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COMBAT CORRESPONDENT **Style Guide & Notebook**

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MCN News

MARINE CORPS NEWS

Style Guide



Public affairs Marines play the primary role in telling the Marine Corps story to a global audience. We send news and information to the world every day. Much of the public's initial contact with our Corps is through *www.marines.mil*. Therefore, it is essential that professional appearance and standards be reflected in this medium — that uniformity and standardization lend to a professional, user-friendly Web site.

In accordance with Marine Administration Message 236/07, the *Marine Corps News Style Guide* shall supplement the *Associated Press Stylebook*. Both references are applicable to all documents and publications produced by Marine Corps public affairs offices, including stories, captions, media advisories and press releases.

The *AP Stylebook*, *www.apstylebook.com*, shall be the standard, primary reference for all style and usage. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, *www.m-w.com*, shall be used for punctuation, spelling, style and usage not covered in the *AP Stylebook*. The *Marine Corps News Style Guide* shall be used only after the above sources have been referenced or for instances not covered by those sources.

All PA shops shall ensure their Marines adhere to these guidelines and that the most recent editions of the required sources are obtained.

This guide functions as the definitive style source for all Marine Corps publicly releasable information and content via public affairs.

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I. Abbreviations, acronyms, medial capitals, hybrids

Spell out unit names on first reference: *A squad leader with Company K, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, single-handedly repelled an ambush.* Spell out unit names on all references that do not entail an organizational hierarchy: *The squad leader joined Company K.* Treat a hierarchy as a non-essential clause, offsetting with commas. Abbreviate when used with a hierarchy on second reference: *Two squads augmented Company K, while Co. L, 3rd Bn., 7th Marines, had its new patrol base fortified.* Only *battalion, company* and *battery* are words with idiomatic abbreviations. When used with an ordinal or description, abbreviate *battalion* as *Bn.*, *company* as *Co.*, and *battery* as *Btry.*: *Weapons Co., 1st Bn., 3rd Marines, or Btry. L, 3rd Bn., 12th Marines.*

PHONETIC SPELLING: Command officials determine whether phonetic spelling (alphabet that assigns code words to letters, e.g. alpha to A, bravo to B, etc.) or the letter itself shall be used as a unit designator: *Mike Battery* or *Battery M* are both acceptable but not interchangeable. These are proper nouns and should be determined as such. If this cannot be determined, or the parent command contradicts usage, use the letter itself preceded by the unit type: *Company C* or *Battery C*.

PROPER NAMES: Command officials determine usage; however, elements that do not carry strong, traceable lineages, such as platoons, squads and fire teams, typically should not be proper nouns and their ordinal numbers should be spelled out: *first fire team, fourth squad, weapons platoon.* Entry-level training platoons are one exception: *Platoon 3007.*

When spelled out, do not hyphenate the number designator with the unit name: *Regimental Combat Team 7.* Hyphenate with the abbreviated form: *RCT-7.*

In headlines, it is permissible to use 1/5 for 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, etc. Clunky unit acronyms, particularly in aviation, should be avoided in headlines.

In aviation, squadron abbreviations are usually initialisms that are not logical to the unit name and appear as gibberish: VMFA(AW)-242 stands for Marine All-Weather Fighter Attack

Squadron 242. Use "squadron" on subsequent references if no other squadrons confuse. This likewise applies for any other unit whose code would be more comprehensible as a general description. If code letters and numbers must be used, introduce them no further than two sentences from the first reference.

Follow the *AP Stylebook* on acronym usage. Avoid overuse of acronyms. Do not place acronym or full name in parentheses. Use ordinals (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.) to identify units, except for those properly identified with roman numerals. See the *abbreviations and acronyms, numerals and military units* entries in *AP Stylebook*.

Capitalize only the first letter of each word represented: *WFT Bn*. Accepted abbreviations and acronyms may be used at the beginning of sentences.

Generally, introduce the acronym no more than two sentences from the first spelling out. When a person being quoted introduces an unapproved or new acronym, either spell it out in an indirect quote or, if within a quote, put the spelled out version in parentheses in lieu of the acronym.

