



II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward)



FAMILY NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2013



COMMANDER'S COMMENTS

Maj. Gen. W. Lee Miller



Our mission is going very well as we begin the eighth month of our deployment. The dedication and hard work of your Marines and Sailors as they continue to advise the Afghan National Security Forces is paying off. The Afghan National Army and Police worked together after Ramazan to plan and carry out security operations in Sangin. They caught many of the Taliban by surprise, in several cases routing them back through the Improvised Explosive Devices planted to strike the ANSF, and are now putting their hold plan into action. I'm sure there is still some tough fighting to come next year, but the ANSF have definitely come out ahead and will be even stronger next year as they continue to improve as a professional fighting force.

As we continue to move forward we will stay focused on the advising mission, but we are also drawing down both our personnel and our bases here in Afghanistan. I'll do my best to keep you up to date on what this will

mean for your families, but be assured I will spare no effort to protect the force from those enemies still active in our region.

I know you are also faced with new challenges and uncertainty at home during the ongoing government shutdown. The "Pay Our Military Act" was passed to ensure service members continue to receive their full pay and benefits. If you have any questions about this, be sure to contact your Family Readiness Officer. He or she can point you in the right direction to get the answers you need.

We couldn't accomplish our mission here without the support of our families back home. As we move forward in the final stretch of our deployment, please accept my thanks once again for all you do on the home front keeping your Marines and Sailors focused on the mission overseas. Together we are helping provide the Afghan people with the opportunity to choose a bright future.

P.S. Don't forget the upcoming Spouses' Ball on Nov. 16. OOH-RAH!

SERGEANT MAJOR *Sgt. Maj. Paul Berry*



Hello from Afghanistan! Fall is in the air back home and that means football and baseball playoffs. Even here in Afghanistan there have been a few days where it did not reach 100. As the mission continues to change several units and individuals will be returning soon. The 4/215, ABP, ANCOP, and AUP SFAATs will be returning soon. Their efforts have set the conditions for a successful transition into 2014. Additionally, several individuals from the MEF (FWD) and MHG (FWD) staff are returning. Those on the staff often get overlooked but I can tell you first hand their work does not go unnoticed by Major General Miller and me.

I would like to take this opportunity to point out that Staff Sergeants Bryan Baker and Shawn Minosky from the II MEF (FWD) staff were recently selected to Warrant Officer. This is a great accomplishment. Job well done! Continue staying in touch with our Family Readiness Officer. The II MEF (FWD) Combined Family Readiness Team has been outstanding. There are several great events planned in the coming months. Please contact the FRO or visit eMarine for details. Thank you and Semper Par.

FAMILY NEWSLETTER **OCTOBER 2013**

FROM THE COMMAND

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COMMAND MASTER CHIEF
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II Marine Expeditionary Force (Fwd)

Commander
Maj. Gen. W. Lee Miller

Sergeant Major
Sgt. Maj. Paul A. Berry

Command Master Chief
Master Chief Petty Officer
Kelly A. McNulty

Chaplain
Cmdr. Patrick W. Smith

Family Readiness Officer
Michael E. Cline





COMMAND MASTER CHIEF

Command Master Chief Petty Officer Kelly McNulty



Greetings Navy and Marine Corps Team!

I can't believe it's October already! The kids are back in school and hopefully everyone has their routine down just in time for the holidays to arrive. We have experienced a lot of change and a lot of movement over the last month, but everyone is adapting well and staying the course. As we changed over some of the units, we have changed in temperature as well. We are still hitting the 100 degree mark on most days, but the mornings and evenings are getting just a little cooler each day, a nice change.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month and I encourage you and your families to get involved in one of the many community events to bring awareness to this important issue. The FRO can provide information on events in your area if you are interested.

As fall approaches both here in Afghanistan and back home, flu season is also arriving with the cooler weather. I encourage you to be proactive in getting your flu shots and protecting your families from the local and widespread epidemics that occur in the U.S. every year. The most important steps to take are to get your flu shot, wash your hands with soap and water, and cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing. If you feel ill with some of the signs and symptoms of the flu, please don't wait to call your health care provider and get an appointment. We are receiving our shot here and I hope you all get yours as well. If you are unsure if you should or should not get the flu shot, please contact your healthcare provider who can answer all your questions so you can make an informed decision.

