



2nd Marine Division (Forward)

Task Force Leatherneck

Camp Leatherneck, Helmand province, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

January 1, 2011

Weekly News Round-Up

The following content includes the weekly news coverage of 2nd Marine Division (Forward). The division, also known as Task Force Leatherneck, is the ground combat element of Regional Command (Southwest) and is responsible for Helmand and Nimroz provinces, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The content was created by Marine Corps Combat Correspondents and Combat Camera. Feel free to forward our stories to friends, family and those who support our deployed service members.

Alabama Marine uses gift of encouragement in Helmand

By Sgt. Earnest Barnes

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Helmand province, Afghanistan – Those who work with Mario T. Handley on a daily basis clearly see there is something different about him. Being a Marine is not about doing a job for this Birmingham, Ala., native, but rather an opportunity to fulfill his purpose in life.

Corporal Handley, an administrative clerk with Headquarters Battalion (Forward), 2nd Marine Division (Forward), said he feels he was called to the Marine Corps, not just to improve upon himself, but to use his faith to encourage his fellow servicemembers and uplift their spirits.

Handley, who graduated from A.H. Parker High School in 2007, was attracted to the Marine Corps because of the leadership and stability the organization offers. He said after considering his options and praying, he felt he was called to be a Marine, even though his cousin in the Army tried to convince him otherwise.

“I talk to my cousin every now and then, and she is an (Army) lieutenant colonel at the Pentagon,” said Handley, who joined the Marine Corps in April 2009. “(She) tried her best to get me to join the Army before I enlisted. I felt that it was meant for me to join the Marine Corps rather than the Army because I approached the situation with prayer; I believe I was divinely led to the Marine Corps.”

He said he likes being a Marine because he gets to know so many other people and is able to fellowship with his brothers and sisters from different walks of life. He said fellowship with his fellow Marines is one of the greatest gifts he could ask for.

Everyone experiences life’s struggles, but Handley said in the Marine Corps there is always someone you can



fellowship with no matter who they are or where they come from, and he believes he is that someone for many Marines within his battalion.

Handley’s position in the administration section gives him the opportunity to interact with the diverse cultures and ethnic groups that constitute the Corps. He is responsible for preparing administrative correspondence, handling pay entitlements, awards, and any other administrative issues Marines might bring to him.

“Corporal Handley’s performance, character and personality speak for itself. He is one of very few corporals that can produce and run an admin shop by himself,” said Staff Sgt. Aqueel Freeman, a Columbus, Ga., native and the administration section chief. “He is calm and keeps his cool under stress, yet at the same time he has the means to find words of inspiration.”

Handley said working in the administration section is not a one-man show. All the Marines in the section make huge contributions to the battalion, but he also tries to bring a different essence of camaraderie to the battalion.

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Post-Taliban Marjah enjoys security, promise

By Cpl. Tommy Bellegarde

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Helmand province, Afghanistan – Marjah district, Helmand province, was a major producer of opium and a Taliban stronghold just two years ago. The Taliban was also using the district as a launching pad for insurgent activities throughout Helmand province and other areas of Afghanistan.

Marjah was relatively undeveloped and had scant infrastructure. Local Afghan leaders said the district had no services, schools, clinics or police force under Taliban rule; it had a thriving drug trade and was a dangerous place with little hope for improvement. Marjah today is a very different place, however, with the help



of coalition forces and Afghan leaders determined to free their people from insurgents' terror and intimidation.

“Two years ago Marjah was a central location or gathering location for Taliban, and that’s where the Taliban were being organized,” said Senior Captain Ghulam Wali, the Marjah chief of police. “They were organizing

the Taliban from Marjah to (Zabul) province, Nimroz province and Uruzgan province. This place was the main place, or the hub, for the Taliban and drug traffickers.”

The situation changed when coalition forces captured Marjah during Operation Moshtarak.

