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Wing Marine awarded for heroism in Afghanistan

CPL. BRIAN ADAM JONES

MCAS CHERRY POINT

1st Sgt. Reginald Daniels received the Bronze Star Dec. 14, during a special ceremony at Marine Wing Communications Squadron 28 headquarters.

The squadron commanding officer, Lt. Col. Matthew E. Limbert, presented the award. Daniels is the company first sergeant for Company A, MWCS-28.

From July through December 2011, Daniels was deployed to Helmand province, Afghanistan, as the company gunnery sergeant for 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment.

Following a "catastrophic improvised explosive device attack" on Aug. 5, 2011, that severely wounded his company commander, a Navy corpsman and two Marines, Daniels freed two service members trapped in the vehicle through the turret, secured the site, and ensured the wounded were safely evacuated, all the while ensuring accountability of all serialized gear.

Throughout his tour in Afghanistan, Daniels "was a driving force behind company combat operations ensuring security in a highly unstable and kinetic battle space. He personally participated in over 200 mounted patrols, logging over 3,500 miles and 675 hours of tactical movements in order to resupply 15 fixed positions and 420 personnel dispersed across a violent 48 square kilometer area," according to the award citation.



CPL. BRIAN ADAM JONES

Search and rescue Marines stay ready through constant training



LANCE CPL. CORY D. POLOM

Petty Officer 3rd Class John H. Nelson, a search and rescue medical technician with Marine Transport Squadron 1, evaluates the condition of a dummy during an injured pilot training scenario as one of the squadron's HH-46E Sea Knight helicopters awaits orders during a search and rescue exercise near Morehead City, N.C., Dec. 6.

LANCE CPL. CORY D. POLOM

MCAS CHERRY POINT

Frequent, tough, realistic training helps maintain the process demanded of America's expeditionary force in readiness. Marine Transport Squadron 1's search and rescue members train as often as two or three times a day to be ready in case they have to jump into action.

VMR-1's SAR unit conducts training ranging from rappelling from its HH-46E Sea Knight helicopters to search and rescue exercises. During a SAR-X, VMR-1 rescue swimmers, crew chiefs and their SAR medical technicians face difficult qualification tests. They conduct training in forests, open plains and over water. The scenarios include rescuing downed pilots and open-ocean medical evacuations. These rescues force the team to use all the skills they train to maintain.

"Search and rescue is so dynamic, and there are so many different skills utilized to successfully complete a mission," said Petty Officer 3rd Class John H. Nelson, a SAR medical technician with VMR-1. "There are so many skills we have to maintain, so one day we will conduct hoisting, the next we'll conduct boat hoisting training, where we lower our team down to a boat to medevac an injured person, and then the next conduct a SAR-X."

VMR-1 constantly tries to entice new Marines and Sailors to join its ranks in order to maintain mission capability, but not everyone has the skills needed to become a search and rescue team member.

Marines of any rank or military occupational specialty can

come be a rescue swimmer, said Cpl. Kyle B. Smith, one of only three qualified rescue swimmers in the entire Marine Corps, all of whom are assigned to VMR-1.

"We have very few qualified crew members right now," said Smith. "We need to keep these people's training up to date to maintain mission readiness and ensure success within our unit."

Search and rescue missions are high-stress situations that can cause some people to lose their cool. The team with VMR-1 said their training helps them mentally prepare for their missions.

"Keeping a clear mind is the most important thing," said Smith. "If you're not in the right state of mind, you're going to start forgetting about safety. When you have someone hanging outside of an aircraft and you forget about safety, people are going to get hurt. The last thing you want to do is hurt someone while you're trying to rescue them."

The Marines said they know their success or failure literally dictates whether or not people live or die.

"We train every day to ensure the success of every search and rescue mission we get," said Nelson. "During training exercises, we do everything we can to push our Marines to learn their job and perfect it. When you are dealing with a real-life situation, you don't have time to lose your cool. Someone may die because you weren't functioning correctly."

For details about joining the squadron's SAR team, contact VMR-1 at (252) 466-6213.



LANCE CPL. S. T. STEWART

Lt. Col. Mark Elfers, right, executive officer of Marine Attack Squadron 223, receives the 2nd place 2012 Maj. Gen. Harold W. Chase Essay Contest Award from Maj. Gen. Glenn M. Walters, commanding general of 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing, in the squadron's hangar Dec. 10

Harrier pilot recognized for 'challenging conventional wisdom'

LANCE CPL. S. T. STEWART

MCAS CHERRY POINT

Lt. Col. Mark Elfers, executive officer of Marine Attack Squadron 223, received the 2nd place 2012 Maj. Gen. Harold W. Chase Essay Contest Award from the Marine Corps Gazette Dec. 10 at Cherry Point.

Maj. Gen. Glenn M. Walters, commanding general of 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing, presented the award to Elfers.