Thank you again for all the support. We could not complete our day to day jobs and missions without knowing you are there, holding down the household and family and supporting our every effort.

The Rewards of Risk.

Jonathan said to the attendant who carried his weapons, "Come on let's cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised men. Perhaps the Lord will help us. Nothing can keep the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few" 1 Samuel 14:6

Faith Required

King Saul was the first king of Israel. Initially he was brave and sought out God in making decisions and taking decisive action. However, along the way he became impatient, jealous, indecisive and lacked faith. His son Jonathan was different, and when he was confronted with an enemy or obstacle, he met it head on. In this particular passage, Jonathan and his armor-bearer launched a surprise attack against a Philistine garrison. It was a risky move that could have killed them both. However Jonathan was not going to sit back and do nothing.

Listen again to what Jonathan said to his armor-bearer: "Perhaps the Lord will help us." The lesson for us, is that we wait too often for a perfect spiritual sign before we act. We suffer paralysis by analysis. Real, Godly leadership is willing to take risks. For if there are no risks, there is no faith needed.

Calculated Risk

If there is a leadership crisis today, it is a crisis of passivity, a failure to take decisive action when needed. What this really amounts to is a crisis of faith. So often, fear of disapproval or fear of failure leads men to adopt a defensive posture, hiding behind vague claims of searching for "God's will" or "waiting on the Lord"

Certainly we should be doing those things. And God does not call us to be reckless. But we need to understand that God rarely allows a spiritually dramatic experience as a sign. Instead, he expects us to prayerfully weigh our options, seek appropriate counsel and then act. Time is short, and doing something based on imperfect knowledge is always better than nothing. So ask God for wisdom, and trust that He's willing and able to guide you. Then act in faith.

Remember...following God is not a risk free proposition. If we're not risking, we're not living by faith.

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

Cmdr. Patrick Smith



FAMILY READINESS OFFICER

Michael Cline

II MEF FWD FAMILIES,

As we move through this time period of the government shutdown, I am sure there are several questions and concerns about how military families may be affected. You may find some answers in the information here, but for a closer look please visit the websites linked within.

Will my service member be paid?

The President signed H.R. 3210 into law, which will provide pay to the military in the midst of a shutdown. There are still some administrative issues to work through, however.

If our pay is delayed, how will we pay our bills?

Our Association has contacted a sampling of military banks and credit unions. In the event of a government shutdown, some military banks and credit unions may waive fees associated with the possible shutdown. Others have stated they will consider permitting families to skip a loan or credit card payment.

Military families who use automatic payments are encouraged to contact their bank and make alternative arrangements. For example, families may transfer money from a savings account to a checking account to cover the automatic payment.

The National Association of Federal Credit Unions has compiled a list of credit unions that will offer assistance to members. Credit union members must contact their credit union directly to get complete details. Examples of support include interest free advance credit of direct deposit, loan payment deferment, payment reductions, etc.

We urge military families to contact their bank to review their individual situation and the guidance established by their financial entity. Below are links to banks and credit unions with specific government shutdown plans:

Air Force Federal Credit Union
Marine Federal Credit Union
Navy Federal Credit Union
USAA

Where can we go for financial help?

Do not turn to payday lenders – your military community has the resources to provide assistance. If your family experiences a hardship due to a reduced paycheck, we urge you to seek assistance from a military aid organization, military bank or military credit union. Aid organizations, military banks, and credit unions have short-term loans available to help in this situation.

Aid organizations will remain open and are ready and willing to help service members and their families.

- Air Force Aid Society (AFAS)
- Army Emergency Relief (AER)
- Coast Guard Mutual Assistance (CGMA)
- Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society (NMCRS)
- Reserve Aid

If you are not located near an aid organization, you may contact your local Red Cross to be connected with aid organization resources. Each aid organization has an agreement with the Red Cross to provide the same type of financial assistance to military families who do not live near a military installation.

