

FLIGHT JACKET

Vol. 6, No. 17

Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, Calif.

April 30, 2004

HMH-465 hauls beans, bullets, band-aids to troops

Story by Sgt. Nathan K. LaForte

MAG-16 Combat Correspondent

AL ASAD, Iraq - The Iraqi sheep herders heard them coming long before they saw anything appear from behind the blind spot created by the glare of the morning sun.

With hands shielding their eyes from the sun's punishing rays, they looked up and saw a CH-53E Super Stallion externally hauling a Weather Van through the sky like a fairytale stork carrying a baby in a bundle to a new mother-to-be.

The heavy-lift helicopter wasn't carrying a baby, but its cargo might be considered new life to whoever needs it.

Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 465, Marine Aircraft Group 16, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, is currently hauling "beans, bullets and band-aids" throughout the entire region of Western Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The "Warhorses" and their sister squadron HMH-466 are tasked with bringing supplies to all Marine units within the western area of operations in Iraq, according to Sgt. Leonardo Velasquez, aerial observer, HMH-465.

"It's our job to carry the stuff that needs to be (externally lifted)," the Pomona, Calif., native claimed.

The external lifting capabilities of the Super Stallion has made it an asset to current 3rd MAW operations and the Marine Corps since its introduction in June of 1981, claimed Cpl. Tyrell J. Davis, crew chief, HMH-465.

The 22-year-old helicopter boasts an external lifting capacity of more than 7,000 pounds, which allows it to easily lift and transport M198 Howitzers, Light Armored Vehicles or even another Super Stallion.

The plane is capable of holding up to 55 passengers in the center-lined seats. The all-weather flying and aerial refueling capabilities give the helicopter an indefinite range.



Sgt. Leonardo Velasquez, aerial observer, Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 465, Marine Aircraft Group 16, from Pomona, Calif., scans the landscape for enemies while the lead CH-53E Super Stallion externally lifts a cargo load in Western Iraq April 20. Photo by Sgt. Nathan K. LaForte

One of its most useful features is the dual-point hook system, Davis noted.

The helicopter is equipped with the single-point system, which allows the crew to lift a smaller sized load that is hooked to the helicopter by the main hook through the "hell hole," the Bloomfield, N.M., native said. The dual-point system is more versatile, he added.

"This type of lift is for loads that are questionable (in size), because it is worked from two different points," the 21 year old explained. "It is a bit more secure."

There has to be certain aircrew members present for the lift, Davis continued.

"Beside the pilots, there will be either a crew chief or qualified aerial observer in the 'hell hole' who calls the status of the load," he described. "You'll also have qualified crewmembers in the left and right windows making sure the aircraft is clear of any obstacles."

The crewmember looking through the "hell hole" will "call the load" to the pilot, he explained. The member will give the pilot standardized instructions because he is the person onboard the helicopter with the clearest view of the load and the Helicopter Support Team who hooks the load to the helicopter while it hovers above them, he added.

The status updates from the crew, along with other factors, are important to the safety of the whole operation, claimed 1st Lt. Matthew A. Sproat, CH-53E pilot, HMH-465.

"You have all these gauges, as well as a crew chief in the back, feeding me information to allow me to build a better picture of what's going on," the Huntsville, Texas, native clarified. "You have to be aware of what's going on in the air around you and what they are doing on the ground."

With crews of five or more on any external lift, the helicopter has enough eyes to keep information flowing to the pilots, claimed Velasquez. The squadron has added to that number to increase safety while in Iraq.

"Two 'birds' with two crews always go out at one time," he clarified. "They watch each other's back. It is pretty much a 'battle buddy' in the air."

It is this sort of team effort between each helicopter, and even the HST, that has allowed the external lifts to go without incident since arriving in theater, Velasquez added.

"We see them with their hooks, and they see us with our lifting systems, and we all know that point 'a' and 'b' go together," he started. "We put our game faces on and get it done. Most of the time we don't even know each other, but we know how to get the job done."

The new aerial observer has only taken part in three external lifts since training outside his normal military occupational specialty of administrative clerk, but he said he has come to enjoy his additional duties.

