



"The Lone Star Battalion"

January 2011

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See You When You get back!!



Education, relocation, parenting, stress- you name it- Military One Source is here to help you with just about any need. Available by phone or online, our free service is provided by the Department of Defense for active duty, guard, and Reserve service members and their families. The service is completely private and confidential with a few exceptions. Start solving today with Military One Source.

As the 1/23 family, we have truly embarked on a new and adventurous journey that many of us have never been on before. Life back at home here in the States continues to press forward while our Marines continue their training in Southern California continuously honing their skills in preparation for the upcoming deployment to Southwestern Afghanistan.

Ready or not, there may be an adjustment period ahead with our loved ones being gone away from home. The goal of this newsletter is to give you some insight of what your Marine or Sailor is seeing, experiencing, and has been accomplishing over the past few months. The newsletter, along with the 1/23 Battalion website should serve as a useful resource for most questions, concerns, points of contact, and any other issues that may come to mind. We encourage our readers to utilize the information and invaluable resources provided to address any matters of concern before they actually become a significant issue for the family member. The unit website is as follows:

<http://www.marines.mil/unit/marforres/4thMarDiv/23rdMar/1stBn/Pages/>

How to get involved and stay informed??

- Ensure your FRO(Family Readiness Officer) has your contact information- primary phone and email
- Inform friends and family members of these communication avenues- newsletter and website
- Attend events planned and advertised on the unit website
- Volunteer in the family readiness program

A Message from the CO



Dear Family and Friends of the Marines from 1st Battalion, 23d Marines,

Since the battalion was activated on November 1, 2010 and returned to Camp Pendleton, California on November 10, 2010, your Marines have been training very hard in preparation for their upcoming deployment to Afghanistan. You have a lot to be proud of because they have come together quickly as a team.

We hit the ground running with a march up Margarita Peak overlooking the hills of Camp Pendleton to commemorate the 235th birthday of the United States Marine Corps. It was on that peak that we came together committed to our upcoming deployment to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. This is a war that we did not ask for, but that was forced upon us after 9-11, a day that will always be remembered. This war has tested the endurance of our nation heading into its ninth year. The commitment by your Marine and your support of him are a testament that America will not allow its freedoms and its security to be compromised by a group of Al Qaeda and Taliban extremists who wish to destroy our way of life.

Over the last month and a half your Marines have received some of the best training the Marine Corps has to offer for units heading overseas. Some of the highlights of this training include Counter Insurgency (COIN) patrolling-tactics with Afghan role players; small unit live fire with their companies; Afghanistan culture & language classes; communications with the latest in radio technology to include satellite communications; counter IED dog handling; advanced combat medical training; licensing on the newest counter IED vehicles such as the MATV; tactical site exploitation-police like investigations; and hikes to improve physical conditioning. The Marines have earned a well deserved break for the holidays to spend quality time with their friends and families. To keep you updated on the battalion, I encourage you to review the battalion's website at

<http://www.marines.mil/unit/marforres/4thMarDiv/23rdMar/1stBn/Pages/default.aspx> or do a Google search under "1st Battalion 23rd Marines." The website offers the viewer a carousel of articles, photos, media coverage of the battalion, newsletters, and resources for family readiness issues.

Upon their return to Camp Pendleton the pace will be fast and furious as the battalion heads down the final stretch before deploying to Afghanistan. I appreciate your continued understanding of your Marine as most of his time will be committed to this important preparation. Thank you for your support from a grateful country and a commander who after twenty years continues to be in awe at the unselfish commitment of the Marine and his family.

Semper Fidelis (Always Faithful).

LtCol Russell Todd Zink
1st Battalion, 23d Marines
Commanding Officer

From your Family Readiness Officer, Kristen Ruiz

832-380-7523

Kristen.ruiz@usmc.mil



There is so much to learn, the Marine Corps is always changing, and you don't know what your Marine is really saying. L.I.N.K.S. is a seminar for Marine family members to answer your questions about the Marine Corps and information about benefits, communication and coping skills for this deployment. This team of trainers is coming to town just for you. Anyone who supports a Marine is welcome to attend. Please join us! Contact your Family Readiness Officer for further details. Join us and discover how you can better support your Marine during this deployment!