Spell out the name of all organizations on first reference. Acronyms, abbreviations, medial capitals or hybrids can be used on second reference for the examples below, but generic references are preferred:

First reference — Second reference

Marine Corps Base — *MCB* or *base*

I Marine Expeditionary Force — *I MEF* or *MEF*

1st Marine Logistics Group — *1st MLG* or *group*

2nd Marine Division — *division*

22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit — *22nd MEU* or *MEU*

3rd Marine Aircraft Wing — *3rd MAW* or *wing*

Marine Aircraft Group 39 — *MAG-39* or *group*

Marine Corps Forces Pacific — *MarForPac*

Marine Corps Forces Command — *MarForCom*

Marine Corps Forces Reserve — *MarForRes* or *reserve forces*

Department of Defense — *DoD* or *department*

Department of the Navy — *DoN* or *department*

II. General Guidelines

Listed below are commonly used terms and the guidelines for using them. Some entries are unique to the Marine Corps and may be contrary to the AP Stylebook.

(Forward) Parenthetically distinguishes a force's forward-deployed elements. Use (Fwd.) on second reference. Not an initialism: *II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward)* or *II MEF (Fwd.)*.

7-ton truck

ADSW Acceptable on second reference for active duty for special work, a period of active duty not exceeding 180 days for reserve Marines.

AFRTS Acceptable on second reference for American Forces Radio and Television Service.

armed forces, armed services Synonyms that refer to the military services and the Coast Guard.

assaultman Example: *Sgt. William Jones, an antitank assaultman with 2nd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, is from Swansong, Tenn.*

augmentee Use only in reference to reserves Marines assigned to the Individual Mobilization Augmentee program. Otherwise use augment.

BAH Acceptable on second reference for basic allowance for housing.

boot camp Two words. Use in casual reference to recruit training.

captions Photographic captions should be written for external release in accordance with the *AP Stylebook* and the *Marine Corps News Style Guide*. Captions should include a dateline and be written in complete sentences. Captions should be included in the metadata of the photograph file. Information should include as many of the five Ws as possible, including names, titles,

hometowns, dates, locations, exercise, etc. Do not assume readers understand anything about the captioned photograph or have read the accompanying story.

MARINE CORPS BASE CAMP PENDLETON, Calif. (Feb. 12, 2007) — *Cpl. Jimmie Benotz of Tule Lake, Mont., sweeps the catwalks of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit's barracks here. Benotz and other members of the MEU's command element recently moved into the barracks following their six-month deployment to the Western Pacific and Arabian Gulf. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Combat Correspondent).*

CFC Acceptable on second reference for the annual Combined Federal Campaign fund-raising drive.

CinC Use only on second reference when speaking of the president of the United States as commander in chief. Not a preferred term, however. Do not hyphenate. No longer acceptable for commanders of naval forces in the Atlantic or Pacific.

CMC May be used as second reference for commandant of the Marine Corps. When possible, use "the commandant."

coalition Lowercase. Refers to the U.S.-led multinational force in Iraq.

Combat V No quotation marks. Give context to explain device is a combat distinguishing device. Denotes a valorous act performed during direct combat with an enemy force or an accomplishment of a heroic nature in direct support of operations against an enemy force. Accompanies certain awards for which valor is not intrinsically associated. The device is awarded as a single, one-time decoration only. A service member may not wear several valor devices on the same decoration.

commandant Lowercase when used alone. Capitalize when preceding rank and name:

1. *Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. Michael W. Hagee said yesterday, "I enjoy being the commandant."* 2. *Gen. Michael W. Hagee, commandant of the Marine Corps, said in an interview yesterday, being commandant is good.* 3. *Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. Michael W. Hagee said yesterday, "I enjoy being*

the commandant.” Hagee is the 33rd commandant of the Marine Corps.

CONUS Acceptable on second reference for continental United States.

Corps Exception to the AP Stylebook. Capitalize when referring to the U.S. Marine Corps.