The essay, "Don't Accomplish Your Plan; Accomplish Your Mission," appears in the December issue of the Marine Corps Gazette.

"You wrote about planning and being an out of the box thinker, and I know that is true because you drove me nuts when you were my planner," said Walters. Elfers served under Walters in Afghanistan in 2011 as a future operations officer with 2nd MAW (Forward).

The Marine Corps Gazette editorial board wrote that Elfers' piece, "... serves well the objectives of the contest by encouraging professional dialogue and challenging conventional wisdom in the U.S. Marine Corps."

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Cookies for Troops raises spirits at Cherry Point



LANCE CPL. PAUL E. WYATT

From left to right, Sgt. Maj. Angela M. Maness, Cherry Point sergeant major; Sgt. Maj. David L. Bradford, Marine Aircraft Group 14 sergeant major; Bob Upchurch, Carteret County Chamber of Commerce Military Affairs Committee member; David Heath, Carteret County Chamber of Commerce Military Affairs Committee chairman; and Lt. Col. Eric S. Weissberger, the air station executive officer, gather around cookies donated by the committee to Marines in the Cherry Point and 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing headquarters building Dec. 20. The committee members brought dozens of boxes of cookies and Christmas cards for 2nd MAW and Cherry Point Marines during its sixth annual Cookies for Troops event. "We recognize that there are a lot of service members on duty during the holidays, so we brought treats, so they can still have a taste of Christmas and grab some cookies," said Heath.

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The Windsock

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SGT. JOHN JACKSON

An AH-1W Super Cobra with Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 169 sits on the Camp Bastion, Afghanistan, flight line Dec. 15. The squadron's corrosion control section hand painted a mural on the side of the Super Cobra to help remind the squadron's Marines and all service members who see the aircraft why they are deployed.

FDNY ladder company tribute patrols Afghanistan skies

SGT. JOHN JACKSON

REGIONAL COMMAND SOUTHWEST

CAMP BASTION, Afghanistan – In an effort to ensure Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 169 Marines remember why they are deployed, the squadron has adopted the “Greet Berets” of Engine 60, Ladder 17, one of New York Fire Department’s most decorated ladder companies. The company was heavily involved in rescue attempts at the World Trade Center, Sept. 11, 2001.

The squadron, comprised of AH-1W Super Cobras and UH-1Y Venoms, began its current deployment in southern Afghanistan in November.

During HMLA-169’s deployment, Lt. Col. Garrett Hoffman, commanding officer, HMLA-169, announced the name and showed the photograph of a fallen firefighter who lost his life on 9/11. He ended the brief by saying two simple words, “Never forget.”

The squadron also paid tribute to the ladder company and to all FDNY members. Marines with the corrosion control section developed and painted a mural on the side on a Super Cobra to honor FDNY and help ensure the squadron’s Marines remember why they are deployed.

“We took an actual picture of the New York skyline prior to 9/11, and then scaled the photo,” said Sgt. Micheal Morgan, the corrosion control noncommissioned officer in charge. “Then we built a model to see how it would look on the (aircraft) and eventually hand-painted the image on the actual (helicopter).”

The process took the corrosion control section approximately one week to complete. While the Marines in the

section are proud of their work, they understand the importance and bigger picture of the message behind it.

“It serves as a reminder to everyone in the squadron and anyone who sees the aircraft,” said Lance Cpl. Jacob Estrada, a corrosion control Marine with the squadron. “Not only is it a reminder of why we are here, but it is also definitely a morale booster and motivator for everyone.”

“Sometimes when you are (working on the flightline), you forget exactly where you are,” said Lance Cpl. Philip Shands, a corrosion control Marine. “Now, every time you see that aircraft, you remember where you are and why you are here.”

The mural painted on the aircraft is also intended to serve as a reminder to all Marines throughout Helmand province of the important role each of them plays.

“Not only does the aircraft represent the New York City emergency responders, it also reminds Marines of what we are fighting for here in Afghanistan,” said Capt. Gregory Butler, the corrosion control officer in charge and a Super Cobra pilot. “Regardless what a Marine does while deployed, whether he is working on the flightline, is an administrator or patrolling the streets, everyone plays a vital role.”

The squadron has approximately four months remaining in Afghanistan and will continue to support and pay tribute to Engine 60, Ladder 17 and the New York City Fire Department throughout their deployment, and the Super Cobra will continue to patrol the Afghan sky reminding Marines of why they are here.

31st MEU Marines practice mass casualty evacuation

SGT. PAUL ROBBINS

31ST MARINE EXPEDITIONARY UNIT

CENTRAL TRAINING AREA, OKINAWA, Japan – Dozens of simulated casualties were strewn about the open field in varying conditions, anxiously awaiting the welcome sound of rotors from incoming CH-46E Sea Knight helicopters.