February 12, 2011 9a-4p
Bossier City, LA
POC 1st Sgt Donald
318-747-0795
Cedric.donald@usmc.mil

February 13, 2011 9a-4p
Houston, Texas
POC 1stSgt Grimmett
832-380-7520
Harvey.grimmett@usmc.mil

L.I.N.K.S stands for Lifestyle Insights, Networking, Knowledge and Skills. L.I.N.K.S. is a program with Marine Corps Family Team Building that enhances the readiness of Marines, both single and married, and their families by offering an **orientation to the Marine Corps lifestyle**. This orientation includes mentorship by experienced and knowledgeable Marine Corps spouses, Marine Corps Family Team Building personnel, and involves information sharing, small group discussions, and interactive activities. L.I.N.K.S. provides a positive environment for Marines and their families to learn to manage the demands of the Marine Corps lifestyle, and to work together as a team in balancing family needs while meeting Marine Corps expectations.

Benefits of attending L.I.N.K.S. includes:

- Understanding the Marine Corps mission and how it affects Marines and the family they were born into, sworn into, and married into.
- Acquiring the knowledge and developing the skills to successfully meet the challenges of the Marine Corps lifestyle.



Chaplain's Corner

1/23 Chaplain
Lt. Commander Mucha

In recent times, humanity has ascended to incredible heights: aviators have conquered the skies; astronauts have left their footprints on the moon; oceanographers have gone to the depths of the ocean floor; environmental engineers have harnessed the wind with giant windmills; communications experts have made it possible to bounce our voices across the globe using mobile devices; pathologists have developed cures for diseases; forensic scientists have perfected the use of DNA to solve crimes. What incredible power we have over our world! And yet, we still have not conquered "the tongue."

The words we use have the power to wound or to heal, to tear down or to build up. One proverb says, "Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing" (Prov 12:18). This sword has certainly wounded and killed more people than all the wars since the world began. "Sticks and stones may break my bones," but only if I'm physically present. However, a malicious word can cause infinite damage from a distance.

Destructive Communication can be as blatant as: "Can't you do anything right?" "What's wrong with you?" "Why are you so stupid?" "You're a hopeless cause!" "You'll never amount to anything!" Or, it can be subtle, such as: "You're always breaking something!" "Oh, let me do it, or I'll probably have to come back and do it right!"

The Bible compares the damage caused by the human tongue to the destruction caused by a raging forest fire (James 3:6). In the dry conditions of Southern California, a fire is almost immediately out of control. Like a blazing fire, a spoken word is far reaching and also has the potential to produce results that rage out of control.

Constructive Communication builds up and encourages: "That's the way!" "You're really working hard!" "I'm proud of you!" "Now you've figured it out!" "You're good at this!" "Good thinking!" "You're catching on!" "Good job!" There are twelve words that can transform any situation: "Please!" "Thank you!" "I'm sorry!" "I love you!" "I'm praying for you." Studies show that people respond to encouragement more than criticism. For every negative word spoken, it takes ten positive words to make up for it.

The Bible compares the tongue's power to direct the course of our life to that of a small rudder (James 3:4). Just as a ship is controlled by a small rudder and turned in any direction the skipper determines, so we must allow the Captain of the Soul to control the helm of our lives.

When we edify and build others up through our speech, we impart grace and spiritual benefit to their lives. Remember, once a word is released from our lips, it can never be retrieved. So let's watch for words that hurt and choose words that heal. An encouraging word can make the difference between giving up and going on.

Red Cross Emergency Notifications

Red Cross emergency communications services keeps deployed military personnel in touch with their families following the death or serious illness of an immediate family member, the birth of a service member's child or grandchild or when a family faces other emergencies. Where ever their military service takes them, he or she knows that the Red Cross will deliver notification in times of an emergency at home. Even if the service member receives an e-mail or phone call from home, Red Cross-verified information assists commanding officers with making a decision regarding emergency leave. Without this verification, the service member may not be able to come home during a family crisis. When calling the Red Cross (1877-272-7337) to send an emergency message to a family member, please have the following information ready:

- Service Member's Full Name
- Branch of Service
- Social Security Number
- Military Address Where Deployed
- Home Base Unit

Child & Youth Assistance Programs



Our Military Kids

Our Military Kids helps families who often fall outside the parameters of established support programs – the families of National Guard and Reserve service men and women who have been and are continuing to sacrifice so much for our country. Along with the sacrifice of having a parent away in service for months at a time, many Guard and Reserve families are financially stretched and cannot afford the fees for sports, fine arts, or tutoring programs so crucial to their children's sense of well-being.

