

TIP OF THE SPEAR

FOUR VALOR AWARDS FOR AFGHAN COMBAT



Three Marines and a Sailor from Company B, 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion received top valor awards from Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus Dec. 3 for combat heroics performed two years ago in Afghanistan's Helmand province. Sgt. William B. Soutra was awarded the Navy Cross and Maj. James T. Rose, SSgt. Frankie J. Shinost, and Hospitalman Corpsman 1st Class Partick B. Quill were each awarded the Silver Star. The July 2010 two-day operation began when the Marines and their Afghan commando counterparts successfully fended off an enemy ambush. On the second day, they

were engaged again and their element leader, SSgt. Chris Antonik, was mortally wounded by a makeshift bomb blast. The men repeatedly braved enemy fire to retrieve Antonik as he drifted in and out of consciousness, and assist Afghan troops, enabling coalition aircraft to provide suppressive fire and evacuate the team. "These incredible Sailors and Marines always say the same thing about what they did: 'I was just doing my job,'" said Mabus. "Their job for special operations forces, like those we honor here today, include actions and events that most of us not a member of this community cannot even imagine." [Read more](#)



PHOTO OF THE WEEK



Since 1947, the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots Program has distributed more than 452 million toys to more than 209 million children in need. This charitable endeavor has made the Marine Corps the unchallenged leader in looking after less fortunate children at Christmas. *(Photo by SSgt. Mark Fayloga)*

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IN THE NEWS

EXERCISE STEEL KNIGHT 2013 UNDERWAY AT PENDLETON, TWENTYNINE PALMS



The annual Steel Knight exercise kicked off at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, Calif., Nov. 29. The two-week training is a combined arms live-fire exercise focused on preparing units from 1st Marine Division for deployment as the Ground Combat Element of a Marine Air-Ground Task Force. Participating Marines and Sailors begin with a series of platoon-size ranges, building up in complexity from company-sized operations and thus allowing them to refine essential combat skills. This year is the first time Steel Knight will be conducted simultaneously at both Camp Pendleton and Twentynine Palms as a

base-wide live-fire exercise. [Read more](#)

MEB REACTIVATED TO INCREASE CAPABILITY



The 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) was reactivated at Camp Lejeune, N.C., Nov. 20 to rebuild its capability to command deployed crisis-response forces. Now a permanent unit, 2nd MEB will provide a "scalable, standing, joint-capable, deployment-ready headquarters element that can also enable the introduction of follow-on forces if required," said II Marine Expeditionary Force officials. This activation marks the third active-duty MEB reactivated in as many years, aligning with the commandant's plan to have permanent brigade headquarters elements regionally focused and prepared to respond to contingencies

ranging from humanitarian missions to combat operations. The 2nd MEB will become fully operational

in late 2015 and focus primarily on the U.S. Southern Command, U.S. European Command, and U.S. Africa Command regions. [Read more](#)

MAKING GAINS IN MUSA QAL'AH



Members of the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) met with officials and elders of Musa Qal'ah, Afghanistan Nov. 29 in an effort to assess governance, security and stability. The group discussed recent area improvements and how to build upon them as coalition forces withdraw and responsibility is shifted to the Afghans. SSgt. Ben Lund, civil affairs with Fox Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines, Regimental Combat Team 7, noted the increased security presence in the area and how the Afghan National Security Forces continue to provide stability to the region. "Securitywise, Musa Qal'ah has probably come twofold. Its security has

progressed 100 percent," said Lund, from Phoenix. "The [Afghan Uniform Police] and [Afghan National Army] operate by themselves with little to no assistance." [Read more](#)

MARINES PREPARE FOR AFRICA DEPLOYMENT



More than 130 Marines from 32 Reserve training centers came together at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, N.C. last month to train for their upcoming deployment to Africa. The Special-Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) Africa 13.2 is learning essential methods for training foreign militaries on marksmanship and how to set up and conduct firing ranges -- vital lessons as their ability to train a partner-nation force as an individually operation security cooperation team will be key to their deployment. The Special-Purpose MAGTF is currently training with the logistic support of the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit. It is projected to

deploy in January to Africa, where Marines can be expected to provide training in up to a dozen countries at once. [Read more](#)

