

MSgt Rush Williams, USMC
(Ret)
1954 to 1975
San Diego, Calif.

Big John Shut Down Camp Lejeune


It was obvious why his fellow Marines called him "Big John." He was 6 feet, 5 inches tall, weighed about 270 lbs., and was built like an Olympic weightlifter. The first time I really took notice of Big John was when 2/6 was scheduled to make a serious forced march from Cedar Point, N.C., back to 2nd Marine Division Headquarters at Camp Lejeune. Prior to mounting out, I inspected all the Marines in my unit to ensure they had all their equipment. Everyone complied except Big John. When I lifted his pack, it weighed less than a pound. When I opened it the only thing inside was an empty cardboard box to make the pack appear full. That's

when I knew Big John would be an "interesting" Marine to keep an eye on.

Big John's crowning achievement was during Operation Solid Shield 76. This was a massive military exercise involving all military branches with coordinated air, ground and land operations across several states with thousands of people participating. I was on radio watch at the 2/6 battalion command post when a "Mayday" call came over the net. All operations involved in the exercise at Camp Lejeune were to immediately stand down. A helicopter flying overhead had called in a drowning victim, face down in one of the lagoons at Camp Lejeune. I went to tell my unit and make a head count. When I got to our bivouac area, I didn't find Big John.

Just as I was about to send people to search for him, I looked off into the woods and saw an unusual sight heading our way. It was Big John wearing only his skivvies carrying his olive drab rubber air mattress. When I asked him what in the hell he had been doing, he said, "I found a great little lake over there and went sunbathing." Big John had singlehandedly shut down Operation Solid Shield 76. He was one of these memorable "characters" the Marine Corps seems to be blessed with.

R.L. McNeely
USMC, 1973-1977
Conway, Ark.

Do you have any interesting stories from your time in the Corps that will give our readers a good chuckle? We would love to hear them. Write them down (500 words or less) and send them to: Patricia Everett, *Leatherneck Magazine*, P.O. Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134, or email them to p.everett@mca-marines.org. We offer \$25 or a one-year MCA membership for the "Sea Story of the Month." 

Honoring Our Heroes: New ID Cards Give Veterans Secure Proof of Service

By Jacqueline Jedrych

Personal safety is of the utmost importance to military veterans who understand how vital security is, both on and off the battlefield. The effort to protect personally identifiable information, however, was often undermined for non-retiree military veterans by the need to carry discharge papers or other official documentation containing sensitive information in order to have their service acknowledged and receive benefits at numerous businesses and retail establishments throughout the country.

Addressing the Need

In 2015, President Barack Obama signed the Veteran Identification Act, which called on the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to produce ID cards for any person who “served in the Armed Forces; and has a Department of Defense form DD-214 or other official document in the official military personnel file of the veteran that describes the service of the veteran.”

The Veteran Identification Card (VIC) serves as a photo ID for veterans to present at businesses offering military or veteran benefits although the individual businesses maintain the right to refuse it. The VIC does not grant its holder access to military bases without a Veteran Health Identification Card (VHIC) and valid photo ID, nor does it grant commissary or Post Exchange privileges.

“The card is a way to prove veteran status without the need for veterans to carry around sensitive documents containing personally identifiable information contained on many military discharge documents,” said Gary Kunich of the Department of Veterans Affairs. “Additionally, these discharge documents are often paper-based and subject to normal wear and tear. The VIC card was implemented in a way to safeguard these documents and the information contained on them while still affording veterans the opportunity to prove their veteran status.”



PETE SOUZA

Above: President Barack Obama signs the Veterans' Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014, allocating more resources to the VA and paving the way for the Veteran Identification Act of 2015.

Right: A sample version of the front and back of the Veterans Identification Card. (Photo courtesy of VA)





Right: The Veteran Identification Act was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in a vote of 411-0 held in the U.S. Capitol on July 7, 2015.

Production and Distribution

The Department of Veterans Affairs rolled out the VIC in November of 2017, and 386,000 veterans have received the card to date. Server crashes due to the incredibly high website traffic and other unexpected delays within the first months of its implementation hindered the production of many cards, but the issues have since been resolved and cards began to be issued in 2018.

The card displays the name and branch of service on the front alongside an identification number. The back features resources for veterans, a statement of use and a prominent Office Depot logo. Since no federal funding was allocated to the project, Office Depot picked up a sizable percentage of the cost of printing and mailing the cards, allowing the cards to be distributed at no charge to the veteran.

The application process for a VIC is completed through the Veterans Affairs website. Applicants use secure login credentials through DS Logon, ID.me or MyHealtheVet to access the application. To apply, they must supply their social security number, a current and valid government- or state-issued ID card and a scan of their DD-214, DD-256, DD-257, or NGB-22, along with a picture to be printed on the card face.

