

# 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,

It has been an eventful two months since our last newsletter. The last time I wrote you we had just witnessed Afghanistan participate in the historic April 5 presidential election. Just two days ago, millions of Afghans returned to the polls to vote in a run-off election to select the next president in what could become the first democratic transfer of power in the history of the country. These two elections, and the remarkable success of the Afghan security forces, demonstrate more than anything else how much your Marines and Sailors have accomplished in more than a decade of service and sacrifice, which you have shared every step of the way.



The Afghan people once again rejected the Taliban and their threats of violence and turned out in large numbers, including female voters. Early reports indicate that almost as many people voted during the run-off as did in April, which was nearly 7 million voters across Afghanistan, 3 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 many Western nations.

In RC(SW), the news was also positive. All of the polling centers were open throughout Helmand and Nimroz provinces, and the Taliban were unable to disrupt any of the voters who showed up in long lines, many of whom proudly displayed their fingers dipped in ink to show they voted. We expect to hear final election results during July, and if all goes well the next president will take office during the first week of August.

The election is only part of the story, and much more has happened in RC(SW). We transitioned Tactical Installation Sabit Qadam and Forward Operating Base Nalay to the Afghan National Army in Sangin District, May 5- hallowed ground for the Marines, Sailors and coalition members who have fought there- and the scene of intense fighting and much sacrifice. We also lifted off the brigade advisor team to the 2nd Brigade, 215th Corps, ANA, which is now operating completely independently and holding their own. We have reorganized all of our advisors under a Consolidated Corps Advisor Team, and our main effort is now at the corps level as we focus on institutional development and sustainment to ensure we set the conditions for a responsible transition of full security responsibility to the Afghan National Security Forces.

President Obama also made significant news as he announced there will be approximately 9,800 troops left in Afghanistan after 2014. That announcement should not affect your Marines and Sailors. Although we are prepared for any mission we are given, we are still on track to finish our mission by the end of this year, and during the summer months we will begin to see some of our Marines and Sailors head home. Other countries are heading home as well. Our coalition force has grown smaller as the contingents from Tonga, Estonia, Denmark and Bosnia have ended their operations.

We have kept up with news at home as well and anxiously tracked the wildfires in May. I know many of you had to evacuate your homes, yet another crisis you had to handle yourself while your loved one is deployed. Thank you for taking care of the homefront. If you had to evacuate you can be reimbursed for some expenses, such as lodging, through the I MEF Joint Claims Office. For more information, call 760-763-2517/2518 or contact the Family Readiness Officer.

In the last two months we have also observed Memorial Day and celebrated Easter, Mother's Day and Father's Day. In a couple of weeks we will celebrate Independence Day, a time to reflect on the reasons we serve and remind ourselves how fortunate we are to live in a free country where we can vote in safety and live our lives in equality regardless of race, gender or religious beliefs. As always, thank you for your tremendous support which gives us strength and confidence to focus on our mission.

Semper Fidelis,

D. D. YOO

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



# From the Sergeant Major:

Dear family and friends,

Since the last letter I wrote, three very significant events took place in Helmand province, and the hard work of your Marines and Sailors is a direct reflection of the success in the region.

The last Marines and Sailors left Sangin Valley in northern Helmand province on May 5. Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, as well as a group of advisors with the 2nd Brigade Security Force Assistance Advisor Team left the former insurgent stronghold of Sangin in the capable hands of the Afghan National Army 215th Corps' 2nd Brigade.

The Sangin Valley will forever be etched in Marine Corps history due to the substantial fighting the Marines did in the area. More than 50 Marines lost their lives fighting in Sangin, but their sacrifices were not in vain. The area has seen drastic security improvements since Marines first took security responsibility of the region during September 2010. The ANA soldiers were sad to see the Marines go but they understood that it was time for us to leave and they are confident in their abilities to succeed in the region. As Marines departed the area, our Afghan counterparts provided security along their route back to Camp Leatherneck, ensuring the safety of our Marines and proving they are prepared to continue to keep the Sangin Valley secure.



In addition to the more than 50 Marines who paid the ultimate sacrifice in Sangin, the Marines and Sailors in Helmand took time to remember all of those who have gone before and those who have been killed in action while deployed to Afghanistan during our Memorial Day ceremony. Marines, Sailors and our Coalition partners came together to remember the sacrifices of all service members. It was a time for us all to remember their sacrifices and to remember that freedom is not free.

The third significant event was the successful runoff election that took place June 14. Following the initial presidential election on April 5, the Afghan people once again went to the polls to cast their vote for the next president of Afghanistan. The outcome during the runoff election is further proof that the Afghan National Security Forces are ready to stand on their own and provide security to their country. Lines to vote throughout Helmand were long, and there were no significant security incidents in Helmand that took place during the runoff election. Soon the country will know who will be their next president.