"It's all for a good cause," he stated. "I'm just glad to help. It's all going somewhere to someone who needs it."

Anti-coalition forces fire on Marines from Fallujah mosque

CJTF-7 Press Release

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq - Anti-coalition forces fired on Marines from a Fallujah mosque Monday with small-arms fire and rocket-propelled grenades.

The attack began about 9:45 a.m. when Marines reported three men shot at them from the Al-Ma'adhidy mosque in northwest Fallujah. Marines returned fire, confirming they killed one attacker.

Marines gave instructions in Arabic

over loudspeakers telling anyone in the mosque to come out with their hands raised over their heads. No one withdrew.

Marines briefly entered the mosque and found it empty. Expended ammunition casings were found on the floor of the mosque's minaret.

A short time later, insurgents re-entered the mosque and again fired on Marines. Marines responded with tank fire against the minaret, silencing the attackers.

Marine helicopters also returned fire on attackers in nearby buildings.

The Marines regard these attacks as an attempt to derail initiatives to return Fallujah to Iraqi authorities and resume a peaceful existence. Marines do not target mosques; however, they retain the inherent right of self-defense when attacked.

Anti-coalition forces have repeatedly used mosques and civilian homes from which to launch attacks on Marines. These attacks show a disregard for the

safety of Iraqi civilians and a lack of respect for Islamic religious beliefs. Marines will continue to show respect for Islamic people, their culture and holy sites. Anti-coalition forces knowingly make mosques targets by occupying them as military positions.

Marines are strongly committed to helping Iraqi authorities in Fallujah regain control of their city and will assist Iraqi police and the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps in restoring order.

Inside

Weekend forecast from Miramar's weather station



MCABWA top enlisted retires



Page 4

Marine draws in Iraq



Page 8

Phone card donation program goes public

New Armed Services Exchange program to 'Help our troops call home'

Department of Defense Release

The Department of Defense announced recently that any American can now help troops in contingency operations call home.

The Defense Department has authorized the Armed Services Exchanges to sell prepaid calling cards to any individual or organization that wishes to purchase cards for troops who are deployed.

The "Help our troops call home" program is designed to help servicemembers call home from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

For those wishing to donate a prepaid calling card to a military member may log on to any of the three Armed Services Ex-

change Web sites: the Army and Air Force Exchange Service <http://www.aafes.com>, the Navy Exchange Service Command <http://www.navy-nex.com/> and the Marine Corps Exchange <http://www.usmc-mccs.org/>.

Click the "Help our troops call home" link. From there, a prepaid calling card may be purchased for an individual at his or her deployed address or to "any servicemember" deployed or hospitalized.

The Armed Services Exchanges will then distribute the cards donated to "any servicemember" through the American Red Cross, Air Force Aid Society and the Fisher House Foundation.

The Armed Services Exchanges op-

erate telephone call centers in Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan and other countries and aboard ships – anywhere servicemembers are deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

All of these locations stay busy around the clock to keep up communication between deployed troops and their loved ones.

The cards available through the "Help our troops call home" program offer the best value for calls made from the call centers, never expire, and there are no added charges or connection fees.

Individuals and organizations also can show their support to deployed troops and their families with gift certificates. The "Gift of groceries" program allows anyone to pur-

chase commissary gift certificates at <http://www.commissaries.com> or by calling toll free 877-770-GIFT.

The Armed Services Exchanges offer the "Gift from the homefront" gift certificate for merchandise at these exchange Web sites: <http://www.aafes.com> and <http://www.navy-nex.com> or by calling toll free 877-770-GIFT.

Gift certificates may be purchased to be mailed to servicemembers and family members or will be distributed to "any servicemember."

Only authorized commissary and exchange patrons may redeem the gift certificates at military commissaries and exchanges, including those stores supporting deployed personnel around the globe.

DFAS savings deposit program benefits deployed members

Story Compiled by CPAO

Deployed uniformed servicemembers have the chance to earn a guaranteed 10-percent interest on their savings annually.