Our Military Kids, www.ourmilitarykids.org assists with Grants that pay for participation in activities including various sports programs, fine arts programs, tutoring programs, and other programs such as driver's ed, camps, and scouting. Eligible families apply for a grant and within days of receiving the application in the Our Military Kids office, a packet is sent to the child thanking them for their service to our country and notifying them of the award, and a check is sent directly to the service provider.

To be eligible, your child must be ages 3-18 and your spouse currently deployed overseas with the National Guard or Reserves. The grants, which can be up to \$500, will pay for up to six months of an extracurricular activity.

To apply:

Visit the Our Military Kids website www.ourmilitarykids.org, and download and complete the appropriate application. Send it to Our Military Kids along with a copy of three supporting documents:

A copy of deployment orders which show that the child's parent is National Guard or Reserve and is deployed overseas.

A copy of the child's military dependent ID card, OR a copy of the completed Form 1172, Application for Uniformed Services Identification (DEERS Form), OR a copy of the child's birth certificate if he/she is the biological child of the deployed service member.

Documentation of the cost of the sports, fine arts or tutoring program. Include a program flyer, the website address (URL) or a letter from the organization which clearly states the cost of the program. Grant requests for tutoring services provided by an individual must include a copy of the tutor's teaching certificate.

Mail applications with supporting documents to:

Our Military Kids, Inc.
6861 Elm Street, Suite 2-A
McLean, VA 22101
Or Fax to: 703-734-6503

Questions:

Call: 703-734-6654

Toll Free: 1-866-691-6654

Email: omkinquiry@ourmilitarykids.org

National Association of Childcare Resources and Referral Agencies (NACCRA)

Am I eligible?

Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood (MCCYN) is for Families of:

Active Duty Marines
Active Reserve Marines
Marine Recruiters

For married Marines, the spouse must be working, looking for work or attending school. The same policies will apply to unmarried legal parents living in the same household. Children of Active Duty and Reserve Marines, living within 30 miles of an installation, must be on the waitlist at the installation child care program and not have denied a viable child care option within the last year.

Eligible Families receive:

Help finding approved high-quality child care in your community
Fee assistance to help cover part of the cost of child care. How do I find an approved high-quality provider? Contact Child Care Aware at 1-800-424-2246 for a personal consultation. Approved providers must meet all the Marine Corps's requirements. The provider must have a state child care license and have received an inspection within the last 12 months.

PLUS...

The Deployed Respite Care Program

While your Marine is deployed, you will receive 16 hours of respite childcare per month for as long as your Marine is deployed. Simply call 1800-424-2246 and mention this program.

To apply:

Complete an online application at <http://www.naccra.org/MilitaryPrograms/marine-corps/> and submit required documents. Make sure your provider submits required documents. Questions?? Call 1-800-424-2246

Military Child of the Year

<http://www.operationhomefront.net/mcoy/>

In spite of the extraordinary challenges they face, military kids have proven to be some of the strongest, brightest kids around. They are vibrant and flexible. And they shine in the most difficult circumstances. Operation Homefront is proud to honor the strength, courage and achievements of our warriors' children through a special award – the 2011 Military Child of the Year. If you know a military child who shines, please nominate him or her for this special award. They might be in your neighborhood or school. You might know them from church. It only takes a moment to fill out the form and here's what it could mean to one of these young heroes:

- \$5,000
- A laptop computer
- A paid trip to Washing-ton, D.C. for a special ceremony with high-level military dignitaries
- Much-deserved recognition for our young patriots

This year, for the first time, the contest is open to all branches of the military, including the Coast Guard. One child from each branch of service will be chosen and given this high honor. For more information and to nominate, please visit www.operationhomefront.net/mcoy. Deadline is January 31, 2011. Thank you for helping us recognize our youngest heroes

YMCA Operation Kid Comfort

Operation Kid Comfort creates custom-made quilts for children of deployed military personnel who experience grief from missing their mom or dad.

