

MARINE EXPEDITIONARY BRIGADE - AFGHANISTAN

FAMILY NEWSLETTER



The Command Element of Regional Command (Southwest) in Helmand province, Afghanistan.



From the Commander's Desk:

Dear friends and family,

This newsletter comes to you just after Afghanistan's April 5 presidential election, which I'm sure you've heard was a tremendous success. While we certainly stood back in a supporting role, every single section on this staff has been focused on the election for many months and has worked tirelessly to train and advise their Afghan security counterparts so they could ensure the election was a secure and successful one.

The Afghan people rejected the Taliban and their threats of violence and turned out in large numbers, including female voters, who comprised an estimated 35 percent of the vote. This year seven million voters turned out across Afghanistan, three million more than the last presidential election during 2009. That means 58 percent of the registered voters actually cast a vote, a far higher percentage than we see in U.S. elections.

In RC(SW) the news was also positive. This year 209 polling centers were open throughout Helmand and Nimroz provinces, compared to 148 during 2009, and there were an estimated 155,000 more registered voters. In Kajaki District here in Helmand not a vote was cast during 2009, but this year approximately 3,500 voted. Only 177 voted in Sangin District last time, but more than 5,000 voted this year. That is a tremendous measure of success for a district in which the Marine Corps has fought hard and sacrificed much in recent years. As you know, Sangin Valley has been the scene of some of our toughest fighting in the Afghanistan campaign. It is that sacrifice that set the conditions for this historic election to be so successful.

Fortunately, violence turned out to be far less than we anticipated. I am happy to report there were no coalition casualties on Election Day. That is due to the bravery and sacrifice of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and the impressive effort of your loved ones. The ANSF did unfortunately suffer some casualties, and each one is tragic, but we are proud of their success and relieved their losses were not higher.

There will likely still be a run-off election, and if it goes well we will witness the first democratic transition of power in the history of Afghanistan. With the first election round behind us, we will increasingly turn our attention to our support of the ANSF for the run-off election and transition to the summer fighting season. We will continue to work hard with our Afghan partners to help them learn critical lessons from the first round of voting, maintain the momentum of their success and begin setting conditions for the next vote. Our contribution will mostly be assistance with assessments and planning, but we will only provide limited support.

The summer fighting season typically begins during May and will come just after the poppy harvest and before the potential runoff. It will be critical for the ANSF to reset and prepare for what is usually the most active and kinetic period of the year. We are helping them plan operations, gather intelligence, schedule rest for troops, reset weapons and equipment, plan logistics, and much, much more. The Afghans will be in the lead for most operations, but Marines and Sailors will remain active throughout the battlespace to provide for the security of Camps Bastion and Leatherneck.

I know some of you have been without your loved one for up to four months by now, and for many of you it means you are the only one taking care of all the demands of life at home. It is an exhausting and sometimes a thankless task, so let me thank you for your dedication and support. You are truly serving your country and sacrificing as much or more than our Marines and Sailors, and we could not do this without you.

Semper Fidelis,

D. D. YOO

Brigadier General, Commanding General, Marine Expeditionary Brigade - Afghanistan / RC(SW)





From the Sergeant Major:

Dear family and friends,

Since Marine Expeditionary Brigade – Afghanistan took command of Regional Command (Southwest) on Feb. 5, I have had the privilege to travel throughout the battlespace and see your Marines and Sailors hard at work. Visiting places like Forward Operating Base Nalay, FOB De-laram and Patrol Base Boldak, I have seen firsthand the efforts put forth throughout Helmand and Nimroz provinces.

Your Marines and Sailors are working long, demanding hours, but their efforts are paying off. I am very proud of the work everyone continues to do on a daily basis throughout our area of operations.



Afghanistan held its third democratic election April 5. Because of the hard work of your loved ones and the dedication of their Afghan National Security Forces counterparts, the elections in southwestern Afghanistan were a success. The election proves not only that the work of your Marines and Sailors during the past 13 years has been successful, but it reaffirms to the local populace that the Afghan soldiers and police are confident, willing and capable to defend and protect their own country.