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RCT-5 sailors track, provide care for brothers-in-arms

By Cpl. Alfred Lopez

CAMP DWYER, Helmand province, Afghanistan – U.S. Navy corpsmen are vital to keeping Marines in the business of fighting battles.

Every day they treat the simplest of injuries, save Marine lives and ensure that their fellow warriors are able to return home to their families.



One essential role that corpsmen undertake is casualty tracking.

Petty Officers 3rd Class Jose R. Perez and Bradley Donahue, both corpsmen and casualty trackers with the Regimental Combat Team 5 regimental aid station casualty tracking center, are in the business of taking care of Marines, and getting them to where they need to be.

Whether it’s back to the front lines for another day in the fight, or back home to fully recover from their wounds, the casualty trackers ensure that their Marine brothers and sisters are well cared for.

“Our overall mission is to track and care for patients and casualties from units that fall under RCT-5,” said Perez, a 34-year-old native of San German, Puerto Rico.

“If you boil it down to the basics, our job is to pass information,” said Donahue, a 30-year-old native of Mission Viejo, Calif. “We’re professional communicators.” [\(Read Story\)](#)

Marine returns to Corps after 21 years, shares wisdom with juniors

Cpl. James Clark

KAJAKI SOFLA, Helmand province, Afghanistan - He can be found in the early mornings rousing exhausted 20-year-olds from the rack with a mug of steaming coffee in hand, or, come evening, shrouded in a veil of cigar smoke, reclining in a leather armchair within a plank and plywood shack of his own construction.

In the corner of the shanty, a rusty and once-derelict oven has been put to good use, and the fire smoldering inside never seems to go out, which is something that can be said of Sgt. Randy King, a platoon guide with 2nd Combat Engineer Battalion, who serves alongside the Marines of 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, at Forward Operating Base White House near Kajaki Sofla.



At first glance, he appears weathered and hard-bitten, but within seconds a smile flashes across his face, followed shortly by a gruff, but full-bellied laugh and his eyes look back with both wisdom and benevolence.

The 50-year-old sergeant from Ashville, N.C., walks among his

Marines, doling out advice while they work, and a helping hand where needed.

He is a man of two Corps, of two generations of Marines, having begun his time in the service in 1979, serving for eight years before ending his active duty contract for nearly two decades before returning once more.

“I liked everything there was about the Marine Corps,” said King, explaining how when he was in high school, he accompanied a friend of his to the recruiter’s office and found something he didn’t know he was looking for.

“Listening to the recruiter talk, I thought, ‘I like this; I want to be a Marine.’” [\(Read Story\)](#)

Killing Time: Channeling boredom into board games

By Cpl. Reece Lodder

COMBAT OUTPOST KOSHTAY, Helmand province, Afghanistan — A group of infantry Marines huddle around a Scrabble board, barely visible beneath filthy camouflage utilities and a mishmash of warming layers. Sheltered in the meager warmth of an unheated concrete room, they fill their down time by channeling boredom into a board game.

The room — a chow hall that doubles as a recreation center — is plastered with cheesy Christmas decorations. Sparsely decorated miniature Christmas trees, cheap plastic tablecloths imprinted with mistletoe and giant paper snowflakes offer a weak semblance of holiday festivity.

A veil of dust thickens the chilly air outside, limiting visibility and rendering the once-blue sky an ashen gray. In the wake of the Dec. 21 dust storm, Marines with 1st Platoon, Lima Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, remain indoors, unable to travel beyond the base’s walls.

This down time is an exception to the short time they have between the regular rotation of guard post duty and foot patrols — precious moments to unwind by connecting with family, lifting weights, cooking and watching movies.

Today, however, they’re away from their home base, stuck indoors with little to do.

“We’re playing games just to pass the time,” said Lance Cpl. Stuart Ferreri, a 21-year-old improvised explosive device dog handler with 1st Platoon, from Northglenn, Colo. “There’s always a lot of boredom in our down time, but we just make the best of it.”

Ferreri surveys the letter blocks on the table in front of him, struggling to find a word to put on the board.

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