ASYMCA's Operation Kid Comfort is designed to address the emotional stress that children of military personnel suffer during a parent's absence from home, providing free quilts for children ages 6 and under and pillows for children ages 7 and older. ASYMCA volunteers collect photographs from military families to make "photo-transfer" quilts that feature images of the deployed family member. With the help of local quilting artists, volunteers are taught the basic steps of quilt making, how to crop and scan pictures, preparation of the fabric, and use of equipment. Once the quilt is complete, it is given to the child to play with, sleep with, or use to comfort them from the grief of missing their mom or dad.

Parents or loved ones of children of deployed parents can request a quilt or pillow by filling out the [Operation Kid Comfort Request Form](http://www.asymca.org/what-we-do-3/national-programs-services/operation-kid-comfort/). <http://www.asymca.org/what-we-do-3/national-programs-services/operation-kid-comfort/>

Armed Forces YMCA offers various child & youth programs. Visit <http://www.asymca.org/> to view all of the programs that they offer.

Military Outreach Initiative and Respite Child Care



Deployment can be a stressful and uncertain time for our nation's servicemen and women and their families. In partnership with the Armed Services YMCA and the Department of Defense, the Y is proud to offer memberships and respite child care services to eligible military families and personnel to give them extra support during this difficult period. It's our way of giving back to those who dedicate themselves to serving our country.

Title 10 personnel are eligible for a Y membership, including:

Family members of deployed National Guard and Reservists

Active Duty Independent Duty personnel and their families

Relocated spouse/dependent children of deployed Active Duty personnel

Note: The Relocated Spouse category supports families/spouse who relocate away from an installation/duty station while the active duty service member is deployed. All of the following criteria must be met:

The service member is DEPLOYED for a minimum of six months (on deployment orders—NOT unaccompanied orders, NOT geographic bachelors). The spouse has relocated away from the military installation where the service member is assigned (most often, back home near family). Wounded service members assigned to a Community Based Warrior in Transition Unit (CBWTU)

What do I need to do?

1. Contact Military OneSource at www.militaryonesource.com or 800-342-9647 to confirm your eligibility and receive an eligibility form.
2. Find a participating Y in your area by visiting <http://www.ymca.net/militaryoutreach/memberships.html>
3. Fill out and bring your eligibility form, Military ID and any other required documentation (usually, your Deployment Orders or Military Service Headquarters approval letter) to a participating YMCA for verification. Please do not leave copies of these documents at the YMCA.



Tips for Shipping a Package to Iraq or Afghanistan

For some items, need to ship it to your U.S. home first

Amazon.com and some other online retailers cannot ship electronics, cameras, computers and food to APO/FPO addresses. You need to have these items shipped to your home in the U.S. first, then take them to your U.S. Post Office where they can be shipped to the APO/FPO address. See [Amazon.com Shipping Restrictions](#) for more info.

Fill out the address correctly

You must address all mail to a specific soldier. You can no longer address mail to "Any Servicemember" or "Any Soldier" due to security concerns. Use the specific Army unit as the address, "APO" as the city and "AE" as the state. APO AE mail goes to New York first, where it is transferred to the Army Post Office system for air transport to Iraq.

Mail it early

Letters and packages take anywhere from as little as **7 days** up to **21 days** to arrive in Iraq or Afghanistan. Especially during the busy Christmas season, assume it will take 3 weeks to get there so plan accordingly. Same applies to important dates such as birthdays. Letters and cards less than 13 ounces are sent First Class Mail while everything more than 13 ounces is sent Priority Mail.

Use free USPS Flat Rate shipping materials

The U.S. Postal Service will send you free Flat Rate shipping boxes, Customs forms, Priority Mail labels and tape for sending packages to Iraq or Afghanistan. Call 1-800-610-8734, select option 1 (Express Mail, Priority Mail or Global Express) and ask the service agent for the Military Kit (or Mili-Kit). By using Flat Rate boxes, you can save *substantially* on postage. The local Post Office will also have these on hand if you want to pick them up locally.

List the Marine's address inside the package

This will ensure your package gets to the soldier in the event that the address on the box is unreadable or the box has been opened or is damaged.