Corpswide One word. See “-wide” in AP Stylebook.

courtesy titles Do not use Mr., Mrs., Ms., Dr., or military rank on second reference. Exceptions to the AP Stylebook: When family members with the same last name are mentioned in the same story or in direct quotes.

crewmember One word.

devil dog

DSN Acceptable on all references when used with telephone numbers. In stories about the system, spell out Defense Switched Network.

end punctuation There should be only one space between end punctuation (periods, colons, question marks, etc.) and the following word. The period and the comma always go within the quotation marks. The dash, the semicolon, the question mark and the exclamation point go within the quotation marks when they apply to the quoted matter only. They go outside when they apply to the whole sentence.

exercise/operation Use exercise or operation in titles on first use only – e.g., Exercise Cobra Gold. For well-known exercises or operations, it is not necessary to use the term on first reference – e.g., Desert Storm.

federal government Lowercase.

fire team Two words.

firefight One word.

firefighter Not fireman/men.

first names Always use first and last names on first reference. When discussing persons with same last names, use first and last names to avoid confusion. Do not use first names only. Exception: Family members in the same story, after initial identification. It may be acceptable to use family member's first names for ease of readability. See "presidents" entry in AP Stylebook.

formal titles Because some titles are lengthy, it is often preferable to use an informal title on the first reference, particularly in a lede.

hangar/hanger A hangar is a building for aircraft. A hanger is for hanging clothes.

hard charger

headlines Must contain a verb. Use single quotation marks in headlines. Do not break up prepositional phrases. When referring to units such as 2nd Bn., 1st Marines, the use of the fraction style abbreviation "2/1" in headlines is acceptable. However, it may be better to use, "Pendleton infantry deploys to Kuwait," to attract larger readership.

home front Two words.

humvee Common noun acceptable on all references.

hyphen vs. dash Hyphens are used for compound modifiers: *U.S.-led invasion*. Dashes are used to show an abrupt change in thought: *"I thought the battle was over — the slashing, stabbing, the screaming and dying — but I was sorely mistaken."* A hyphen is one stroke of the hyphen key; a dash is two strokes of the same key.

IG Acceptable on second reference for inspector general, but spell out when pluralizing. Inspectors general. See *post positives*.

improvised explosive device IED is acceptable on second reference. When modifying IED with more terms, do not expand the

acronym: *vehicle-borne IED* not *VBIED*.

installations Use full name on first reference. On second reference, drop Fort, Naval Station, Air Force Base, Camp, etc., unless the need exists to distinguish the installation from an adjacent or similarly named town.

Kevlar Slang for helmet. The material used to make the helmet is Kevlar.

leatherneck

Long War Refers to the ongoing global war against terrorism.

machine gun Two words.

Marine Air-Ground Task Force MAGTF is acceptable on second reference. Also, Special-Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force or Special-Purpose MAGTF. Not SPMAGTF.

Marine Corps Community Services MCCS on second reference. MCCS replaced MWR.

mess hall Do not use chow hall.

military police MP is acceptable on second reference. Do not use military policeman/policemen.

military services Refers to U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Navy, U.S. Army, and U.S. Air Force.

mortarman

multinational

naval vessels Do not use all capital letters. 1: *USS Bonhomme Richard sailed out of San Diego harbor this morning.* 2: *The USS Bonhomme Richard Expeditionary Strike Group sailed out of San Diego harbor today.*

noncommissioned officer in charge Also staff noncommissioned officer in charge and officer in charge. Beware of writing acronyms for these positions on second reference, e.g. NCOIC, SNCOIC, OIC. If instances are few, spell out on all references to avoid jarring the reader.

ooh-rah

op tempo Acceptable on second reference for operational tempo; term generally refers to the volume, urgency and frequency of military operations.

Operation Enduring Freedom Use Enduring Freedom on second reference. Was the U.S. military response to the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks. Typically refers to the war in Afghanistan, but includes several subordinate operations in the Philippines, the Horn of Africa, the Trans-Saharan region of Africa, and Pankisi Gorge in Georgia. NATO officially took over control of U.S. forces in Afghanistan Oct. 5, 2006; however, the United States military conducts operations separate from NATO as part of Enduring Freedom in other parts of Afghanistan. *See the Long War.*

Operation Iraqi Freedom Use Iraqi Freedom on second reference; OIF is acceptable in headlines and should be avoided in text. Refers to the conflict in Iraq that began with the United States-led invasion in 2003. Since the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime, a coalition of nations has continued working to establish a stable democratic state capable of defending itself, holding itself together, and overcoming insurgent attacks and internal divisions.