Your Marines and Sailors continue to get after it. Their dedication to mission accomplishment is what makes us succeed and meet our goals. And as always, I can't thank you enough for the sacrifices you make and for your support while your loved ones are forward deployed in harms way.

Semper Fidelis,

D. E. BERRY, JR.

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



Sergeant Maj. Doug Berry Jr., sergeant major, Regional Command (Southwest), salutes during a Memorial Day ceremony held aboard Camp Leatherneck, Helmand province, Afghanistan, May 26, 2014. During the ceremony, RC(SW) Commander Brig. Gen. Daniel D. Yoo spoke about the importance of the day and service members observed a moment of silence to remember those who gave their lives in service to their country.

Photo by Cpl. Cody Haas

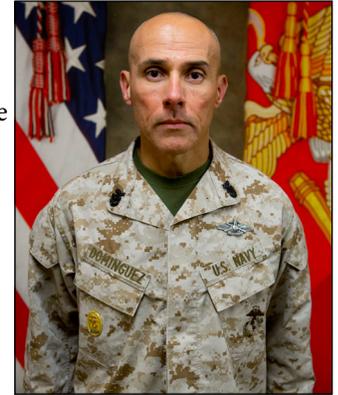


# From the Command Master Chief:

To our family, friends and loved ones:

As you all know, the last Sailors and Marines left Sangin Valley, May 5. More than 170 tactical vehicles loaded with approximately 700 service members left the area and convoyed to Camp Leatherneck. The Afghan National Security Forces proved they were ready for the Sailors and Marines to leave by providing security for the convoy out of Sangin. The ride back to Camp Leatherneck was quiet and now the 215th Corps' 2nd Brigade is standing on their own in Sangin.

There have been vast improvements in Sangin throughout the past four years. During their last months in Sangin, the corpsmen in the area were busy putting the final touches on years of training with their Afghan counterparts. The "Docs" of 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, and 2nd Brigade Security Force Assistance Advisor Team worked tirelessly with the Afghan medics teaching combat lifesaving skills and treating wounded Afghan soldiers. One corpsman, HM3 Kristopher Krysa, was recognized for his hard work at Forward Operating Base Nalay, and was selected to be combat meritoriously promoted to the rank of Petty Officer 2nd Class.



In addition to leaving Sangin for the final time, Sailors and Marines from across the Marine Air Ground Task Force came together to remember our fallen during a Memorial Day Ceremony aboard Camp Leatherneck. We honored those who have gone before and all of those who paid the ultimate sacrifice here in Afghanistan. It was a day of reflection for all service members forward deployed and a day where we remembered all of the sacrifice that our all-volunteer military has done since operations in Afghanistan began during 2001.

Finally, the most decorated rating in the entire Navy will be celebrating their 116th birthday on June 17. Since the inception of the hospital corpsmen during 1898, there have been 22 corpsmen who received the Medal of Honor. Additionally, there have been 174 Navy Crosses awarded, 946 Silver Stars and 1,582 Bronze Stars. Hospital Corpsmen have distinguished themselves on the battlefield for 116 years and have continue to do so throughout operations in Afghanistan.

Lastly, I ask for your continued support for your loved ones currently deployed. We wouldn't be able to do what we do without it. Your sacrifices are not forgotten, and we all thank you for all you do.

Semper Fidelis,

F. DOMINGUEZ

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



Petty Officer 3rd Class Eduardo Castillo, a hospital corpsman with Regional Command (Southwest), is congratulated by Master Chief Frank Dominguez, RC(SW) command master chief, during a ceremony aboard Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, May 17, 2014. Castillo and two other corpsmen received Fleet Marine Force Enlisted Warfare Specialist Devices after completing three practical applications of land navigation, weapons fundamentals and communications and a 100-question test of Marine Corps history and operations.

Photo by Cpl. Lance Cpl. Cody Haas

# Chaplain's Corner:

Hello MEB-A families and friends!

As the temperature goes up and buildings come down, I find myself drawn to the subject of change. Maybe because I am one of the old guys out here (49 years old), I am noticing that I don't do change nearly as well as I used to. I tend to believe that most things claiming to be "New and Improved" fall way short of expectations. If I'm going to be honest, and I try to do that, I have to realize that change is inevitable and continuing that honesty thread, I'm not really sure that I'd want to live in an unchanging world.