Will Department of Defense (DoD) civilian employees be impacted?

Yes, DoD has issued a memorandum with guidance for a government shutdown which may include furloughs. Essential civilian employees may be required to work and they will be paid retroactively; however, furloughed employees will need an act of Congress to be paid. Civilian employees are encouraged to talk to their supervisor for specific instructions.

What will be the status of family support and installation services during a shutdown in the Camp Lejeune area?

OPEN

All "Category C" (revenue generating) facilities—to include:

- Exchanges – All Retail Functions
- Eateries (exceptions - Michelangelo's located inside the French Creek Recreation Center and the Education Snack Bar are CLOSED)
- Marine Marts
- Bowling Center
- Golf Course
- Skeet Range
- Beach Lodging
- Movie Theaters
- Barber Shops
- Catering Activities (to include Officers and SNCO Clubs & Marston Pavilion)
- Lejeune Inn
- Vending services

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THE 2,000TH HOUR

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY
CPL. AUSTIN LONG

CAMP BASTION, Afghanistan - Soaring high above the Afghan desert, Staff Sgt. Michael DeMars stares out the open door of the helicopter and watches as tiny houses below disappear into the distance.

For seven years, he has watched the world come and go from the back of a helicopter. As an MV-22 Osprey crew chief, DeMars has reached a milestone few in the community have yet to achieve—2,000 flight hours.

DeMars is one of only three crew chiefs in the history of the Marine Corps to reach 2,000 flight hours in an Osprey.

"It's a huge accomplishment and I'm privileged to have reached that mark," said DeMars, who is deployed to Helmand province with Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 165. "It's a small community and there aren't a large number of people who've reached that level yet. I think it's an awesome achievement and I'm happy that I could be in Afghanistan for it."

For DeMars, working thousands of feet above the ground is something he has dreamed of since he was a kid. Growing up, DeMars listened with fascination as his father told stories about his time in the Marine Corps working on airplanes and jets. After graduating high school, DeMars talked with a Marine Corps recruiter, who shared his experiences as a Huey UH-1 crew chief, and decided to enlist in aviation.

DeMars attended one year of flight school before he was able to choose his specific job. His first choice was to be a crew chief on a Huey. His second choice was to be a crew chief on an Osprey.

The Marine Corps had just activated its first MV-22 Osprey squadron and DeMars was assigned as a crew chief. Since the helicopter was new, DeMars was among the first to establish and test the flight procedures for the aircraft. He flew his initial flight on Sept. 11, 2006.

DeMars has grown up with the aircraft and has even beaten some Ospreys to the milestone.

"There is a plane in our squadron that is 18 hours away from its 2,000 hour mark," said DeMars. "It's pretty cool to beat some of the planes to that milestone, and it has been a great experience growing up with the aircraft."

DeMars is on his third deployment in Afghanistan and the majority of his job revolves around moving service members from one forward operating base to another or inserting them on the battlefield for planned operations. When DeMars is not flying, he is focused on maintaining the aircraft by conducting daily safety checks on the aircraft.

DeMars said he favors being deployed.

"Your operating tempo is increased while deployed," said DeMars. "You do more flying and more maintenance. I prefer the deployment tempo."

When DeMars returns from Afghanistan, he wants to become an instructor and teach other enlisted Marines about the Osprey.

DeMars said he still enjoys flying, but for him, now is the time to pass on what he has learned to the next generation of crew chiefs.

"The hours aren't what makes the crew chief, it's the knowledge they have," said DeMars.



**"THERE IS A PLANE
IN OUR SQUADRON THAT IS
18 HOURS AWAY FROM ITS 2,000
HOUR MARK.
IT'S PRETTY COOL TO BEAT SOME OF THE
PLANES TO THAT MILESTONE."**

-STAFF SGT. MICHAEL DEMARS



Facilities used by Marines for Training

- Fitness Centers (to include the functions of Personal Training and Group Exercise)
- Gyms (to include Goettge Memorial Fieldhouse)
- Indoor Pools

Essential Functions (as determined by HQMC)

- All Child Development Centers will be fully staffed.
- School Age Care/Youth Pavilions will remain open.
- Suicide and Sexual Assault counseling services will be partially staffed
- Sexual Assault Prevention and Response will be fully staffed
- Exceptional Family Member Program will be fully staffed
- Military OneSource will remain open.