As we begin to turn our focus to the retrograde and redeployment of gear, equipment and personnel, we will continue to provide Security Force Assistance to our Afghan counterparts and continue to work diligently. As I said in my last letter, we will become more expeditionary as we reduce operations in Afghanistan, but I have no doubt your Marines and Sailors will continue to maintain focus and give 100 percent until our mission is complete.

We thank you all for your continued support. We all know that our mission here couldn't be successful without the unwavering support we receive from our family, friends and loved ones back home.

Semper Fidelis,

D. E. BERRY, JR.

Sergeant Major, Marine Expeditionary Brigade - Afghanistan / RC(SW)



Photo by Cpl. Cody Haas

◀Sergeant Maj. Doug Berry Jr., center, sergeant major, Regional Command (Southwest), talks to Marines and Sailors with 1st Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment, during a visit aboard Patrol Base Boldak in Helmand province, Afghanistan, Feb. 25, 2014. Sergeant Maj. Berry enjoyed the Marines' enthusiasm despite the austere living conditions for their deployment aboard PB Boldak.



From the Command Master Chief:

To our family, friends and loved ones:

Your Sailors and Marines have been extremely busy since taking command of Regional Command (Southwest) on Feb. 5. Providing Security Force Assistance to our Afghan National Security Forces still remains our number one mission, and the Sailors and Marines throughout southwestern Afghanistan continue to advise their Afghan counterparts successfully on a daily basis.

This past week, Afghanistan held its third presidential election since Operation Enduring Freedom began during 2001. The election was successful, and most importantly, the Afghans conducted the elections on their own. Everything from delivering election materials to the more than 145 polling sites throughout Helmand and Nimroz provinces to providing security for the elections, the Afghans were truly in the lead.

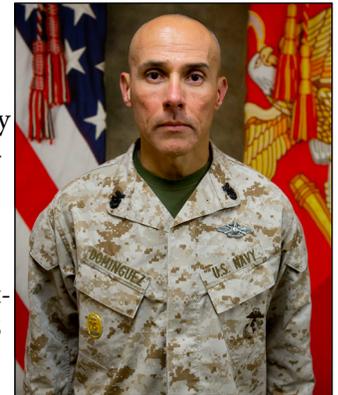
We will continue our advising role here until we transfer full security responsibility to the Afghan National Security Forces later this year. In addition to advising, we will begin to retrograde and redeploy forces and equipment. As we prepare for the remainder of the deployment, things will continue to shift, which means we ask for you and your service members' patience and flexibility.

We can't thank our families, friends and loved ones enough for your continued support. Your letters, emails and care packages continue to provide morale boosters to all the Sailors and Marines in RC(SW), and we greatly appreciate it.

Semper Fidelis,

F. DOMINGUEZ

Command Master Chief, Marine Expeditionary Brigade - Afghanistan / RC(SW)



► Master Chief Petty Officer Frank Dominguez, right, command master chief of Regional Command (Southwest), and Brig. Gen. Daniel Yoo, commander, RC(SW), cut a piece of birthday cake while celebrating the 121st birthday of Navy chiefs aboard Camp Leatherneck, Helmand province, Afghanistan, April 1, 2014.



Photo by Lance Cpl. Lance Cpl. Darien J. Bjorndal

Chaplain's Corner

Greetings MEB-A families!

It is election season here, but honestly my focus is leaning in a different direction. For those of us involved in Religious Ministries, March and April can be a bit hectic. For those of us with a Christian background, we have observed Ash Wednesday and are now more than halfway through the season of Lent.

We are looking forward to a broad spectrum of Easter services, including a Sunrise Service on Easter Sunday morning. We have five new Roman Catholics who are going to be confirmed in a special Holy Saturday Vigil Mass by His Excellency, Archbishop Timothy Broglio, Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese for the Military Services. Additionally, our Jewish brothers and sisters will celebrate Passover this month and we are busy arranging that opportunity for them.

