



The Convoy

Delivering quality information on the 1st Marine Logistics Group.

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Operation Moshtarak

Marine Engineers Survive Marjah Blast

Story and Photos by
Lance Cpl. Walter Marino
**Regimental Combat Team-7, 1st
Marine Division Public Affairs**

HELMAND PROVINCE, Afghanistan – Marines from Alpha Company, 2nd Combat Engineer Battalion, worked tirelessly from early morning to the mid-afternoon Feb. 11, building makeshift bridges over canals to provide a route for Marines and vehicles to enter the known Taliban stronghold of Marjah.

After completion of their last makeshift bridge, Marines had just boarded their vehicles, when suddenly a loud explosion erupted from behind one of their trucks.

Mud chunks fell from the sky like rain. But, no Marines were hurt. Fortunately, Alpha Company had boarded their vehicles moments before the blast.

“The blast made my heart jump. It was a reality check,” said Sgt. Jonathan J. Sanabria, a truck master for Alpha Company. “Everyone is real lucky.”

Marines surveyed the scene to find nothing but mud houses and Afghan goat herders. It appeared the insurgent attack had been only a single improvised explosive device. Alpha Company continued forward, but halted as enemy shots rang out.



Marines from Alpha Company, 2nd Combat Engineer Battalion, rest after finishing the construction of three makeshift bridges, encountering an improvised explosive device and providing security during a fire fight in Marjah, Helmand province, Afghanistan, Feb. 11.

The attack was coming from a mud building in the north. Surprisingly however, the attack was not being placed on Alpha Company, but rather on Marines from 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment.

Alpha Company moved into position to provide security, and assist in any way possible.

“The reason I went out is because I didn’t think it was fair to have those Marines fighting by themselves. I thought we could push forward and help them suppress fire, and make it a little

easier for those guys,” said Cpl. James A. Pabey, a motor transport operator for Alpha Company. “We are all here for the same reason. It doesn’t matter who they are or where they come from. You just come together, you might not even know the guy shooting next to you, but you make sure he’s good to go. It’s camaraderie. We’re here for them and they’re there for you.”

Several MK-19 40 mm machine guns and 60 mm mortar rounds were fired into the mud compound for approximately an hour until the insurgent threat was ceased.

“I could see them leaving once the mortar rounds started hitting the building,” said Cpl. Christopher T. McKinzyie, a machine gunner for Alpha Company.

With the bridge construction completed and the firefight over, Alpha Company’s mission was done. Still, Alpha Company chose to remain posted near the route, just in case their engineering skills or assistance might be needed for the fight in Marjah.

Alpha Company is prepared to help their fellow Marines in any way they can.

Courtesy story by
ISAF Joint Command

KABUL, Afghanistan - The clearing phase of operation Moshtarak continued yesterday. The combined force continues to face sporadic fire fights. The combined forces have incurred casualties.

A press conference held yesterday in Lashkar Gah included General Abdul Rahim Wardak, minister of Defense; Mohammed Hanif Atmar, minister of Interior; Mohammed Gulab Mangal, governor of Helmand province; Brig. Gen. Sher Mohammad Zazai, ANA 205 Corps commander; and General Stanley McChrystal, ISAF commander.

Gen. Wardak said the objective of Operation Moshtarak is not to kill insurgents, but to provide security, governance and development for the people of Helmand. He called on insurgents to put down their weapons and join the reintegration process. He also said that sufficient security forces will remain following the clearing operation to provide an environment conducive to development.

During the press conference, Minister Atmar provided an update on the tragic incident that occurred Sunday. He indicated according to the initial report insurgents held civilians captive in a compound. The insurgents used this location to deliver accurate, direct fire at combined forces. Not knowing there were civilians present, the combined forces responded using a heavy weapon, resulting in a tragic loss of civilian lives. Atmar said there was a meeting with people in the area and an apology has been made. The village elders voiced their support for the Afghan government.