CLOSED -- MCCS Facilities that will be CLOSED during the Furlough

• Commissary: On 1 October stores in the U.S. will be open to sell as much produce and perishables as possible. All stateside stores (including Alaska and Hawaii) will be closed starting 2 October. Stores outside the US will remain operational (including Guam and Puerto Rico). * DeCA will immediately post the latest information possible on their website, www.commissaries.com, as well as on the store web pages and on social media before the shutdown.

- All Personal and Professional Development related facilities.
- Libraries
- Education Center (to include Snack Bar)
- Transition Readiness Seminar Center
- Career Assistance
- Family Member Employment Assistance Program
- Marine Corps Family Team Building
- Resilience Education
- Drug Demand Reduction
- Single Marine Program and Recreation Centers (Snack Bars inside CHB and Camp Johnson Recreation Centers will be OPEN)
- Marinas
- Outdoor Recreation (to include Operation Adrenaline Rush)
- Hobby Shops (Auto, Auto Hobby, Wood)
- Sports Offices (Intramural, Varsity and Youth sports events will be cancelled if they are to occur during the furlough)
- Recreation Equipment Issue
- Community Centers
- Information Tickets and Tours

Services that will be open with a reduced staff, resulting in potential processing delays

- MCCS Facilities and Maintenance
- Contracting and Purchasing Office
- Marketing Office
- Human Resources
- Accounts Receivable
- Information and Technology

Will access to health care be impacted?

TRICARE. If you normally get your health care in a military hospital or military clinic, you may find appointments may be cancelled or some medical, lab, or pharmacy services will not be available during a government shutdown. Depending on each military hospital or military clinic's staffing, there will probably be a different mix of available services. So, we advise families to call whatever phone number you would normally call for information or to make an appointment before you travel to your military hospital or military clinic for any reason.

As always, if you or a family member has an emergency medical situation, immediately go to the closest emergency room or dial 911. If the need is not an emergency, but you need urgent care and cannot get in touch with anyone at your military hospital or military clinic, we recommend that you call your TRICARE Regional contractor for information and instructions.

North: Health Net at 1.888.874.2273

South: Humana at 1.800.444.5445

West: UnitedHealthcare Military & Veterans at 1.877.988.9378

If you normally get your care from civilian health care providers, you should not notice a disruption in service due to the shutdown. TRICARE contractors will continue to provide all of their services and their call centers will be operational.

Below are the upcoming events of October 2013 in the event the Government Shutdown period ends:

EVENT: OCTOBERFEST

DATE: 17 OCTOBER 2013

TIME: 2:00 – 6:30 PM

REMARKS: Open to all Area 3 Units, including II MEF FWD, II MHG FWD, and SFAAT Families. Come out and enjoy the Octoberfest Event! Prizes, Games, and Events will be available. This event is run by MCCS through the Area 3 Coordinator, our very own Mrs. Barbara Dozier!!

EVENT: TRUNK OR TREAT

DATE: 27 OCTOBER 2013

TIME: 3:00 – 5:00 PM

REMARKS: Come out and enjoy the Trunk or Treat Halloween Event. Decorate your car trunk and provide a memorable experience for all the children of II MEF FWD, II MHG FWD, and SFAAT Families. Prizes will be awarded for the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Place Trunks, and costumes.

EVENT: DEPLOYED SPOUSES BALL

DATE: 16 NOVEMBER 2013

TIME: 5:00 – 11:00 PM

REMARKS: Tickets are on sale for \$25 at the Marston Pavilion (910- 451-1521/3375) or Paradise Point Officer's Club (910-451-2465 Option #2). Please specify your food choice of Chicken/Beef, Tuna Steak, or Veggie Plate/Gluten-Free at purchase. Attire is Formal/Cocktail Dress w/favorite boots optional and there will be a Ball Ceremony, Commandant of the Marine Corps Message, II MEF FWD Commanding General Message, messages from those abroad, as well as live music and dance. Open to all Deployed Spouses.