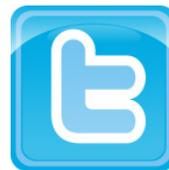


April is a great time for us to reflect on who we are spiritually. As winter breaks forth into the newness of spring, we have the opportunity to grow and mature in the grace, love and peace of the one who has created us, who has redeemed us and who sustains us. With that in mind, I wish you and yours the best for this most sacred season. May God continue to bless each of you with His grace.

Semper Fidelis,

T. H. HUNT
Chaplain, Marine Expeditionary Brigade - Afghanistan / RC(SW)

Check
out
MEB-A
on the
web!



Regional Command (Southwest)

PHOTOS



Photo by Lance Cpl. Zachery B. Martin

To see more photos of Marines, Sailors and our coalition partners in RC(SW) and to read stories about operations in southwestern Afghanistan, [click here](#).

▲ U.S. Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Cody Kovnesky, an automatic rifleman with Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment, provides security during a patrol in Helmand province, Afghanistan, March 5, 2014. The Marines patrolled with Afghan National Army soldiers as a part of their transition to becoming the primary security force in the area.

➤ New Orleans Saints tight end Jimmy Graham talks to Marines with Regional Command (Southwest) during a USO-sponsored tour to Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, March 3, 2014. Three NFL players volunteered for the tour to support troops serving in Operation Enduring Freedom.



Photo by Cpl. Cody Haas



Photo by Sgt. Frances Johnson

A crew chief with Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 369 gives the "Gunfighter's Salute" to Brig. Gen. Mark R. Wise, assistant wing commander, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, and the Marines aboard the UH-1Y Huey as they leave for a mission, March 10, 2014. Brigadier Gen. Wise traveled from Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, Calif., to visit the air wing Marines deployed to Regional Command (Southwest) in Helmand province, Afghanistan.



Photo by Sgt. Jessica Ostroska

▲ Sergeant Jeffrey S. Watkins, motor transportation maintenance shop chief with Combat Logistics Company, Combat Logistics Battalion 7, and native of Marlin, Texas, works to remove the hood on one of the 215th Corps' tactical vehicle aboard Camp Shorabak, Helmand province, Afghanistan, March 12, 2014. The training was conducted to assist the ANA mechanics in preparing their vehicles for the upcoming Afghan presidential elections and ensure mobility of the security forces and sustainability of capabilities and equipment.



Photo by Cpl. Joshua Young

► Marines with Security Force Assistance Advisor Team 2-215 and soldiers with 2nd Brigade, 215th Corps, Afghan National Army visit an outpost near Forward Operating Base Robinson, Feb. 24, 2014. The outposts overlook the Sangin Valley and Route 611 and are vital to mission success in the region.



Photo by Sgt. Jessica Ostroska

▲ (Front to back) Staff Sgt. Robert Plemmons, Charlie Company Advisor, Georgian Liaison Team 11; Gunnery Sgt. Robert Kaufmann, Alpha Company Advisor, GLT-11; Staff Sgt. Jason Rodriguez, Bravo Company Advisor, GLT-11; Capt. Thomas McCabe, officer in charge, 2nd Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company, Supporting Arms Liaison Team, and 1st Lt. Tyler Ross, Supply and Logistics officer, GLT-11, prepare to march off after being presented medals by Georgian President Giorgi Margvelashvili, left, during his visit to Camp Leatherneck, Helmand province, Afghanistan, March 15, 2014.

► Lance Cpl. Donald Rucker, left, a maintenance administration clerk with Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 466, and Lance Cpl. Ian Smith, a mortarman with Weapons Company, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, pose for a photo after reuniting aboard Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, March 11, 2014. The brothers reconnected for the first time after being separated for more than a year and a half while serving in the Marine Corps.



Photo by Cpl. Cody Haas