Marines and Sailors of Combat Logistics Battalion 31, 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, conducted a mass casualty evacuation training exercise here Dec. 14, as part of their preparatory training for the upcoming spring deployment.

Security teams were inserted via helicopters from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 262 (Reinforced) to secure the landing zone and casualty area. A team of riflemen formed a ring around the landing zone to protect the helicopters moving in and out, while a team from the CLB-31's military police detachment secured the casualty area.

“We are responsible for safeguarding our corpsmen and casualties from external threats,” said Staff Sgt. C. C. Poole, platoon sergeant of the MP detachment. “If our medical teams and casualties are harmed during the process, it defeats the purpose of us coming to evacuate those already wounded.”

Once the MP detachment determined the casualty area to be clear of any threat, helicopters inserted the medical team. Several corpsmen moved in to assess and categorize more than a dozen casualties.

Casualties are rated as immediate (life threat-

ening injuries), delayed (treatable injuries) or expectant (expected to die from injuries). Once categorized, Marines from the security element transport the casualties by litter to a staging area.

“We need to make sure the immediate casualties get out first, the ones needing the most urgent care,” said Petty Officer 2nd Class James D. Woodson, a hospital corpsman and initial response team leader with CLB-31.

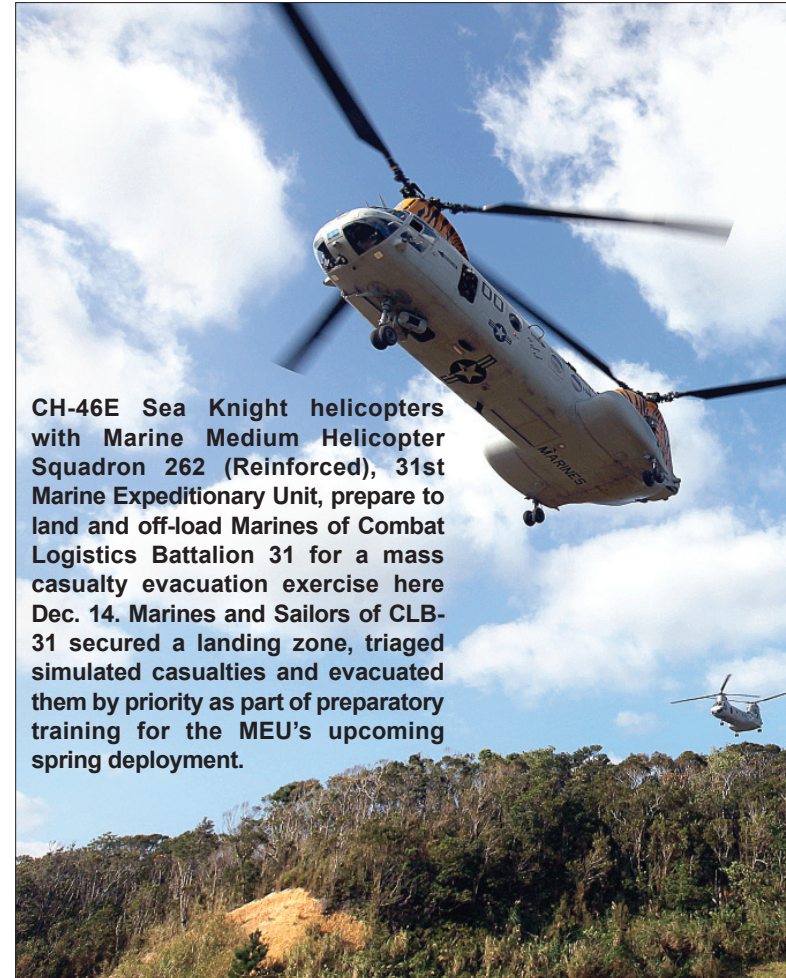
In a real mass casualty situation, casualties would be evacuated by helicopter to a Level 2 medical facility like the USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD-6), where surgical and extended care is available. In the training evolution, the helicopters brought the casualties back to the LZ after a short ride.

Throughout the execution of the exercise, the mission priority remained on patient care. This focus places the operation's team of corpsmen in a leading role.

“The (corpsmen) are the main effort in all of this,” said 2nd Lt. Jake M. Sharry, the maintenance management officer of CLB-31. “The success of the mission depends a lot on them.”

The Marines and Sailors successfully completed two training scenarios, preparing to respond to mass casualty situations ranging from combat operations to humanitarian aid and disaster relief.

The 31st MEU is the Marine Corps' force in readiness for the Asia-Pacific region and the only continuously forward deployed MEU.



CH-46E Sea Knight helicopters with Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 262 (Reinforced), 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, prepare to land and off-load Marines of Combat Logistics Battalion 31 for a mass casualty evacuation exercise here Dec. 14. Marines and Sailors of CLB-31 secured a landing zone, triaged simulated casualties and evacuated them by priority as part of preparatory training for the MEU's upcoming spring deployment.