*Navy medical officer awarded
for training corpsmen to go
above standard*

Story and Photos by Cpl. Austin Long

FOB SABIT QADAM, Afghanistan - Medical officials in Afghanistan awarded its top award for out-of-hospital trauma care to Lt. Hans Hulsebos, the battalion surgeon with 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, at Forward Operating Base Sabit Qadam, Sept. 6.

Medical staff at the Joint Theatre Trauma System in Bagram, Afghanistan, presented the Ditch Medicine Award to the lieutenant for his commitment and dedication to pre-hospital care.

Officials reviewed aid stations throughout Afghanistan and presented the award to the general medical provider based on the number of patients seen at the facility, the quality of care performed on the patient, and the method used for recording patient care.

The aid station serves as a Role 1 Medical Treatment Facility and is equipped to provide the basic echelon of medical care. In general, Role 1 facilities are capable of providing first aid, immediate lifesaving measures and triage. However, the medical treatment provided to patients at Sabit Qadam was beyond what was expected of Hulsebos and his corpsmen and therefore drew the attention and recognition from leadership at JTTS.

The JTTS focused on Role 1 facilities and noticed the patients coming from Sabit Qadam had a survivability rate of 95 percent, just three percent less than patients at Role 3 medical facilities, including Camp Bastion.

Although JTTS selected Hulsebos for the award, he credits his corpsmen for the quality of medical care provided at the aid station. He said his "corpsmen do 98 percent of the work."

Prior to their deployment, Hulsebos began teaching the corpsmen advanced techniques for treatment through simulated training exercises. According to Petty Officer 3rd Class Martin Burrola, Hulsebos pushed the corpsmen to learn advanced techniques by rehearsing realistic scenarios until they developed the muscle memory to respond to them.

"Before the deployment, he ran us through multiple scenarios to prepare us for what we could potentially face in Afghanistan," said Burrola, who is a trauma leader assistant. "He would run us through the basics multiple times until we learned them."

Burrola said Hulsebos continues to teach the corpsmen while in Afghanistan by evaluating their performance in after action reports. After each patient is transferred from the medical facility, Hulsebos talks the corpsmen through the treatment administered to the patient and discusses alternative ways the patient could have been stabilized.

"It's because of my corpsmen's passion, their motivation for treating battle wounds, and doing more than what is expected of them that has gotten us this recognition," said Hulsebos.





U.S. Marines and Georgian Soldiers with 33rd Georgian Battalion exit an MV-22 Osprey aircraft during an operation in Helmand province, Afghanistan, Sept. 23, 2013. Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 165 provided the service members with aerial support during the operation. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Ashley E. Santy/Released)



(Above) The Camp Leatherneck fire department Color Guard retires the American flag during a flag retirement ceremony at Camp Krutke, Helmand province, Afghanistan, Sept. 11, 2013. (Right) Bunker gear is displayed during a flag retirement ceremony at Camp Krutke, Helmand province, Afghanistan, Sept. 11, 2013. The flag retirement ceremony was held in remembrance of the lives lost during the Sept. 11 terrorist attack. (U.S. Marine Corps photos by Sgt. Demetrius L. Munnerlyn/Released)



THIS MONTH IN PHOTOS



A U.S. Marine with the 33rd Georgian Liaison Team, provides security in Barrmo, Washir district, Afghanistan, Sept. 19, 2013. The 33rd Georgian Liaison Team assisted Georgian and Afghan Nation Army soldiers in conducting mounted and dismounted patrolling and engaged local nationals to prevent insurgency. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Demetrius L. Munnerlyn/Released)



Deputy Secretary of Defense Ashton B. Carter, left, shakes hands with Sgt. Joshua Moore, a scout sniper team leader with 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, at Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, Sept. 13, 2013. Moore was notified that he was approved to be awarded the Navy Cross for his actions supporting Operation Enduring Freedom in 2011. (Official Marine Corps Photo by Sgt. Tammy K. Hineline/Released)