SEA KNIGHT'S FINAL FLIGHT FROM FUTENMA



The last of the CH-46E Sea Knights with Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 265 (VMM-265), made its final departure Nov. 26 at Futenma Marine Corps Air Station in Okinawa, Japan. "The legacy that the CH-46E has in the Marine Corps, everything that it's done from Vietnam to Lebanon, Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, is a testament to its capabilities and dependability," said Col. Jeffrey K. Arruda, the commanding officer of Marine Aircraft Group 36. It is a bittersweet goodbye as the Phrog awaits final disposition at Camp Kinser. The squadron has fully transitioned to the MV-22 Osprey, which can go

faster, farther, and higher than its predecessor, enhancing capabilities as focus shifts to the Asia-Pacific region. [Read more](#)

NAVY, MARINE CORPS SAVE ON INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY



The Navy and Marine Corps have achieved more than \$100 million in information technology (IT) savings in the last year, making strides to cut 25 percent of their \$7.8 billion budget by 2017. The services are consolidating IT business systems and data centers, increasing use of enterprise software licenses, and reducing printing and mobile device costs. Having collectively closed seven of the nearly 160 data centers already, both services hope to have fewer than 25 by the 2017 audit. They have also adjusted terms in their financial systems to clarify data center

funds and better track costs and savings. [Read more](#)

DOD CREATES BRAIN REPOSITORY FOR RESEARCH



The Defense Department, in partnership with the National Institutes of Health, opened a brain repository to research the damage that can occur during military service, particularly from exposure to blast waves. The brain bank, located in Rockville, Md., aims to understand key subtle changes to the brain and the effects of repetitive damage, which can lead to dementia or chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE). "The whole idea is to understand not only what's happening," said Jonathon Woodson, the Pentagon's top medical officer, "but what magnitude of injury might precipitate this [brain damage] and how we might intervene." Only one

brain sample has been collected so far. Officials are working to educate troops and their families on brain donation, including consent to the process after a loved one dies. [Read more](#)

PENNSYLVANIA'S OLDEST LIVING FEMALE MARINE HONORED



Grace Ricci Bergman, the oldest living Marine in Pennsylvania, celebrated her 97th birthday Dec. 3. A flag in Washington, D.C. was raised in her honor on the same day. "I feel very, very unworthy, truly. There were so many women like me," she said. Bergman enlisted in the Corps in 1945, and served in a support role at Marine Corps Headquarters in D.C. for two years during World War II, keeping detailed personnel records of the hundreds of thousands of troops serving in combat worldwide. Reunited with her fianc after the war, Bergman married, quietly returning to civilian life as a homemaker. [Read more](#)



THIS WEEK IN HISTORY

DECEMBER 5, 1929

Marine Capt. Alton N. Parker became the first to fly over the unexplored Antarctic. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for the expedition.



VIETNAM WALL CENTER ALSO TO HONOR RECENT FALLEN



Military and D.C. officials broke ground Nov. 28 for the Education Center at The Wall, a 35,000-square-foot facility that will tell the stories of the 58,282 service members who died in connection with the Vietnam War and those who died in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Center, located across the street from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, will feature a "Wall of Faces" depicting photos of fallen service members, a changing display of the more than 400,000 personal items left at the Wall over the past 30 years, a timeline of the Vietnam War, and an exhibit on veterans' experiences after returning home. The Center is anticipated to open in 2014 -- in time for the return of troops from Afghanistan. "This will connect the nation's past with the nation's future," said Jan Scruggs, president and founder of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund. [Read more](#)

OUR MISSION

*In the words of Lt. Gen. Victor H. "Brute" Krulak, "The United States does not need a Marine Corps... the United States wants a Marine Corps." As America's Expeditionary Force in Readiness, the Marine Corps is deployed across the globe, standing ready to respond to any crisis. The Marine Corps Connection is your one-stop source for the latest Marine Corps news and is published weekly by the Division of Public Affairs at Headquarters Marine Corps. **Stay connected to your Marines!***



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