Use roman numerals with Operation Iraqi Freedom only when necessary and possible to clearly distinguish stages of the overall ongoing operation: *Operation Iraqi Freedom II*. These roman numerals are usually confusing and don't give the reader a comprehensible time frame. *See the Long War.*

PCS Acceptable on second reference for permanent change of station. May be a noun, verb, adjective or adverb. Choose usage carefully.

policy maker Two words.

post positives A post-positive adjective is placed after the noun it modifies. Make the noun plural and not the adjective. This rule leads to pluralizations like:

- * *sergeants major, sergeants major of the Marine Corps*
- * *lieutenants junior grade*
- * *privates first class, airmen first class, sergeants first class*
- * *inspectors, attorneys, secretaries, surgeons and postmasters general*
- * *courts-martial*
- * *brothers-in-law*
- * *passersby*

pre-position Use a hyphen when referring to material positioned beforehand. A preposition is a part of speech.

ranks Use ranks listed in the *AP Stylebook*. Exceptions: Chief warrant officers. Before a name, capitalize and spell out each word with numeric designator: *Chief Warrant Officer 2 Paul Sheffield*.

For Navy ranks, use rank, not rate: *Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Tom Smith, a hospital corpsman*.

For other ranks that could be confused with other services or those unique to a particular branch but out of context, preface ranks with the service name: "Army Sgt. 1st Class Charles Moore" when out of context, "Navy Capt. Kelly Armstrong" to distinguish between a Navy O-6 and a Marine O-3.

rappelling, rappelled

reinforced units Use the MEU precedent: *15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable)*; second reference *15th MEU (SOC)*. *Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 262 (Reinforced)*; second reference *HMM-262 (Rein)*. May be better to say "HMM-262, with attachments from other wing squadrons, ..."

reserves/active duty Do not use reservist. Use "reserve Marine" instead when necessary to differentiate from an active-duty Marine. Do not hyphenate active duty as a noun. Do not capitalize.

safety stand-down

sailor

sergeant major Pluralized as sergeants major. See post positives.

sergeant major of the Marine Corps Sergeant major of the Marine Corps is a unique noncommissioned rank in the Marine Corps. Capitalize and abbreviate “sergeant major” when used as a rank before an individual’s name: *Sgt. Maj. of the Marine Corps Carlton W. Kent described the attack.*

Spell out and lowercase the title when it is substituted for a name: *The chevrons of the sergeant major of the Marine Corps are the only rank insignia to bear the Marine Corps emblem. It may be necessary to explain the significance of this title; Kent, the sole holder of this rank, is the senior enlisted member of the Marine Corps. Avoid using the acronym SMMC.*

service member, serviceman, servicewoman

the honorable Do not use. Use official title only. See “courtesy titles” in the organizational and AP Stylebook.

toe-to-toe Hyphens in between each word if a compound modifier such as, “The men had a toe-to-toe debate.” But, no hyphen if used like, “They stood toe to toe and battled it out.”

uniformed services Refers to the armed services, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the officer corps of the U.S. Public Health Service. Different from armed forces, armed services.

unit nicknames Should be used in addition to a unit’s given name in news stories only when it is the way the command prefers to be known: *the Darkhorse battalion; Betio Bastards.* Capitalize without quotation marks. When a nickname is explained after the identification of the unit, use quotation marks: *3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, known as the “Betio Bastards.”*

warfighter

warfighting

III. Posting to www.marines.mil

The Marine Corps' Official Web site, www.marines.mil, is viewed by more than half a million people each day. As such, all content posted to www.marines.mil is to be considered externally released information. All images, captions stories, press releases etc., shall be written for external audiences and tailored for individual publications by local editors.

image/file size Marine Corps News relies heavily on combat correspondents at bases and stations around the world to provide the images published in Marines magazine and other internal and external publications. For this reason, every image shot should be preserved at the highest resolution possible. Combat correspondents should consider themselves shooting for the front cover of Marines magazine. As such, all images should be captured at the highest quality setting the camera offers. Marines shall ensure the images uploaded to Marines.mil are in the RGB color mode.