Although the card appears to be integrating itself well, roadblocks still exist: the card is only available to veterans who received an honorable discharge. Discharge status can vary due to several factors. However, it is possible to upgrade a less than honorable discharge if the veteran does not feel that it properly acknowledges their caliber of service.



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“The card is a way to prove veteran status without the need for veterans to carry around sensitive documents containing personally identifiable information contained on many military discharge documents.”

—Gary Kunich, Department of Veterans Affairs

The Veterans' Views

Marine Corps retiree Patrick Lusi of St. George, Utah, said he was offered enrollment into the program at his yearly check-up at the VA health clinic. He has used his card to check into the health clinic more easily.

“It was pretty seamless... they didn't issue it on the spot; somebody at the reception took care of [helping me with my application], and within about three weeks from that time, it came in the mail ... at the clinic, they want you to check in at a kiosk, so you just slip the card under there, and a little laser light reads it, and it tells you to go have a seat and the doctor will be with you.”

Marine veteran William Fortune, who served for four years

To see if you qualify and to apply for the VIC at no cost, visit the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs website at <https://www.va.gov/records/get-veteran-id-cards/vic/>.



CAROL M. HIGHSMITH, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The Department of Veterans Affairs building is located in downtown Washington, D.C.

following his 1959 enlistment, received his card last year and has used it at several businesses around his community. He is glad it displays the eagle, globe and anchor so people can identify him as a Marine and thinks the new look is more official.

For Fortune, it feels good to have his military service acknowledged.

“When people first started saying anything, I was surprised and perhaps felt a little awkward,” said Fortune. “I had not thought anything about it when I went in. The draft was in effect and if you didn’t go to college, it was a natural thing to do. Besides all I wanted to do was just be a Marine. But today with the awful treatment the Vietnam vets got upon returning and all vets becoming a smaller group of people, it feels pretty nice to have people recognize that you stepped up to the challenges of your youth.”

Fortune says that having a physical proof of his service has inspired a deeper sense of pride in himself and his fellow Marines.

“I was attending an event in which all the services were recognized with their songs being played and not too many vets

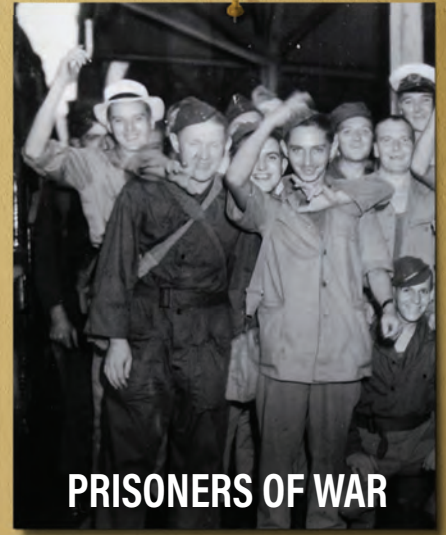
were standing when their song came up,” Fortune recalled. “I, of course, as I had been taught from day one, came to attention, and I and one other Marine I didn’t know next to me were on our feet. After the event a lady who was seated behind us sought me out and told me of the pride she felt when just two Marines out of the huge crowd were not afraid to be recognized.”

To see if you qualify and to apply for the VIC at no cost, visit the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs website at <https://www.va.gov/records/get-veteran-id-cards/vic/>.

Author’s bio: Jacqueline Jedrych is a junior studying world politics, French and intelligence at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. This is her first feature for Leatherneck.

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Review Board Allows Veterans To Request Corrections To Their Military Records

The Defense Department wants to make sure its veterans know they can apply to correct inaccuracies or injustices in their military records, including an upgrade in discharge.

“Veterans who believe they have suffered an inequity or injustice warranting a correction to their service record or who believe their discharge was unjust, erroneous or warrants an upgrade are encouraged to apply,” said Christa Specht, director of the DOD’s office of legal policy.

For example, veterans who received less-than-honorable discharges can file an application to request their military records be changed as long as they provide justifiable supplemental information for approval by their military department’s Board for Correction of Military/Naval Records or Discharge Review Board.

Furthermore, applications to a military department review board that allege a veteran suffered from a mental health condition, post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, sexual assault or sexual harassment while on duty, will be reviewed using a “liberal consideration” standard according to a May 26 memorandum from the acting undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness.

On Feb. 19, the department directed the secretaries of the military departments to identify and examine the records of any servicemember who was involuntarily separated, discharged or denied reenlistment or continuation of service in accordance with the prior administration’s policies relating to gender identity. The military departments issued supplemental guidance to their respective Boards for Correction of Military/Naval Records for review of servicemembers’ records so that, where appropriate, individuals who meet current accession standards

and are otherwise eligible are offered an opportunity to rejoin the military.