The Defense Finance and Accounting Service, in accordance with the Department of Defense, implemented the Savings Deposit Program in August 1990 for members who were serving in the Persian Gulf conflict. The act progressively changed to include troops assigned to areas of operation outside the United States on ships or mobile units. This program includes Operation Iraqi Freedom and servicemembers assigned to a combat zone or in direct support of a combat zone.

"A servicemember can contribute up to \$10,000, but interest of 10 percent will not accrue after that amount," said Roger Castillo, program director for the Savings Deposit Program. "A member can participate in the program if the member is serving outside the United States or its possessions in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and has served at least

'This is a great opportunity for servicemembers to accrue at a higher interest rate than at an average interest rate of two or three percent.'

Patrick T. Shine

"This is a great opportunity for servicemembers to accrue at a higher interest rate than at an average interest rate of two or three percent," said Patrick T. Shine, acting director of DFAS. "We are always taking the extra steps to assist our troops and their families in anyway possible, especially while members are deployed."

There are two options Marines here can use to contribute to the program, according to Chief Warrant Officer John W. Denovitz, Pay and Separations Section officer-in-charge. The first option is by allotment that is started by the disbursing office. The second option for Marines is to make a cash deposit to the program.

"You have to go to the disbursing office with your check or cash to do this," said Denovitz, an Anaheim, Calif., native. "A member who is deployed can also have his or her dependent make a cash deposit here. They must have a power of attorney from the member to do so. The members can only contribute their unallotted pay every 30 days."

DFAS will post the savings deposit balance of active-component members to their Leave and Earnings Statement.

The DFAS is the world's largest finance and accounting operation. It provides responsive, professional finance and accounting services to the men and women who defend America.

In fiscal year 2003, DFAS paid about 5.9 million people, processed more than 12.3 million invoices from defense contractors, disbursed more than \$416 billion and managed more than \$197.4 billion in military trust funds.

MIRAMARKS

"What do you like to do to have fun in the sun?"

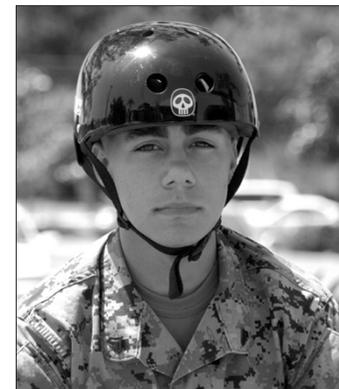


CPL. JONATHAN E. BROWN
Radio repairman
MACS-1

"I'm not a big fan of the sun, but I do enjoy rock climbing."

CPL. ANDRES RESTREPO
Aviation supply clerk
MALS-11

"I like to ride my bike."



PFC. RANDY A. ARCHULETA
CH-53 aviation mechanic
HMH-361

"I like to go to the beach of course. I also like to surf, go bike riding, mountain climbing, hiking and camping."



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Marine Corps Air Bases Western Area
Commanding General
MCAS Miramar

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FLIGHT JACKET

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Air Force Maj. Gregory E. Moster, 45-year-old Connersville, Ind., native (left), Air Force Maj. David R. Bartkowiak, 38-year-old native of Allentown, Pa. (center), and Cmdr. Chris B. McMahan, a 43-year-old native of Loveland, Ohio, examine a piece of a combat-damaged aircraft in Al Asad, Iraq, April 21. Photo by Staff Sgt. Houston F. White Jr.

Logistical department packs powerful punch

Story by Staff Sgt. Houston F. White Jr.

MWHS-3 Combat Correspondent

AL ASAD, Iraq - The increased combat demands placed upon 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing air assets during Operation Iraqi Freedom II have not become a setback, thanks to the tireless efforts of the Aviation Logistics Department here.

"The mission of the Aviation Logistics Department is to provide policy, guidance, oversight, assistance and support to the tactical air groups of the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing," said Col. Gary D. Fraley, assistant chief of staff, ALD, 3rd MAW, and 55-year-old native of Hubbardstown, W.Va.

Divided into six components of equal magnitude, the ALD is responsible for the behind-the-scenes support that keeps 3rd MAW planes and helicopters prepared for battle.

