



MARINES HELP OPEN NEW SOLAR-POWERED PACKING FACILITY IN AFGHANISTAN

As efforts continue in Afghanistan to improve Afghan farmers' sustainable income, the Marjah Fruit and Vegetable Packing Facility officially opened for business earlier this month. The plant will provide local farmers a controlled environment in which to clean, store and distribute their produce, helping farmers to better market their home-grown fruits and vegetables, and perhaps build a profit-generating business. "The new building has the potential to change the current paradigm in the produce market," said Maj. Erich Bergiel, project supervisor and member of the Regional Command Southwest Economic Development section. "We hope to use this facility as a pilot (program) to determine appropriateness and feasibility of the construction of similar facilities throughout Afghanistan." Setting his sights even higher, Bergiel hopes that one day he will see produce in the U.S. labeled "(Grown and) packaged in Afghanistan."

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Also Read: Marines in Helmand partner, mentor in Now Zad

NAWA: THE ESSENCE OF PROGRESS



Coalition forces have brought safety and security to once-impooverished Nawa, Helmand province, Afghanistan. Marines and Sailors worked closely with the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in Nawa to support development and make the area a safer place to live for its residents. Local Afghan forces took responsibility for the safety of Nawa in December 2011 and ensured an active system of government

has been established. Since the Marines arrived two years ago, projects such as increased education, refurbishments to shops and a new solar power project have developed in the area. The biggest project in progress in Nawa is the road that goes from Nawa to Lashkar Gah, also in Helmand province. "It's a 23-kilometer road that is the crown jewel of the development projects," said Cmdr. Edward Leitz, the civil military medical officer and education and development chief for 2nd Marine Division (Forward). "It will improve the freedom of movement and connect the people of Nawa to the provincial center in Lashkar Gah." The road connects farmers and other businesses to wider markets and major road networks. In addition to helping farmers more easily transport their goods, the road will provide ANSF with more freedom of movement to maintain security.

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HEROES

MARINE RECEIVES SILVER STAR

On Feb. 10, Sgt. Phillip McCulloch Jr. received the Silver Star for bravery during combat in Sangin, Afghanistan. McCulloch was a squad leader with 3rd Battalion, 5th



Marine regiment on Jan. 8, 2011 when he and his Marines were attacked by insurgents. McCulloch took the lead in organizing them into a counter-attack while directing air support and indirect fire. "Only after six hours of fighting, with his squad dangerously low on ammunition and himself wounded in the leg, did he return to friendly lines," according to the Silver Star citation signed by Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. James Amos. The Silver Star is the third-highest combat award for bravery, heroism or meritorious services in the U.S. Armed Forces.



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[Watch: Silver Star Ceremony](#)

EOD MARINE AWARDED BRONZE STAR

Staff Sgt. Cassell Wiggins, a Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Ariz., Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) technician, was awarded the Bronze Star with a Combat "V" on Feb. 3. During his deployment to Sangin in Helmand province, Afghanistan, he went on 85 combat missions with Company K, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines. On two different occasions, while attempting to disable improvised explosive devices, Wiggins' team leader was injured. Wiggins provided life-saving first aid, prepared for the arrival



of a medical evacuation helicopter and assisted the casualties on board. Later, he was in a convoy when the lead vehicle was hit by a rocket propelled grenade and the convoy was ambushed. Without heed for enemy fire, Wiggins cleared a path to help the wounded Marines. "It's a real privilege for me to have this honor of presenting this award and recognizing Staff Sgt. Wiggins' extraordinary performance of duty," said Maj. Gen. Melvin Spiese, 1st Marine Expeditionary Force deputy commanding general. "His actions saved lives. You can't make a finer statement for a Marine. EOD Marines are pretty unique creatures. They are willing to expose themselves to save their fellow Marines." The Bronze Star is the fourth-highest combat award for bravery, heroism or meritorious services in the

NEWS

WOMEN INCHING CLOSER TO COMBAT



For nearly seven decades, women have served in the Marine Corps and within the past decade, female Marines have fought and died in Iraq and Afghanistan. Change is coming to certain military occupational specialties due to a recent proposal from the Department of Defense. "Women are contributing in unprecedented ways to the military's mission," said Leon Panetta, Secretary of Defense. "Through their courage, sacrifice, patriotism and great skill, women have proven their ability to serve in an expanding number of roles on and off the battlefield. We will continue to

open as many positions as possible to women so that anyone qualified to serve can have the opportunity to do so." The new regulation would still prohibit their service in infantry units, but it would enable female Marines to provide assistance to the frontlines of combat. According to officials, the new ruling will open up more positions such as communications, intelligence and logistics at the battalion level, not just the combat brigade level — meaning that female service members will be allowed to work closer with units whose primary mission is to engage in direct combat on the ground. The policy will go into effect later this spring.