The boards can also grant relief based on clemency, Specht said, noting that those who got out of the military with a less-than-honorable discharge might still have positive accomplishments or evidence of good conduct to provide a review board in support of an upgrade. This may include indications of rehabilitation such as a long job history, absence of additional misconduct, character references or proof of extensive volunteer work.

One incentive for veterans to request an upgrade to their discharge is so they can qualify for Department of Veterans Affairs benefits, such as the GI Bill and VA mortgages, said Margarete Ashmore, deputy director of the DOD’s legal policy office.

Veterans who want to ask for discharge upgrades, reconsiderations of previously denied upgrades or corrections to other military records should fill out the appropriate form and return it to their service’s review board. For discharges fewer than 15 years ago, veterans should complete DD Form 293. For discharges more than 15 years ago or in cases already considered for upgrade and denied by a military department Discharge Review Board, veterans should complete DD Form 149. For corrections of records other than discharges, veterans should complete the DD Form 149.

If a veteran is unsure of how or where to apply for a discharge upgrade or correction, the VA provides resources on its website that can be used to help with applications.

In their applications, veterans should explain why the discharge or other record was unjust or erroneous—how is it connected to or resulting from unjust policies, a physical or mental health condition related to military service, or some other explainable or justifiable circumstance. They also should provide support, where

applicable, for key facts. If a veteran has a relevant medical diagnosis, it would be helpful to include medical records that reflect that diagnosis. Veterans should submit copies of applicable service records as well.

Specht emphasized that the more information a veteran provides, the easier it is for the review boards to understand the circumstances of the correction being sought.

Personnel records for veterans who served after 1997 should be accessible online and are usually retrievable within hours of a request through the Defense Personnel Records Information Retrieval System (DPRIS). To obtain a personnel record for DPRIS, visit its website, select “Individual Veteran Access” on the left side, and follow the instructions. Veterans must register for access and verify their mailing address before requesting records.

Those who served before 1997 or for whom electronic records are not available from DPRIS can request their records from the National Archives’ National Personnel Records Center at <https://vetrecs.archives.gov/VeteranRequest/home.html>.

Terri Moon Cronk

Corps to Add Plank to Annual PFT, Phase Out Abdominal Crunch

Headquarters Marine Corps recently announced that effective Jan. 1, 2023, the plank will replace abdominal crunches on the annual physical fitness test (PFT).

In 2020, the Marine Corps adopted the plank as an alternative to crunches for the PFT that would measure core stability, strength and endurance while reducing risk of injury. For PFTs conducted in 2022, Marines will still have the option to conduct the plank or the crunch just as in 2021, with slight scoring adjustments.

For decades, the Marine Corps has used sit-ups and crunches to improve and assess abdominal endurance. However, research has shown that sit-ups and crunches with the feet restrained require significant hip flexor activation. This has been linked to an increased risk of injury, including lower back pain due to increased lumbar lordosis.

The plank presents numerous advantages as an abdominal exercise. The plank’s isometric hold requires constant muscle activation, activates almost twice as many muscles as the crunch, and has been proven to be most reliable in

Need assistance or have questions about the process?

For veteran Marines, the following contacts may be helpful.

Board for Correction of Naval Records

<https://www.secnav.navy.mil/mra/bcnr>
(703) 607-6111
BCNR_Application@navy.mil

Naval Discharge Review Board

<https://www.secnav.navy.mil/mra/CORB/Pages/NDRB/default.aspx>
(202) 685-6600
NDRB@navy.mil



LCPL ROBERT GAVALDON, USMC

PFT UPDATE
CY22 VS CY23

CRUNCHES or PLANK
MAX 3:45
MIN 1:10

PLANK
MAX 3:45
MIN 1:10

USMC

Marines with Service Co, Headquarters and Service Bn, MCRD San Diego, plank during their annual Super Squad Competition in 2016. The Marine Corps recently announced that effective Jan. 1, 2023, a timed plank will replace the abdominal crunch portion of the annual PFT.

pricing by using AFT. This includes discounted rates on hotels (up to 60 percent), airfare, rental cars, vacation packages, event tickets and cruises.

“Sixteen million veterans will now be able to access the American Forces Travel website, joining the 10 million active duty, Guard and reserve servicemembers, family members, DOD civilians and other patrons who are already receiving the benefit,” said Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy, Patricia Montes Barron. “We are committed to providing quality-of-life programs to our military community, which includes our honorably discharged veterans.”

The change will not affect access for existing patrons, and the increased customer base will allow AFT to negotiate better prices for its customers.