Gov. Mangal said he appreciated the good coordination

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An improvised explosive device detonated after Alpha Company, 2nd Combat Engineer Battalion, built a makeshift bridge across a canal in Marjah, Helmand province, Afghanistan, Feb. 11. The IED did not injure any Marines. Bridges built by Alpha Company provided a route for vehicles and Marines to take into the Taliban stronghold of Marjah.

U.S. Marine walks away from shot to helmet in Afghanistan

Story by Michael M. Phillips
Wall Street Journal

MARJAH, Afghanistan—It is hard to know whether Monday was a very bad day or a very good day for Lance Cpl. Andrew Koenig.

On the one hand, he was shot in the head. On the other, the bullet bounced off him.

In one of those rare battlefield miracles, an insurgent sniper hit Lance Cpl. Koenig dead on in the front of his helmet, and he walked away from it with a smile on his face.

"I don't think I could be any luckier than this," Lance Cpl. Koenig said two hours after the shooting.

Lance Cpl. Koenig's brush with death came during a day of intense fighting for the Marines of Company B, 1st Battalion, 6th Regiment.

The company had landed by helicopter in the predawn dark on Saturday, launching a major coalition offensive to take Marjah from the Taliban.

The Marines set up an outpost in a former drug lab and roadside-bomb factory and soon found themselves under near-constant attack.

Lance Cpl. Koenig, a lanky 21-year-old with jug-handle ears and a burr of sandy hair, is a designated marksman. His job is to hit the elusive Taliban fighters hiding in the tightly



Photo by Bryan Denton, Wall Street Journal

Lance Cpl. Andrew Koenig shows the spot on his helmet where a Taliban bullet struck, almost centered, between the eyes.

MOSHTARAK

Continued from Page 1

between the ANSF and ISAF troops during the operation. He said the government does not currently have control of three (Baghran, Washir and Deshow) out of the 13 districts in Helmand province, indicating he was optimistic that the government soon would take charge in these areas. He also appealed to insurgents to join the peace process.

Indicating there is still resistance from insurgents in Marjah, Gen. Zazai expressed confidence they will soon be defeated. Local elders in Nad-e Ali have expressed their support for the Afghan government during shuras held in the area, he said.

Gen. McChrystal said the Afghan-led Operation Moshtarak has highlighted a special partnership of which he is very proud. He asked media to watch the bravery of the ANSF and coalition partners, stating he is himself exceptionally proud of how they have performed.

The goal of Moshtarak - Dari for "together" - is for the combined force (ANA, ANP, ISAF and the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team) to support the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in asserting its authority in central Helmand, thereby demonstrating the government's commitment to the people living there.

The operation is being conducted at the request of the Afghan government and the governor of Helmand. The security forces involved are serving side-by-side, representing partnership in strength.

packed neighborhood near the base.

The insurgent sniper hit him first. The Casper, Wyo., native was kneeling on the roof of the one-story outpost, looking for targets.

He was reaching back to his left for his rifle when the sniper's round slammed into his helmet.

The impact knocked him onto his back.

"I'm hit," he yelled to his buddy, Lance Cpl. Scott Gabriel, a 21-year-old from St. Louis. Lance Cpl. Gabriel belly-crawled along the rooftop to his friend's side. He patted Lance Cpl. Koenig's body, looking for wounds.

Then he noticed that the plate that usually secures night-vision goggles to the front of Lance Cpl. Koenig's helmet was missing. In its place was a thumb-deep dent in the hard Kevlar shell.

Lance Cpl. Gabriel slid his hands under his friend's helmet, looking for an entry wound. "You're not bleeding," he assured Lance Cpl. Koenig. "You're going to be OK."

Lance Cpl. Koenig climbed down the metal ladder and walked to the company aid station to see the Navy corpsman.

The only injury: A small, numb red welt on his forehead, just above his right eye.

He had spent 15 minutes with Doc, as the Marines call the medics, when an insurgent's rocket-propelled grenade exploded on the rooftop, next to Lance Cpl. Gabriel.

The shock wave left him with a concussion and hearing loss.

He joined Lance Cpl. Koenig at the aid station, where the two friends embraced, their eyes welling.