"We all have to do our part to make the whole team successful," said Maj. Jerry B. Schmidt, 43-year-old avionics officer, ALD, 3rd MAW. "I don't think any one portion of ALD is any more important than the others. We're just one big happy family."

By installing aircraft survivability systems, which include warning and indication mechanisms, the avionics branch of ALD is able to provide personnel aboard 3rd MAW aircraft with a considerable amount of protection from the beginning to the conclusion of the flights.

"Our function is to ensure that our air crews have the best possibility of surviving their missions," remarked the Greenhills, Ohio, native.

"From the time the (air crew) enters the airplane, most every system on the plane is touched by avionics. These are the systems that deter enemy missile attacks, give pilots warning indications on when they're being engaged by the enemy and disperse the correct countermeasures to abort the threat. Our focus is providing air crew with the most survivable aircraft in the world, and we take it personal," said Schmidt.

"The bottom line is keeping the aircraft ready to fly missions," said Lt. Col. George R. Knisley, aviation supply officer, ALD, 3rd MAW. "The aviation supply role in that is checking to make sure that parts are available. We work closely with the (Marine Aviation Logistics Squadrons), monitoring all of their readiness reports and tracking the status of parts being sent from the supply system."

In addition, the 47-year-old native of Salinas, Calif., mentioned that aviation supply works hand-in-hand with the other sections of ALD, including aviation maintenance, to ensure the proper equipment arrives in a timely fashion.

The maintenance section of ALD is able to provide resources such as technical assistance and make battle damage repairs to downed aircraft, said Capt. Raymond E. Barnett, aviation maintenance officer, ALD, 3rd MAW.

"Battle damage repair, so far, has primarily consisted of fixing the small-arms fire that we see from all the hostilities we have in (Iraq)," said the 41 year old.

The Fort Wayne, Ind., native, mentioned that his section also provides the 3rd MAW commanding general and his staff with vital information concerning the best courses of action in recovering damaged aircraft, as well as status reports and repair timelines.

In a related role to the staff of the ALD, the Joint Combat Assessment Team is able to process information from damaged aircraft on site and provide pertinent information to the unit commander.

"Our primary purpose is to ensure that the Marine combat pilot has an accurate assessment of what the real threat is out there before they go fly their missions," said Navy Capt. Gary S. Tollerene, JCAT team leader, ALD, 3rd MAW, and 46-year-old, Mansfield, Texas, native.

The capability the JCAT brings to the ALD is unique personnel-wise as well, said Tollerene.

"The JCAT is a joint team consisting of both Air Force and Navy officers that are deployed to support the wing. That is significant because a JCAT is not normally organic to the Marine Corps."

The firepower supplied to 3rd MAW aircraft, enabling them to accurately "drop warheads on foreheads," is requisitioned and implemented by the ordnance section, said Maj. Joseph R. Boehm, 42-year-old ordnance officer, ALD, 3rd MAW.

According to Boehm, the ordnance provided in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom II to 3rd MAW aircraft has been extremely effective.

"Our missiles have been very accurate so far. Our guns have been working very well and our countermeasures have saved us quite a few helicopters already," he said.

CG reflects on Iraqi deployment MCABWA commander discusses attack against 'adaptive enemy,' plans for future

Story compiled by CPAO

MCAS Miramar Combat Correspondent

Maj. Gen. Jon Gallinetti, commander of Marine Corps Air Bases Western Area, held an officer and staff noncommissioned officer professional military education seminar at the MCABWA Headquarters April 21 to reflect on his recent deployment to Iraq.

Gallinetti worked out of the Coalition Provisional Authority Headquarters, formerly Saddam Hussein's Presidential Palace in the heart of Baghdad, and served for seven months as the chief of staff for Combined Joint Task Force 7.

During Gallinetti's deployment to Iraq, a country that is roughly the size of California, he witnessed first hand the dangers that troops are facing in this war-plagued country.

"From October through the end of March when we left, we had multiple rocket and mortar attacks," he said. "They were launching some of these rockets from up to 30 kilometers away... (The enemy) is getting very adaptive."

He also added that improvised explosive devices (roadside bombs) continued to inflict damage on Coalition Forces and Iraqis alike.