ATF launched in 2019 as the only official joint service morale, welfare and recreation leisure travel website exclusively for DOD patrons. In addition to improving access to DOD’s MWR benefits, every booking on American Forces Travel generates revenue to support critical quality-of-life programs for servicemembers and families.

To access the exclusive military discount pricing on travel products, visit the American Forces Travel website at www.americanforcestravel.com.

measuring the true endurance required for daily activity function. With increased core strength, Marines are less likely to experience injury or fatigue during functional tasks like hiking, lifting and low crawling.

The new time for the plank’s maximum score will be 3:45, reduced from 4:20. The time for the minimum score has also been adjusted, increasing from 1:03 to 1:10.

For more information and resources, including a four-week core strength training plan, visit www.fitness.marines.mil.

HQMC

American Forces Travel Privileges Extended to Eligible Veterans

On July 16, the Department of Defense announced a policy change to the current shopping privileges of the American Forces Travel website. As directed by acting Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, Virginia S. Penrod, in a memo signed April 12, the department will extend online access to the website to honorably discharged veterans of the uniformed services.

On average, customers save 35-40 percent compared to commercial travel

DOD

In Memoriam

Compiled by Nancy S. Lichtman



CPT CHARLES CHELLMAN, USA

Marines honor their fallen during a ramp ceremony at Hamid Karzai International Airport, Aug. 27

Servicemembers Killed During Afghanistan Evacuations

The Department of Defense announced the deaths of 13 servicemembers, including 11 Marines, one Sailor, and one soldier, who were supporting Operation Freedom's Sentinel.

They died as a result of an enemy attack while supporting noncombatant evacuation operations Aug. 26 in Kabul, Afghanistan.

"These fallen heroes answered the call to go into harm's way to do the honorable work of helping others. We are proud of their service and deeply saddened by their loss," said General David H. Berger, Commandant of the Marine Corps.

The Marine Corps deceased are:

Staff Sergeant Darin T. Hoover, 31, of Salt Lake City, Utah. SSgt Hoover was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force, Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif.

Sergeant Johanny Rosariopichardo, 25, of Lawrence, Mass. Sgt Rosariopichardo was assigned to 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, Naval Support Activity Bahrain.

Sgt Nicole L. Gee, 23, of Sacramento, Calif. Sgt Gee was assigned to Combat

Logistics Battalion 24, 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, II MEF, MCB Camp Lejeune, N.C.

Corporal Hunter Lopez, 22, of Indio, Calif. Cpl Lopez was assigned to 2nd Bn, 1st Marines, 1stMarDiv, I MEF, Camp Pendleton, Calif.

Cpl Daegan W. Page, 23, of Omaha, Neb. Cpl Page was assigned to 2nd Bn, 1st Marines, 1stMarDiv, I MEF, Camp Pendleton, Calif.

Cpl Humberto A. Sanchez, 22 of Logansport, Ind. Cpl Sanchez was assigned to 2nd Bn, 1st Marines, 1stMarDiv, I MEF, Camp Pendleton, Calif.

Lance Corporal David L. Espinoza, 20, of Rio Bravo, Texas. LCpl Espinoza was assigned to 2nd Bn, 1st Marines, 1stMarDiv, I MEF, Camp Pendleton, Calif.

LCpl Jared M. Schmitz, 20, of St. Charles, Mo. LCpl Schmitz was assigned to 2nd Bn, 1st Marines, 1stMarDiv, I MEF, Camp Pendleton, Calif.

LCpl Rylee J. McCollum, 20, of Jackson, Wyo. LCpl McCollum was assigned to 2nd Bn, 1st Marines, 1stMarDiv, I MEF, Camp Pendleton, Calif.

LCpl Dylan R. Merola, 20 of Rancho Cucamonga, Calif. LCpl Merola was

assigned to 2nd Bn, 1st Marines, 1stMarDiv, I MEF, Camp Pendleton, Calif.

LCpl Kareem M. Nikoui, 20, of Norco, Calif. LCpl Nikoui was assigned to 2nd Bn, 1st Marines, 1stMarDiv, I MEF, Camp Pendleton, Calif.

The Navy deceased is **Hospitalman Maxon W. Soviak**, 22, of Berlin Heights, Ohio. HN Soviak was assigned to 1st Marines, 1stMarDiv, Camp Pendleton, Calif.

The Army deceased is **SSG Ryan C. Knauss**, 23, of Corryton, Tenn. He was assigned to 9th Psychological Operations Bn, 8th PSYOP Group, Fort Bragg, N.C.

Compiled from press releases

DPAA Identifies Marine Killed During Battle of Tarawa

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) announced recently that a Marine who was killed during World War II has been accounted for.