Check the size and weight

Your package can't be more than 84 inches long or be more than 130 inches when you total up the length (the longest side) plus the girth (thickest portion), or weigh more than 70 lbs.

Use the proper Customs Form

For all parcel packages, you need to fill out the proper Customs Form. Be sure and fill out the form accurately as all mail is x-ray scanned. Here are the regulations:

-Letters and cards less than 16 ounces - no form needed

-Packages less than 16 ounces and less than \$400 value - **Form 2976**

-All mail greater than 16 ounces - **Form 2976-A** with **2976-E** mailer envelope

Under-report the value on the Customs Form

To discourage theft, which does happen occasionally in the APO mail system, underestimate the value of the merchandise listed on the Customs Form.

Always check "Gift" on the Customs Form

By checking "Gift" instead of "Merchandise" or other, potential duty import taxes can be avoided.



On 4-8 November, 2010, 1/23 conducted Yellow Ribbon Events at each of the Companies for the Marines and family members of those deploying Marines. The site support (I&I) Marines were instrumental in making these events happen. I must say that I have never seen a group of people work so hard, and with pride to complete a mission like these Marines, help was always there when I needed it, so thank you. Also, thank you to all of our wonderful Marines and family members for attending these events, a lot of great information and resources was passed. I would also like to offer a special thank you to the following Marines who worked for months to make these events happen:

PFC Rincon –H&S Company
Sgt Vasquez-Alpha Company
SSgt Lee-Bravo Company
LCPL Truillo-Charlie Company
LCPL Morales-Charlie Detachment Company
Sgt Rodriguez-Weapons Company

Semper Fi! Kristen Ruiz, 1/23 BN FRO

Spouse Education



The Military Spouse Career Advancement Accounts Program (MyCAA) is a career development and employment assistance program sponsored by the Department of Defense (DoD). MyCAA helps military spouses pursue licenses, certificates, certifications or Associate's Degrees (excluding General Studies and Liberal Arts) necessary for gainful employment in high demand, high growth Portable Career Fields and Occupations.

As part of the Military Spouse's Career Lifecycle, MyCAA offers the following:

Training and Education Financial Assistance: MyCAA provides a maximum education benefit of \$4,000 with an annual fiscal year cap of \$2,000 to assist eligible military spouses who need professional credentials to meet their Portable Career goals. Annual cap waivers are available if there is an upfront tuition cost that exceeds \$2,000 (up to the maximum education benefit of \$4,000).

Employment Readiness Counseling: Counseling services are provided to all military spouses married to active duty service members of all ranks, regardless of their eligibility to receive MyCAA financial assistance and their desire to pursue higher levels of education. Counseling services help military spouses identify additional sources of federal, state and local financial assistance, expanded career choices and opportunities, and support resources (e.g. child care, transportation, books, computers, equipment, supplies, etc.).

Employment Assistance and Career Services : Referrals are made to networks of military friendly employers for MyCAA spouse participants who have completed their programs of study using MyCAA funding and who are ready to seek gainful employment.

Who is eligible for MyCAA Financial Assistance?

- Spouses of service members on active duty in pay grades E-1 to E-5, W-1 to W-2, and O-1 to O-2 who can start and complete their coursework while their military sponsor is on Title 10 military orders, including spouses married to members of the National Guard and Reserve Components in these same pay grades.

- Those who are not eligible include: Spouses married to service members in pay grades: E-6 and above; W-3 and above; and O-3 and above

- Spouses who are a member of the armed forces themselves currently on Title 10 orders

- Spouses who are married but legally separated (or under court order or statute of any state or US territory) from a member of the armed forces on Title 10 orders

- Spouses whose National Guard/Reserve Component military sponsor is in a Warning Orders/Alert, Post Deployment/Demobilization or Transition Status

- Spouses married to a member of the Coast Guard

- Spouses who have participated in the DoD-DoL Career Advancement Accounts (CAA) Pilot Program

- Spouses who are unable to start and complete their course(s) while their military sponsor is on Title 10 orders.

What will MyCAA pay for?

- Tuition costs for education and training courses and examinations leading to an Associate's degree (excluding General Studies and Liberal Arts), license, certificate or certification at an accredited college, university, or technical school in the United States or approved testing organization that expands employment or portable career opportunities for military spouses.