The rocket, mortar and IED attacks aimed at the Coalition and the Iraqi secu-

rity forces slowed progress toward stability in the surrounding areas that had deteriorated from years of neglect under Saddam.

"In 35 years Saddam put very little money into the infrastructure. Yes, some of the damage was done during Iraqi Freedom and all the bombing we did, but the majority was done from the lack of infrastructure repairs," Gallinetti said.

"You don't see this in the press that often, hardly at all, but in one year there has been 20,000 projects done by military personnel and civilian contractors refurbishing and rebuilding schools, hospitals, roads, electrical power grids and oil pipes."

Gallinetti also explained what the future held for American aid to Iraq, such as \$12-billion worth of projects which will employ Iraqi nationals, further lowering the unemployment rate which according to Gallinetti, was 56 percent during the beginning of the war.

According to Gallinetti, Iraq has the potential to be one of the most productive countries in the Middle East due to its tourism appeal, its reserve of oil and the means of exporting it.

"Once things get stabilized in Iraq, they have the most capability and potential than any other country in the Middle East," he said.

Sergeant major retires after 30 years of service

Story by Lance Cpl. John Sayas

MCAS Miramar Combat Correspondent

Sgt. Maj. Michael A. Spruel put on his uniform for the last time as an active-duty Marine when he relinquished his position as Marine Corps Air Bases Western Area sergeant major to Sgt. Maj. Thomas H. Howard during a relief and appointment ceremony at Airfield Operations here April 23. He retired after 30 years of service in the Marine Corps.

"There is nothing in the world that means more to me than getting up every day and putting on this uniform," said Spruel as he sat in his office filled with memorabilia reminding him of where he has been in his Marine Corps career.

"My career has been great," he continued. "There aren't too many Marines who stick around for 30 years and go to work just for a paycheck. There is the pride and the camaraderie, and the fact that I get to work with young people every day who are motivated and willing to put their life on the line for what they believe in, for their



Retiring Sgt. Maj. Michael A. Spruel presents a gift to Sgt. Maj. John L. Estrada, sergeant major of the Marine Corps, during his retirement and relief ceremony. Estrada will hang the plaque in his office at Headquarters Marine Corps. Photo by Lance Cpl. John Sayas

country, and something bigger than themselves."

Spruel retired after serving two years as the MCABWA sergeant major, but has held several other billets as a senior-enlisted Marine. He was first promoted to

sergeant major in June 1995 and assigned to 1st Recruit Training Battalion at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego. He also served as sergeant major for Marine Aircraft Group 46, Marine Wing Support Squadron 372, based out of Marine Corps

Base Camp Pendleton, and MWSS-171 based out of Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan.

Although he is trained to work in the motor transportation field, Spruel spent much of his career on the drill field conducting training for thousands of young men looking to earn the title of United States Marines. His three tours on the drill field beginning in 1977 moved him up the ranks from sergeant to sergeant major.

"Why did I spend three tours?" asked the Philadelphia native. "Because it was instant gratification. I got to see the fruits of my labor and the fruits of my drill instructors' labor every three months. I got to see the making of Marines."

Spruel recalled the look on many mothers' faces when they saw their sons march along the parade deck and saw how proud those parents were of them. He said those moments were most memorable because "at that time (of graduating recruit training) you thought you achieved the hardest thing in your lifetime."

"Only you claim that title Marine," Spruel said, referring to the many Marines who are currently serving or those who

See **SERVICE**, page 9

Ohio native, 27-year veteran posted as new MCABWA sergeant major

Story by Lance Cpl. John Sayas

MCAS Miramar Combat Correspondent

Sgt. Maj. Thomas H. Howard assumed the duties as the Marine Corps Air Bases Western Area sergeant major during a relief and appointment ceremony at Airfield Operations here April 23.

Howard replaced Sgt. Maj. Michael A. Spruel, who retired after 30 years of military service. Howard was previously assigned as the 4th Force Service Support Group sergeant major in New Orleans.

"Over the last four days, I have had the chance to go around with Sergeant Major Spruel to see everything that there is to see," Howard said during the ceremony. "All I have to do is

keep the train running with the boat floating in the right direction."