Sergeant Fred Farris, 19, of Hillsboro, Texas, was a member of Company I, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division in November 1943, when he landed on Betio Island in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. The Marines met stiff enemy resistance as they fought to secure the island and Sgt Farris was killed on the first day of battle. He was reported to have been buried in Cemetery 10.

In 1946, the 604th Quartermaster Graves Registration Company of the U.S. Army centralized all the American remains found on Tarawa in the Lone Palm Cemetery for later repatriation; however, almost half of the known casualties were never found. Of those found, many were sent to facilities in Hawaii for identification, but more than 90 sets of unidentifiable remains were interred at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (NMCP) in Honolulu. No recovered remains could be associated with Farris, and in 1949, he was declared "non-recoverable."

In May 2016, construction workers on Betio discovered possible human remains, and contacted History Flight, a nonprofit organization excavating American cemetery sites on the island. History Flight recovered the remains and investigated the site further, discovering additional remains and evidence confirming the site to be Cemetery 10. The remains were transferred to the DPAA laboratory at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii.

In November 2016, DPAA disinterred a Tarawa unknown from NMCP and scientific analysis revealed elements of the remains turned over by History Flight were associated with the disinterred remains.

To identify the remains as Farris', DPAA scientists used dental anthropological and chest radiograph comparison analysis as well as circumstantial and material evidence. Additionally, Armed Forces Medical Examiner System scientists used mitochondrial DNA analysis.

DPAA

Philip A. Anderson, 102, of North Branch, Minn. He enlisted soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor and served in the Pacific. He fought on Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Saipan, Guam and Iwo Jima. After the war, he returned to his hometown and he and his wife spent the next few decades as the owners of a 580-acre farm where they raised cash crops and cattle.

Steven G. Bates, 61, of Albuquerque, N.M. He served in the Marine Corps before working two decades for the Albuquerque Water Authority.

SgtMaj Lawrence Blair II, 82, of Vancouver, Wash. He enlisted in 1956 and served for 30 years. He completed four tours in Vietnam and was the recipient of

the Silver Star for his actions on Sept. 16, 1966, when he was a platoon sergeant in Co B, 1st Bn, 26th Marines, 3rdMarDiv. During Operation Deckhouse IV, then-Sgt Blair's platoon was ambushed near Gia Binh Village in Quang Tri Province by a larger enemy force. After two squad leaders were wounded, Blair advanced through heavy fire to reorganize the squads and continue to press the attack, according to the award citation. "He strategically brought the platoon to a forward position and directed its fire, enabling the remainder of the company to maneuver into position. Suddenly, automatic weapons fire erupted from an enemy bunker ... Blair was wounded twice by this burst of fire, sustaining a wound in the right forearm and one in his right leg. Despite his wounds, he continued to lead an attack on enemy positions" His other awards include a Purple Heart and Bronze Star with combat "V."

After his retirement, he worked for 18 years as a member of the Clark County Sheriff's Department in Washington.

Cpl Donald P. Bly, 88, of Rochester, N.Y. He enlisted during the Korean War and served at Fort Campbell, Ky., where he guarded a radioactive material storage facility. He later had a successful career in

management in the telecommunications industry. He was a member of the MCA and the American Legion. His son is also a Marine.

MAJ Robert F. Mergle, 76, of Columbia, S.C. He was a combat correspondent who served two tours in Vietnam. He later served in the Army Reserve and was activated during Operation Desert Storm.

Raphael J. "Ray" Parins, 89, of Green Bay, Wis. He was a Marine who served during the Korean War. He later had a career as a plumbing and heating contractor.

Dewey A. "Jack" Perdue, 87, of Roanoke, Va. During the Korean War he was assigned to Wpns Co, 2nd Bn, 2nd Marines.

In Memoriam is run on a space-available basis. Those wishing to submit items should include full name, age, location at time of death (city and state), last grade held, dates of service, units served in, and, if possible a published obituary. Allow at least four months for the notice to appear. Submissions may be sent to *Leatherneck Magazine*, P.O. Box 1775, Quantico, Va., 22134, or emailed to leatherneck@mca-marines.org or n.lichtman@mca-marines.org.



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It is true that the majority of the Marines in WW II were not regular Marines. As a WW II veteran in the Reserve, I can attest to that. However, I believe the truth is that the majority of those of us who served as Marines in the Pacific were volunteers, as in my case, rather than draftees. Most of us were accepted as reservists due to, I think, the limit set by Congress on the size of the Marine Corps. During the latter stages of the war the Marines did take draftees, but it is an affront to those of us who volunteered to assert that 70 percent were draftees. I volunteered for the Marine Corps, reporting to MCRD San Diego on Nov. 10, 1942. I am proud that the Marine Corps continues to honor that date.