MyCAA will NOT pay for the following :

- o Tuition for courses and examinations that are not included in the spouse's Education and Training Plan and those that have already started or been completed by the spouse
- o Reimbursements of any kind
- o Books, supplies, equipment, uniforms, computers and electronic devices of any kind
- o Student activities, events and entertainment
- o Pre-payment/deposits for future courses, unless costs are part of a block of study
- o School or college level entrance examinations, comprehensive exams and related preparatory courses
- o Courses, tests or fees normally paid by an employer as part of a job training program
- o Non-academic credit or ungraded courses, including courses taken on an audit basis or as an internship, practicum, apprenticeship, or clinical supervision; also, orientation programs that are non-academic credit or ungraded
- o Courses taken more than one time unless MyCAA has received a full refund from the school
- o Academic credit by examination tests (e.g. CLEP, etc.)
- o General Studies and Liberal Arts Associate's Degrees
- o Personal enrichment courses (excluding courses that are academic credit/graded electives in an approved MyCAA Spouse Education and Training Plan)
- o Transportation, lodging, child care, and medical services
- o Course Extensions (except for approved hardship waivers)
- o Study Abroad Programs (excluding programs of study offered by participating MyCAA schools on overseas military bases)

How can you establish a MyCAA Account? Visit the MyCAA Spouse Portal online at <https://aiportal.acc.af.mil/mycaa>. Provide required Spouse Profile information. A real-time DEERS eligibility check will confirm if you meet MyCAA eligibility requirements so you can move forward and establish your MyCAA Account. Those who do not pass this check will be provided additional guidance.

How can you provide MyCAA with feedback? Visit MyCAAFedback@militaryonesource.com to send MyCAA your ideas and recommendations. Visit [Contact Us \(https://aiportal.acc.af.mil/mycaa\)](https://aiportal.acc.af.mil/mycaa) to provide information about your MyCAA program experience once you have found gainful employment.

How can you get additional information or assistance? Call 1-800-342-9647 to speak with a MyCAA Career and Education Consultant or, if you already have an established MyCAA Account, use your Message Box as the fastest way to receive information and assistance.

School representatives should visit the "For School" resource page on the MyCAA Spouse Portal for program eligibility, participation and contact information



Military One Source Tax Services

The Military OneSource Tax Program will begin on Mon-day, January 17, 2011. The program will provide free access to a customized version of the basic H&R Block at Home® electronic tax filing product. This customized product allows for free federal filing and free state filing (up to three states). In addition, free telephonic tax consultations are available to help with tax related issues. Please see our list of Frequently

Asked Questions to learn more about the program and filing your 2010 taxes.

*An Important Note: Please do not create a user account on the public H&R Block Web site. You will incur a fee if you file using the public H&R Block Web site/product. If you create an account on the public H&R Block Web site, regard-less of how you access the ac-count in the future, the H&R Block system will view you as a public user (the system tags the account when it is created, according to the version of the product being used at that time).

Please wait until Monday, January 17th, when the customized MOS version is made available via a link on the Military OneSource Web site to create your account

Find More Filing Tips resources:

<https://www.militaryonesource.com/MOS/FindInformation/Category/TaxFilingServices.aspx>

Resources



ID Cards- find office nearest you, visit <http://www.dmdc.osd.mil/rsl/owa/home>

DEERS 1.800.538.9552

Tricare www.tricare.osd.mil 1.800.444.5445

Tricare Dental www.tricaredentalprogram.com 1.800.866.8499

1/23 Family Readiness Officer kristen.ruiz@usmc.mil 832-380-7523

Military One Source www.militaryonesource.com 1800-342-9647

Red Cross (877) 272-7337

Navy Marine Corps Relief Society <http://www.nmcrs.org> (817) 782-6000

Moto Mail <https://www.motomail.us>

1/23 Website <http://www.marines.mil/unit/marforres/4thMarDiv/23rdMar/1stBn/Pages/default.aspx>

Department of Labor <http://www.dol.gov/>

Employer Support Guard and Reserve www.esgr.org

Texas Department of Public Safety www.txdps.state.tx.us

Texas Workforce Commission www.twc.state.tx.us/

Texas Veterans Commission <http://www.tvc.state.tx.us/>

Job Connection Employment Program <http://jcep.info>

Defense Commissary Agency <http://www.commissaries.com>

United States Marine Corps www.usmc.mil

PICTURE THIS



Area Marine Reserve unit saddling up 'Lone Star Battalion' to train first in California, then go to Afghanistan

By **LINDSAY WISE**
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Nov. 5, 2010, 8:09AM

A Marine Reserve battalion headquartered in Houston has been mobilized for deployment to Afghanistan, Marine officials announced Thursday.