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[Also Read: A Smile Gets You In: Looking at the Female Engagement Team](#)

TRI-NATIONAL MARINE FORCE ASSAULTS THAI BEACH

As exercise Cobra Gold 2012 continues in



Thailand, elements of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) with forces from the Republic of Korea and Kingdom of Thailand conducted an amphibious assault in Hat Yao, Kingdom of Thailand on Feb. 10. "We have participated in exercise Cobra Gold for 31 years," said Lt. Gen. Kenneth Glueck, Jr., deputy commander, Multinational Force and commanding general, III Marine Expeditionary Force. "It really brings together all the nations that contributed; participating nations come together and build teamwork and develop our capabilities together." Events during the exercise include a computer-simulated command-post exercise, field training operations, and humanitarian and civic assistance projects that will increase the standard of living for the Thai people in surrounding communities. Exercise Cobra Gold 2012 is an annual multilateral training event in which various Asia-Pacific nations execute combined military operations.



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Also Read: Exercise Cobra Gold 2012 Has Officially Begun

MARINE BOXING TEAM TAKES GOLD

The Marine Corps team won the 2012 Armed Forces Boxing Championship on Feb. 3, ending the Army's 20-year winning streak. Marine Sgt. DeJesus Gardner took gold against Army Sgt. Marvin Carey. "I told my daughter that daddy would bring her a gold medal, and daddy don't break no promises," said Gardner. Other Marine victories helped contribute to the overall team gold medal. Individual gold medalists in the championship are now preparing for the USA Boxing Nationals, a qualifier for the 2012 Olympics, and for the Conseil International du Sport Militaire's World Military Games. The Pentagon Channel begins airing the 2012 Armed Forces Boxing Championship on March 9 and will be available on demand at www.pentagonchannel.mil/boxing.



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Watch: Soldier trash talks Marine, gets whooped

VIDEO CHAT CONNECTS MARINE AND WIFE FOR CEREMONY

Thanks to video chat, Michelle L. Smoak was able to see her husband, Staff Sgt. Derek A. Smoak, get promoted to his current rank on Feb. 1, while he was aboard Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan. During the ceremony, Staff Sgt. Smoak also received the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal for his efforts in support of International Security Assistance Force operations. "He is a superb Marine, and the words of his peers and the general were very heartfelt," Michelle added. Col. Mark R. Hollahan, the 2nd Marine Logistics Group commanding officer, said that any opportunity for families to participate in personal events is a great experience.

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L.I.N.K.S. PROVIDES MARINE SPOUSES ANSWERS

The Lifestyle, Insights, Networking Knowledge and Skills (L.I.N.K.S.) program provides basic information about the military lifestyle and also helps participants increase their military knowledge by attending the classes. The course is developed by spouses for spouses, children and extended families. On Camp Pendleton, Calif., two general L.I.N.K.S. classes for spouses are held monthly, with classes for extended families held every semester. Additionally, two children's classes and a teen class are held during the summer. Unit-specific classes for Marines and their spouses can be arranged by request as well. For more information, call 760-726-2335, or visit www.mccscp.com/links.

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COMBAT MARKSMANSHIP MOLDS LEADERS, STRENGTHENS TIES



As part of Exercise Cobra Gold, Marines and Sailors from Combat Assault Battalion, 3rd Marine Division, III Marine Expeditionary Force, supported and guided their Royal Thai and Republic of Korea counterparts as they trained to sharpen their combat marksmanship on Feb. 13. "Even though we come from different nations and backgrounds, the core roots of our military fundamentals exist in all countries participating," said U.S. Marine 1st Lt. John N. Biggs, officer-in-charge, combat

marksmanship range. For the training, a heavy machine gun range and an amphibious assault vehicle gunnery range were set up so that U.S. Marines could provide the Royal Thai and Republic of Korea Marines with proper weapons handling techniques and safety practices. Exercise Cobra Gold 2012 is an annual multilateral training in which various Asia-Pacific nations execute combined military operations.

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EVENTS

SPEAKER SERIES LAUNCHED PRIOR TO MARINE WEEK CLEVELAND



Although Marine Week Cleveland is still a few months away, several events leading up to the annual celebration of Community, Corps and Country will give Clevelanders a taste of what to expect in June. One of the main attractions leading up to the week-long event is the Marine Week Speaker Series, which started last week. Maj. Gen. Ronald Bailey,



commander of 1st Marine Division, kicked off the series on Feb. 7, with a presentation entitled, "The Future of Afghanistan: A Military Perspective." As part of his address, Bailey said: "We are transitioning from fighting to training and adviser programs, and progress is being made. We've been going through village areas so people there will feel safe in their daily living...something we take for granted. Our troops will eventually be pulled out of Afghanistan." Today, Brig. Gen. Vincent R. Stewart, director of intelligence, will speak in Cleveland about "African American Contributions to our National Defense." Other upcoming series events will focus on NATO in the 21st century, the future of NASA space exploration,

and innovative medical developments for returning wounded warriors. In addition to the speaker series, Marine sports teams and bands will visit Cleveland throughout the spring to showcase their talents at recreational centers, schools and local businesses. Marine Week Cleveland, which takes place June 11-17, will feature all that America's Expeditionary Force in Readiness has to offer, including a Marine Air Ground Task Force demonstration.

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[Also Read: Speech by Major General Ronald L. Bailey kicks off Marine Week, coming June 11-17 to Cleveland](#)

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