MSgt Marsden E. Champaign
Waynesboro, Va.

Leatherneck Author Wins Colorado Writing Contest

I'm pleased to announce that my article, "Chosin Reservoir Campaign: Battle Perspectives from Marines Who Were There," published in the December 2020 *Leatherneck*, has won first place for article writing in the Colorado Authors League (CAL) annual contest for best writing in the history category for magazines. The oldest and largest writing organization in Colorado, CAL was formed in 1932 and has about 250 professional writers.

I want to thank Colonel Mary Reinwald, USMC (Ret) and *Leatherneck* for the opportunity to publish this work.

Irv Sternberg
USMC, 1951-1952
Denver, Colo.

Lone Sentinel Spirit Stood Watch At Belleau Wood

My oldest son, Shad, who was stationed near London, England, decided to plan a trip for the two of us to France while I was there to observe my oldest grandson's high school graduation in late May 2018. He asked me to pick a battlefield I would like to see, and I chose Belleau Wood. The site of the battle of Belleau Wood was the perfect choice due to its proximity of only 50 miles from Paris and the fact that the battle's 100th anniversary was coming up soon.

The day had arrived, May 31, 2018. We picked up our rental car and set out for our adventure. We arrived at Belleau Wood at approximately 10 am stopping first at the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery and Memorial visitor center to pick up a Belleau Wood Trail map. We parked and started hiking the southern section of the



SGT MICHAEL REED

While visiting Belleau Wood with his son, Shad, Michael Reed discovered this unusual looking tree on May 31, 2018.

wood. Some of the original 100-year-old trench lines and artillery craters were still unearthed and distinctly visible. As my son and I began to explore, we became somewhat separated but could easily see each other. As we walked, I began to take pictures of him with the sites in the background. As I took one picture of Shad, I noticed a tree over his shoulder in a clearing about 40 meters away. As I walked toward it, I took a few shots of the tree as I got closer. I estimated the height to be approximately 15 feet tall.

As I studied a picture I had taken up close, something jumped out at me. In my mind's eye, a distinct face appeared in the tree toward the crest of the right side. I was drawn to the image of the face

as if it was concealed by the leaves but visible. The tree had grown with a single limb jutting out horizontally as if it was an arm pointing to the ground below. This sentinel-like tree had grown in an area of hallowed ground that was declared by German soldiers to have been assaulted by Teufelshunde, Devil Dogs, after they were engaged in fierce and deadly hand-to-hand combat with the Marines of 4th Marine Brigade.

My son and myself were the only ones in the woods that morning and were able to share this magical and surprising moment of discovery. I have since shown this photo over the past three years to friends resulting in many interesting and gratifying reactions. One such reaction

was from an 80-year-old Marine who said, “I’ve got chills down the back of my neck when I look at this picture.” Another insight came from a 71-year-old former drill instructor and 21-year career Marine, who stated it looked like a “ghillie suit” having noticed the face in the tree.

Lastly, I must sound off with some concluding thoughts and feelings regarding the subject of this letter. This tree did not grow in Belleau Wood until after the dawn of the 21st century but took root not by accident or some random act of nature. This guardian emerged in the exact consecrated place to stand watch and commemorate the 100th anniversary of this hallowed ground. Though I am not a Marine myself, (I served in the Army) I am grateful and honored to have been able to capture this image for all Marines to see. Please sound off regarding what it may stir in your mind’s eye and heart.

Sgt Michael Reed
Greensboro, N.C.

Boot Camp, 1953

James Patrick McCrory was a decorated Korean combat Marine. He was what the Corps refers to as an “old salt.” And he looked every bit like what you would think a Marine drill instructor (DI) should look. Of course, we idolized him as he was as

super squared away as a career Marine can get. We also hated him.

Be certain, DIs are a select few, as they themselves went through a grueling 12 weeks of DI boot camp. They take their job of creating a “lean mean Marine” damned serious, knowing that whatever you learn in these 13 or 14 weeks are what you will carry the rest of your life. As the poster says, “Ma’am, we don’t build character, but we sure as hell will bring out any character that might be there.” So, their job is to take slovenly, spoiled, so-called tough guys, strip them bare of any identity they arrived with, and to one degree or another knock the snot out of them. Once they have done that, they then begin the long arduous process of building Marines. It takes three or four months of constant belligerence on the part of the DIs, and they, I assure you, are more than up to the task. They are the Corps’ best.