The men had served together in Afghanistan in 2008, and Lance Cpl. Koenig had survived two blasts from roadside bombs.

"We've got each other's backs," Lance Cpl. Gabriel said, the explosion still ringing in his ears.

Word of Lance Cpl. Koenig's close call spread quickly through the outpost, as he emerged from the shock of the experience and walked

through the outpost with a Cheshire cat grin.

"He's alive for a reason," Tim Coderre, a North Carolina narcotics detective working with the Marines as a consultant, told one of the men. "From a spiritual point of view, that doesn't happen by accident."

Gunnery Sgt. Kevin Shelton, whose job is to keep the Marines stocked with food, water and gear, teased the lance corporal for failing to take care of his helmet.

"I need that damaged-gear statement tonight," Gunnery Sgt. Shelton told Lance Cpl. Koenig. It was understood, however, that Lance Cpl. Koenig would be allowed to keep the helmet as a souvenir.

Gunnery Sgt. Shelton, a 36-year-old veteran from Nashville, said he had never seen a Marine survive a direct shot to the head.

But next to him was Cpl. Christopher Ahrens, who quietly mentioned that two bullets had grazed his helmet the day the Marines attacked Marjah. The same thing, he said, happened to him three times in firefights in Iraq.

Cpl. Ahrens, 26, from Havre de Grace, Md., lifted the camouflaged cloth cover on his helmet, exposing the holes where the bullets had entered and exited.

He turned it over to display the picture card tucked inside, depicting Michael the Archangel stamping on Lucifer's head. "I don't need luck," he said.

After his moment with Lance Cpl. Gabriel, Lance Cpl. Koenig put his dented helmet back on his head and climbed the metal ladder to resume his rooftop duty within an hour of being hit.

"I know any one of these guys would do the same," he explained. "If they could keep going, they would."

Write to Michael M. Phillips at michael.phillips@wsj.com

Financial classes help during economic low

Happenings



Beth Middleton, family Services financial management consultant, explains to participants the importance of credit and debt during a finance management class at the Camp Pendleton's Family Services building, Feb. 5. During the class, Middleton suggested that the most basic ways to keep and improve your credit scores include paying your bills, credit cards and loan payments on time, and by keeping your debt level low.

Story and photos by
Sgt. Alvaro Aro
The Scout Staff

MARINE CORPS BASE CAMP PENDLETON, Calif. — Today's economy has forced many people to search for ways to improve their financial situation with hopes to better the life of themselves and their loved ones.

Service members are no exception to the effects of the economy, and thanks to programs offered on base, financial stability is still attainable.

Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Family Services is offering financial management classes to Marines, sailors and their family members.

Two classes are held at building 1350 every Friday at 8 and 10 a.m., that cover a vast array of useful topics such as budgeting, credit management and investment.

"One of the most basic questions in dealing with your finances is to know how much you make, spend, owe and save," said Beth Middleton, Family Ser-

vices financial management consultant. "We are here to show you how."

Budget planning is the first essential step to financial planning, she said.

"If you have a spouse, it's important to create your budget plan together," said Middleton. "It will be simpler to follow and easier to reach your goals."

Another subject discussed in the class is credit management and how it affects an individual's financial position.

"Credit can be a useful financial tool," said Middleton. "It can also become a nightmare if not handled right."

The most important things that affect ones credit rating are defaulted and unpaid debts, slow payment history, the "debt-to-net income" ratio, the number of companies you have applied for credit even if you did not use it, and the total debt limit compared to income.

"My goal is to improve my credit score," said Pfc. John Espinoza, data network specialist, Combat Logistics Regiment 15. "Just having a peace of mind (of having a good credit score) would mean a lot to me."

During the class, Middleton suggested that the most basic ways to keep and improve your credit scores include paying your bills, credit cards and loan payments on time, and by keeping your debt level low.

When it comes to investing, some tips to remember include putting a large down payment when buying, negotiating for lower interest rates, and avoid co-signing on behalf of others.

"If you have a 30-year fixed mortgage on your house and make one extra payment a year, it will take seven years off the loan," said Middleton.