About 800 Marines and Navy Corpsmen assigned to 1st Battalion, 23rd Marine Regiment, or 1/23, will depart next week for pre-deployment training at Camp Pendleton in California.

The 1/23 Marines — known as "The Lone Star Battalion" — expect to deploy early next year in support of II Marine Expeditionary Force in southwestern Afghanistan, said Lt. Col. Russell Todd Zink, commanding officer.

A group of about 100 also will spread out across the country to train Afghan police and military forces, Zink said.

"We're basically training for what's referred to as counter-insurgency operations," the commander said. "You have to be flexible to really go from training local security forces to offensive operations, the whole gamut."

A large part of the battalion's mission will focus on establishing security so the Afghan government can attain legitimacy in the eyes of the people, Zink said.

"Without security, the Afghan government has no chance," he said.

The conflict in Afghanistan has intensified in the last year and American casualties have increased coinciding with a growing U.S. military offensive against the Taliban and al-Qaida.

The 1/23's headquarters are at Ellington Field. The vast majority of the reservists who will deploy to Afghanistan live in Texas, about half in the Houston area. The rest are based in Austin, Corpus Christi, Harlingen, Dallas-Fort Worth and Bossier, La.

The 1/23 previously deployed to Iraq from 2004 to 2005. This time, the battalion will mobilize for 400 days, with seven months spent in Afghanistan.

With the exception of the Christmas holiday, when the reservists will return home on leave from training, many will not see their families for an entire year, Zink said.

"Really, the dedication these guys demonstrate is remarkable," he said.

'What I want to do'

Cpl. Jon Staffen, 25, of Katy, volunteered for this deployment in August after completing four years in the active-duty Marine Corps in July.

I got a call from a prior service recruiter who wanted to know if I wanted to join back up for a year to do this deployment with the 1/23 and I said, "Why not?" Staffen said. "It was a voluntary thing. They needed some extra guys, and I was looking to go one way or another so it just kind of fell in my lap." Staffen said his wife, Maggie, is supportive. "She knows it's what I want to do," he said.



Staffen deployed to Iraq in 2007, and in 2009 served a tour with a Marine Expeditionary Unit on a ship off the coast of Somalia. With the 1/23, he's the leader of a scout sniper team. "Some people skydive and some people like to go golfing on a weekend, and that's just what they like to do," Staffen said. "This is what I like to do. It's something I enjoy." Pasadena native Cpl. Jonathan Hampton, 24, will take a leave of absence from his job as a swing driver, or courier, with Fed Ex Express to serve as a fire team leader in charge of three other Marines with the 1/23.

Honored to serve

Hampton graduated from Life Christian Academy off Alameda-Genoa in 2005. He enlisted the following year and lives in South Houston with his wife, Kendra, 23. The couple were engaged during Hampton's last deployment to Iraq from 2007 to 2008. Hampton will carry a picture of his wife with him in Afghanistan as one of his few personal possessions.

"It's always difficult to be apart from somebody like that for any length of time, but you know, she's confident that I'll come back home, and I'm confident of the same thing," the corporal said. "The days may feel longer when you're deployed, but there's 24 hours in a day over there, just like there is at home," Hampton said. "So you just have to take it one day at a time and pretty much before you know it the deployment will be over and you'll be back home, and so that's what I tell my wife." He said he tries not to dwell on the possibility that he might be hurt or killed. "Unfortunately, casualties are a part of war and nobody wants to be the one who gets hurt, but I mean I enlisted in 2006," Hampton said. "It was well after the attacks of 9/11. It was well after we invaded Iraq. So that was a realization that I'd already come to when I enlisted, that this could potentially be harmful to my health. But it's an honor for me to serve my country. That's a risk you've got to take."

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