An M-1A1 Abrams Main Battle Tank assigned to Delta Company, 2nd Tank Battalion, patrols during an operation near the village of Saban, Helmand province, Afghanistan, Sept. 10, 2013. The operation was a joint mission with Marines from 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, 2nd Tank Battalion, and the Afghan National Army, 3rd Mobile Strike Force Kandak. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Trent A. Randolph/Released)



A **WORLD** Apart

Deployed father watches daughter's first moments



Story and Photos by Cpl. Paul Peterson

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan - She was only seconds old and more than 7,000 miles away when she heard the voice of her father for the first time.

Hailey Nicole Register was born in Orlando, Fla., at 9:38 p.m. She was a tender 7 pounds, 15 ounces when she lay next to her mother for the first time Tuesday, Sept. 17. Her father, Cpl. James Register, a Marine serving in Helmand province, Afghanistan, heard her cry for the first time from the other side of the world.

"It hit a spot in me," said Register, pausing to remember the moment of his daughter's birth. "I can't really explain it. It gave me new life. It gave me one more reason to keep going even if the world starts crumbling around me ... It was a new sense of purpose."

Register and his wife Rachael, both Orlando natives, shared the moment in real-time thanks to modern communications technology unimaginable even a decade ago.

The couple knew they would face great challenges when they learned they were going to have their first child. Register was in the middle of preparing for his deployment when the news arrived.

"You kind of go crazy," he recalled. "You think about it, and you're like, 'I'm bringing a kid into the world, and I'm not even going to be there for the first three or four months ... for her.'"

Register's unit entered an intense cycle of training early in the pregnancy. The rigors of military life pulled him away from his wife as he moved around the country for pre-deployment exercises.

As he traveled from coast to coast, the couple stayed in contact the best they could through phone calls and the occasional video chat.

"I was afraid for my wife," admitted Register. "I was afraid something was going to happen. That was always a prominent thought in my head, 'I'm not there. Something could happen.'"

The two decided to move Rachael back to Orlando where she could be with family and friends during the deployment.

Register left for Afghanistan in July with plans to watch the birth online.

"I still knew coming into this that no matter what when she came into the world I was going to be there," said Register. "It meant I'm not coming home to pick up pieces and try and put a puzzle together. I'm there from the start, and I'm going to be there until the very end."

The couple stayed in contact over the internet during the first part of the deployment. Register anxiously waited for news as the due date for the pregnancy approached.

That date came and went with no baby and increasing unease.

"I was anxious to actually see my little girl for the first time," said Register, who was frustrated by the delay. "I give a lot of credit to all those who come out here after just having a kid, do a six or seven month [deployment], then go back tougher than ever."

The decision was made to induce delivery more than a week after the expected date. On Sept. 17, Register left his work space here a little before noon with one order: "Come back when you have a baby."

Afternoon transformed into evening, midnight and early morning, while he waited beside his bed typing messages to his wife and family on a computer — nature doesn't abide by military order.

Register stayed awake staring at the screen and waited for the video call. He finally gave in to a few hours of sleep only to awaken around six o'clock by a ringing message.

"It was nerve wracking," he said. "We were there for a good 16 hours just waiting. She went to the hospital at five o'clock in the morning [her time] when she was supposed to be induced. It wasn't until 9:38 [in the evening] that the baby was actually here."

Exhaustion quickly transitioned into quiet euphoria. A reinvigorated Register hunched over the computer screen and watched his world transform.

"It's a bunch of emotions rolled into one that you can't really describe," said Register, recalling the moment his daughter took her first breath. "Whenever you hear your son or daughter's first cries and you see them for the first time, it will melt you. It will take down every defense you had up."

After Hailey's birth, he played his first game of peek-a-boo before putting his uniform back on and returning to work.

"This is something I don't want to leave," said Register. "It's places like this, when you're 7,000 miles away, everybody looks out for each other no matter what."