They believe fervently that they first must break you down to your basic instincts. A “tabula rasa” sort of status. That’s what the shaved heads, painted numbers on one’s butt, and constant harassment manages to do. Everyone is treated with a level of disgust that eventually the recruit himself begins to absorb. It doesn’t take long for him to realize what a worthless soul he once was—and that’s exactly

WAYS TO SOUND OFF


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EMAIL | leatherneck@mca-marines.org

where the Corps wants him as it is then they begin the process of remaking that same hapless soul into a proud Marine. When they are done, he will be in the best physical condition of his life, and he will strut with an air of confidence that others



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who knew him would find it hard to believe that this is the same sort of unkempt boy who left for the Island 14 weeks earlier.

The process takes longer than any recruit desires, but the Marine Corps has it down to a science. They believe that the world the recruit left behind is an unbelievably sloppy and undisciplined one and they endeavor to shut off that world totally. There would be no candy bars or Coca Cola. And if dear old mom sent a package filled with goodies, you never knew it. No one was allowed visitors—under any circumstance. I don't ever remember seeing a civilian on the Island. Not one. Heck, I never saw a newspaper or magazine or a book for that matter—the exception being the Marine Corps Manual which we pretty much memorized. Movies and music, forget it. And the only time I heard a radio I was cleaning the faucets and pipes in the DI's head. There I got to enjoy a moment of music. I still remember the song, "Your Cheatin' Heart" by Teresa Brewer. The DI didn't turn it off, he just bellowed, "Stop listening to that, boot!" I stopped listening.

It didn't dawn on me for years as to why Marines are so tight. Why pride matters so much. Why the esprit de corps? It obviously has a common hold on all Marines

as there's no denying the fellowship when Marines meet. Even their greeting "Semper Fi" (Always Faithful) has deep meaning. I've come to believe that the commonality of pride is none other than Parris Island and those miserable, but memorable, 14 weeks.

Ralph Wright
Lady Lake, Fla.

History and Legacy Kept Alive

I wanted to tell you how much *Leatherneck* magazine through the years becomes more and more relevant to the past, present and future. I have accumulated 25 years plus of *Leatherneck* and while convalescing after some serious surgeries, I find myself going back to reread articles and stories that brought back memories, tears and smiles when I needed them the most. I was taken back while reading the November 2019 issue specifically, "Representing the Past: Pageant of Historic Uniforms Honors the Marines Who Came Before" about the uniforms of our beloved Corps from the inception until present day. The details and efforts put into keeping history alive was and is amazing to me and I'm sure to other readers as well. The photographs and the work going into this project are beyond belief. I only wish I had the privilege of

being at the Commandant's Birthday Ball. I would love to meet General Charles C. Krulak and Gen Robert B. Neller. Perhaps someday. If not here, in the next world to come.

Thanks again for the quality and accuracy of every aspect of *Leatherneck* magazine.

Paul Hout
Jacksonville, Fla.

Editorial Irish Pennants

The August Sound Off letter, "History of the 8th Marine Regiment" states, "In 1950, 40 Marines were transferred from Quantico, Va., to the 2ndMarDiv at Camp Lejeune, N.C., to reactivate the 9th Marine Regiment," and should have read, "to reactivate the 8th Marine Regiment." We apologize for the error.

Feel like sounding off? Address your letter to: Sound Off, *Leatherneck* Magazine, P.O. Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134, or send an email to: leatherneck@mca-marines.org. Due to the heavy volume, we cannot answer every letter received. Do not send original photographs, as we cannot guarantee their return. All letters must be signed, and emails must contain complete names and postal mailing addresses. Anonymous letters will not be published.—Editor 🐻

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WHERE YOU WANT TO BE.**



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WHERE THINGS START TO GET BETTER.



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Reader Assistance

Edited by Sara W. Bock

Reunions

• **East Coast Drill Instructors Assn.**, Oct. 7-10, Parris Island, S.C. Contact SgtMaj Kenneth Miller, USMC (Ret), (828) 499-0224, usmcpidi@charter.net.

• **USMC Weather Service**, June 19-24, 2022, Overland Park, Kan. Contact Kathy Donham, (252) 342-8459, kathy.donham@hotmail.com, or Dave Englert, engertd@psci.net.

• **11th Marine Regiment, OIF (20th anniversary)**, March 31-April 1, 2023, Camp Pendleton, Calif. Contact Casey Harsh, casey.harsh@gmail.com. Facebook group: The Cannon Cockers of OIF-1 (20-Year Reunion 2023 Group).

• **STA Plt, 2/8 (1989-1993)** is planning a reunion. Contact Mike Moriarty, mmoriarty81@comcast.net.

• **11th Engineer Bn (RVN, 1966-1969)**, September 2022, O'Hare-Des Plaines, Ill. Contact Gene T. Spanos, (847) 532-2963, genethemarine@gmail.com.

• **2/9**, Nov. 8-12, Arlington, Va. Contact Danny Schuster, twoninencoic@aol.com,

www.2ndbattalion9thmarines.org.