Participants also discussed debt management, saving and investing by sharing their own experiences and situations.

For more information, call the Camp Pendleton's Family Services Financial Management Office at (760) 725-9790.

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Free comedy show
On Thursday, 4 Mar 10, "Comics On Duty" (www.comicsonduty.com) will be giving a FREE LIVE COMEDY SHOW at the 11 Area Field (next to the Paige Fieldhouse) at 1500 and at the 21 Area SMP Center at 1900! For more information visit www.mccscp.com.

Book signing
Author Hugh Ambrose will be signing his new book, "The Pacific". The book is the official companion book to the HBO miniseries, "Band of Brothers", a 10 part miniseries event premiering on 14 March 2010. "Band of Brothers" is the real life story of five men who put their lives on the line for our Country. For more information please call 760-725 6233 x122

The Base Theater

Tuesday - CLOSED due to a pre-deployment brief.
Wednesday - Sherlock Holmes (PG-13) 6:30 p.m.
Thursday - Invictus (R) 6:30 p.m.
Friday - Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel (PG) 6:15 p.m. Invictus (R) 8:30 p.m.
Saturday - Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel (PG) 3:30 p.m. Sherlock Holmes (PG-13) 5:45 p.m. It's Complicated (R) 8:45 p.m.
Sunday - !!Free Movies!!
Law Abiding Citizen (R) 1:00 p.m. Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs (PG) 4:00 p.m. The Invention of Lying (PG-13) 6:30 p.m.

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- Check the following sites for updates:
- victorythroughlogistics.vox.com
- flickr.com/photos/victorythroughlogistics
- dvidshub.net/units/1-MLG
- myspace.com/1stmlg
- youtube.com/user/1stmlg
- facebook: Group name "1st MLG"

For more information, please contact the 1st MLG Public Affairs Office at (760) 763-7795.



The Convoy Staff

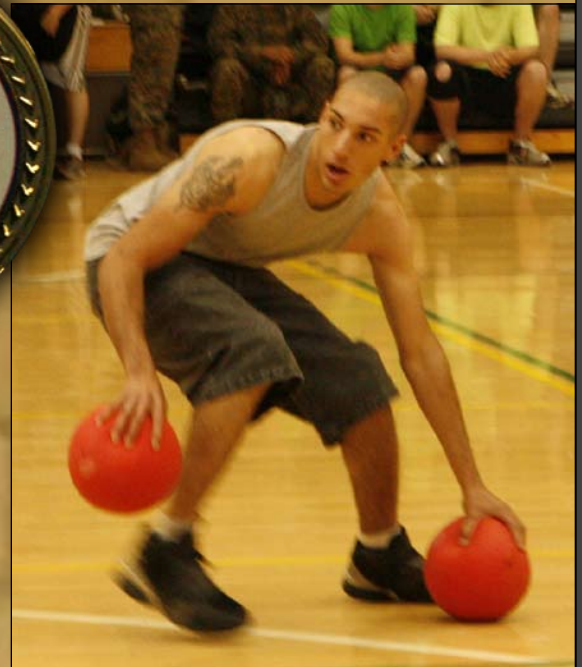
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Photos from the 1st Marine Logistics Group

Combat Dodgeball



Staff Sgt. Alain Espinosa, administrative clerk for Combat Logistics Regiment 17, 1st Marine Logistics Group, runs to the center line to throw a ball during the Combat Dodge Ball tournament at the Page Field house, Feb. 10. More than 100 Marines and sailors from 1st MLG participated in this game. Espinosa was a prize winner of a \$50 gift certificate. (photo by Cpl. Robert C. Medina)



(Right) Lance Cpl. Vonnelliot K. Mitchell, administrative clerk for Combat Logistics Regiment 17, 1st Marine Logistics Group, looks to the rear at his opponents while trying to get an out for his team during the Combat Dodge Ball tournament at the Page Field house, Feb. 10. More than 100 Marines and sailors from 1st MLG participated in this game. (photo by Cpl. Robert C. Medina)



*Photos illustration by
Cpl. Robert C. Medina
The Convoy Staff*