Register intends to remain in the Marine Corps after the deployment, and he and his wife are considering more children. He said he's not looking for a football team, but he might be good with four kids.

For now, he has his hands full.

Educating Afghan Women

DoWA director bests threats, promotes women's rights in Helmand

Story and Photos by Sgt. Lia Adkins

LASHKAR GAH, Afghanistan - In the early 1900s, King Amanullah encouraged Afghan women to be more westernized, shed their face-covering garments, get educated and work. But after Islamic fundamentalists came to power in the late 20th century, the Taliban fully denied women's rights to participate in social, economic, cultural and political life.

Since U.S. military forces toppled the Taliban regime in 2001, women have fought to learn skills to sustain their families. Some have lost their lives during the struggle, including 100 girls who were killed in a grenade attack during their first day of school. However, there are still women who are standing up against the oppression and working to build a better future for women in Afghanistan.

Jamila Niazi has dedicated her life to improving women's roles in Helmand province. She is the Department of Women's Affairs director in Helmand province, Afghanistan, and a member of the High Peace Council in Kabul.

Niazi is responsible for overseeing policy for the women in Helmand and enforcing the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan, as well as any Ministry of Women's Affairs policy. MoWA is responsible for implementing political and social policy to secure and expand women's legal rights, while NAPWA is the "main vehicle of government" for implementing its gender commitments in national and international policy instruments on women, according to the MoWA website.

Niazi was appointed as the DoWA director in 2012 and has devoted herself to running programs which educate women to help them gain employment. She runs vocational programs to teach women skills such as tailoring, embroidery and curtain making so women can financially support themselves and their families, said Sgt. Sarah Abdella, the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program outreach liaison officer with Regional Command (Southwest).

Niazi spends most of her days at the DoWA office in Lashkar Gah, writing new proposals for programs and supervising classes. Her sunlit office is decorated in embroidered, pale green curtains she regularly boasts were sewn by the women attending the vocational classes. But the office has no electricity, lights, or running water, so Niazi resorts to hand writing all her proposals. Niazi recently partnered with the U.S. Agency for International Development, Mercy Corps and the U.S. and Afghan governments for funding and resources. She has been able to collect more than 20 sewing machines for women attending the vocational program.

"We had 70 to 80 women from poor families work with us and we made more than 160 uniforms for girls going to school," said Niazi. "More than 150 women have benefited from the classes and have earned an income."

Women from 13 to more than 40 years old regularly attend the DoWA vocational sewing classes.

Niazi also holds peace shuras, and regularly makes herself available to any woman's issues.

Working together, Niazi and Abdella have been very successful in Helmand province though it has not been without exertions. As recently as May, Niazi had to go into hiding after her driver was killed while on his way to morning prayers.

"Jamila (Niazi) has never been afraid to go against the grain, working at the only open girls' school in Helmand during the Taliban regime," said Abdella, a Rensselaerville, N.Y., native. Niazi is a certified teacher and taught regularly before eventually working as the principle for the girls' school in Lashkar Gah for eight years.

"I had a lot of challenges," said Niazi. "The main problem was locals did not want the women to come to school because foreign officials would visit and tour the school, and it did not sit well with the locals. So I told them not to come while the women were at school. I received a lot of warnings from the Taliban because of it."

Abdella said Niazi has faced death threats since the time she was principal of the Lashkar Gah girls' school and continues to regularly receive threats to her life and that of her family.

But Niazi has not let threats deter her. The mother of seven is described as a kind, caring and determined woman.

"I have personally seen her stand up for other women in ways that one would not expect of a stereotypical Afghan woman," said Abdella. "During one of our shuras, a young teenage girl approached Jamila with a problem. Her parents had been killed, and the uncle she was now living with would not let her continue her education. Jamila asked for his phone number and called him on the spot to demand that he allow his niece to return to school and provide her with his support."

Niazi said she is committed to expanding education and employment for women in Helmand province, as well as developing the female aspect of the peace program.

"I continue to do this kind of work because I am committed to the future of my country," said Niazi. "I want to see women and girls have the opportunity to become educated and contribute to society."