You see, buildings coming down over here is a sign of progress. It means we are closer to finishing our mission. Seems like that is indeed good change. When I have the opportunity to teach a "Warrior Transition" class to Marines and Sailors preparing for redeployment, I tell them that change has already happened. They have changed. Families and friends have changed during deployment. I already know that my house has changed. Since we have been gone, my wonderful wife has had the interior of our house painted from a really ugly flat white to a much more inviting neutral color. The bottom line is this: it is up to each of us to determine whether change is good, bad or just doesn't matter. Having my house painted is good change. For those of you old enough to remember 1985, you'll remember the disaster that was New Coke. One of the finest examples of bad change I have ever seen. As I move further up the chronological scale, I notice my hair getting grayer, but since I get my hair cut every week and have the sides and back taken down to the skin, to me that is change that just doesn't matter.

Folks, as I sign off, my hope is that you are aware of change in your life. Please pay attention to whether it is good, bad or just doesn't matter. If you are struggling with change in your life, find someone you trust who may have had similar experiences and talk to them. Until next time...

Semper Fidelis,

T. H. HUNT

Chaplain, Marine Expeditionary Brigade - Afghanistan / RC(SW)



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# Regional Command (Southwest)

## PHOTOS



Photo by Cpl. Joshua Young

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.](#)

▲ Petty Officer 3rd Class Kristopher Krysa, from La Grange Park, Illinois, and a corpsman with Security Force Assistance Advisor Team 2-215, says goodbye to an Afghan National Army medic with 2nd Brigade, 215th Corps, aboard Forward Operating Base Nolay, Helmand province, Afghanistan, May 2, 2014. Krysa and the other SFAAT 2-215 built strong working relationships and friendships with their ANA counterparts.

➤ Captain Joseph Dewson, left, a 28-year-old Marine reservist from Newark, Delaware, and an advisor with Security Force Assistance Advisor Team 2-215, speaks with Maj. Mhamaref, center, the education officer for 2nd Brigade, 215th Corps, Afghan National Army, aboard Forward Operating Base Nolay, Helmand province, Afghanistan, April 8, 2014. Following four years of Marines fighting in the Sangin District and advising their Afghan counterparts, Marines left Sangin for the final time, May 4, 2014.



Photo by Cpl. Joshua Young



Photo by Cpl. Cody Haas

◀ Service members with Regional Command (Southwest) stand at attention during a Memorial Day ceremony aboard Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, May 26, 2014. During the ceremony, RC(SW) Commander Brig. Gen. Daniel D. Yoo spoke about the importance of the day and service members observed a moment of silence to remember those who gave their lives in service to their country.



Photo by Cpl. Cody Haas

◀ Sergeant Elizabeth Pineda, left, administrative noncommissioned officer in charge, and Sgt. Kyle Bond, commanding general personal security detail, prepare to raise the American flag during a Memorial Day ceremony aboard Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, May 26, 2014. During the ceremony, RC(SW) Commander Brig. Gen. Daniel D. Yoo spoke about the importance of the day and service members observed a moment of silence to remember those who gave their lives in service to their country.

▼ Lance Cpl. Chase Andrus, a security network operator with 9th Communication Battalion, conducts the running portion of the “Memorial Day Murph” aboard Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, May 24, 2014. The “Murph” is a popular CrossFit Hero workout consisting of a 1-mile run, 100 pull-ups, 200 pushups, 300 squats and another mile run following the other exercises. It was named after Navy Lt. Michael Murphy, a Navy Seal who was killed while conducting combat operations in Afghanistan during 2005. The service members performed the “Murph” to reflect upon Memorial Day and remember his service and the sacrifice he and his comrades made.



Photo by Sgt. Jessica Ostroska

▲ Brigadier Gen. Daniel D. Yoo, right, commander, Regional Command (Southwest), shakes hands with Estonia's Minister of Defence, Sven Mikser, after a flag-lowering ceremony for the Estonian Contingent aboard Camp Leatherneck, Helmand province, Afghanistan, May 9, 2014. This was the 17th and last Estonian Contingent to deploy to Afghanistan.

➤ Brigadier Gen. Daniel D. Yoo, left, commander, Regional Command (Southwest), shakes hands with Petty Officer 1st Class Rudy Contreras, an independent duty corpsman with RC(SW), during a recognition ceremony aboard Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, May 13, 2014. Contreras received a certificate of commendation from Brig. Gen. Yoo for earning Senior Sailor of the Quarter for RC(SW).



Photo by Cpl. Joshua Young



Photo by Cpl. Cody Haas

# Afghanistan run-off elections

**Afghan soldiers and civilians throughout Helmand and Nimroz provinces once again went to the polls to cast their vote for their future president, June 14.**