• **M/3/7 (RVN)**, May 11-14, 2022, Annapolis, Md. Contact George Martin, (443) 822-3597, m37bulldog@aol.com.

• **Marine Expeditionary Brigade-Afghanistan, Task Force Leatherneck (2009-2010)**, May 13-15, 2022, Quantico, Va. Contact reunion committee, taskforceleatherneck@gmail.com.

• **Marine Barracks Sasebo, Japan**, Oct. 25-27, Las Vegas, Nev. Contact Bob McCarthy, (515) 274-9110, coach430@aol.com.

• **Philippine Embassy Marines (1976-1977)**, Nov. 10, North Carolina. Contact Tim Craig, phildream2017@gmail.com.

• **TBS 3-64**, April 5-7, 2022. Contact Hugh Doss, hudoss@aol.com.

• **TBS 3-66 & 4-66/38th and 39th OCC**, Oct. 25-28, Las Vegas. Contact Jack Sheehan, (401) 255-0387, jacksheehanjtown@me.com, www.usmc-thebasicschool-1966.com.

• **TBS 4-67, 5-67, 6-67 "Rally at the Alamo,"** Oct. 11-14, San Antonio, Texas.

Contact Ken Pouch, (860) 881-6819, kpouch5@gmail.com.

• **TBS, Co F, 6-70**, Oct. 21-24, Quantico, Va. Contact Col Tom Kanasky, USMCR (Ret), (202) 366-3156, tlkanasky@earthlink.net, or Col Mitch Youngs, USMCR (Ret), (703) 493-9435, mitchyoungs@verizon.net.

• **TBS, Co I, 9-70**, Oct. 7-10, San Diego, Calif. Contact Mike Hoeflerlin, (573) 268-3824, mike.hoeflerlin@gmail.com.

• **TBS, Co C, 3-72**, is planning a 50th-anniversary reunion. Contact Col Joe Mueller, USMCR (Ret), (818) 815-8331, jnm21213@yahoo.com.

• **TBS, Co D, 4-73**, is planning a 50th-anniversary reunion in 2023, Quantico, Va. Contact Col Bill Anderson, USMCR (Ret), (540) 850-4213, binche57@yahoo.com, or Col Bob Donaghue, USMCR (Ret), (617) 840-0267, ip350haven@comcast.net.

• **Plt 1187, San Diego, 1969**, is planning a reunion. Contact T.E. Miller, (618) 520-9646, or Mark Elder, (314) 322-8516.



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• **Plt 3028, San Diego, 1966**, is planning a reunion. Contact MSgt Bob Rees, USMC (Ret), (619) 940-9218, bobrees86@gmail.com.

• **USMC A-4 Skyhawkers**, Oct. 21-24, Las Vegas, Nev. Contact Mark Williams, 10432 Button Willow Dr., Las Vegas, NV 89134, (425) 327-6050, usmcskyhawker21@gmail.com.

• **HMM-165/VMM-165 (all hands, all eras)**, Oct. 21-24, Glendale, Ariz. For details, visit www.165whiteknights.com.

Ships and Others

• **USS Canberra (CA-70/CAG-2)**, Oct. 13-17, Pittsburgh, Pa. Contact Ken Minick, 2115 Pride Ave., Belpre, OH 45714, (740) 423-8976.

• **USS Saratoga (CV/CVA/CVB-60)**, Oct. 20-24, Mobile, Ala. Contact Bill Lack, williamlack@gmail.com.

Entries for "Reader Assistance," which include "Reunions," "Mail Call," "Wanted" and "Sales, Trades and Giveaways," are free and printed on a space-available basis. *Leatherneck* reserves the right to edit or reject any submission. Allow two to three months for publication. Send your email to s.bock@mca-marines.org, or write to Reader Assistance Editor, *Leatherneck* Magazine, P.O. Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134. 🦁



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Saved Round

By Nancy S. Lichtman



MODERNIZING THE MAGAZINE—You have probably noticed a different look to the masthead on the cover of this month's *Leatherneck*. Over the last century, there have been numerous versions of our masthead, but the current design is nearly 20 years old, and we thought it was time for a change. The *Leatherneck* team analyzed dozens of typestyles to choose something new and different, while also keeping the importance of tradition in mind.

Through the coming months, we will continue to make changes to enhance the look and accessibility of the magazine in print and online and on our new Marine Corps Association App, which allows you to access *Leatherneck* from your smartphone or tablet and offers interactive features such as audio recordings of articles. The App will also include professional development resources that we know our readers will enjoy like battle studies, tactical decision games, and podcasts. Most importantly, we remain dedicated to bringing you excellent stories and amazing photographs of Marines as we have done for the last 104 years. 🦖



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