Before concluding his speech, Howard turned to the Marines from Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton and Marine Corps Air Stations Yuma and Miramar lined up in formation behind him to tell them what he wanted them to do.

"Follow me," he said.

The Canton, Ohio, native joined the Marine Corps in April 1977. Upon completion of recruit training at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, S.C., he attended Aviation Maintenance Structures School at Naval Air Station, Millington, Tenn.

His first assignment as a sergeant major was with Recruiting Station Springfield, Mass., where he was as-

signed as the Recruiting Station sergeant major from December 1996 until August 1999. He was reassigned in August to RS Cleveland, 4th Marine Corps District, and later assigned to the 1st Marine Corps District as the district sergeant major from September 2000 until May 2002.

Howard began his first duty assignment as an aviation structures mechanic with Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 267 (detachment), Marine Aircraft Group 16, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, Marine Corps Air Station Camp Pendleton. While assigned to HMLA-267, he had two meritorious promotions to corporal and sergeant.

In February 1984, Howard attended Drill Instructor School as a



Sgt. Maj. Thomas H. Howard (center), a Canton, Ohio, native, takes his post as Marine Corps Air Bases Western Area sergeant major during a post and relief ceremony at Airfield Operations here April 23. Photo by Lance Cpl. John Sayas

staff sergeant at MCRD Parris Island then was assigned to 1st Recruit Training Battalion. In October 1985, while serving as senior drill instructor, he was meritoriously promoted to gun-

nery sergeant.

Some of his other assignments included flightline/quality assurance

See **POST**, page 11

Key volunteers keep Marine families informed

Story by Lance Cpl. John Sayas

MCAS Miramar Combat Correspondent

It is common these days to hear of Marine families who are without the assistance of their husband or wife, father or mother, because of ongoing deployments due to the global war on terrorism.

Although a phone call in the middle of the night or an occasional e-mail may be just what a family needs in order to function normally while their loved one is deployed, it is an open line of communication that Marines and their families may not always have because of security concerns or some unexpected event.

For many families, it is difficult to understand what it means to be a Marine and they are sometimes left wondering why they haven't heard from their spouse or why they have to do things they are trained to do.

"When my husband and I were first married in 1994, he knew what being a Marine meant to him, but I didn't really understand how I fit into it, if I fit in it at all," explained Debbie Gray, Key Volunteer Network trainer, Marine Corps Community Services. "That is how I got involved with the Key Volunteer Network."

The KVN has for more than a decade been a communication link between the commanding officer and the spouses of Marines in his unit, as well as for Marine families to communicate with the commanding officer while a Marine is deployed, according to Gray.

It can also provide referrals and information for services on base and in the local community that will help families get the assistance they need to solve problems they may be experiencing.

"All units or squadrons should have a Key Volunteer Network whether they are deployed or not," Gray said. "The idea is to provide solutions at the lowest level possible. Ideally that is at the family level, but if the family doesn't know what resources are out there, then they can pick up the phone and contact their key volunteer and ask them about possible resources that can help them."

She said each squadron has a family readiness officer assigned by the unit's commanding officer who is responsible for setting up a KVN, which is made of Marine spouses, or in some cases, parents of single Marines. The number of key volunteers will depend on the size of the squadron or unit, Gray said.

"I send information out to the family readiness officers of the squadrons and the KVN coordinators, and they are responsible for passing it down to the families within that unit," she said.

Lisa Smith, key volunteer co-coordinator for Marine All-Weather Fighter Attack Squadron 225, said people have misconceptions about the Key Volunteer Network as being just a social organization.

"My hope is that behind the scenes work that we do as key volunteers reassures our unit's spouses and their husbands that there are people who care about their well being and adjustment to a deployment," said Smith, a Milwaukee native.

Smith said the KVN exists solely to support Marine families by keeping rosters up to date, planning family days, pro-

ducing monthly newsletters, sending frequent e-mails about base news, conducting call trees and solving problems as they arise.

"The key volunteers do all of this so that families feel like they are kept well," Smith said.

The network has served as a valuable resource and tool during deployments and while Marines are at home, said Gray.

"Of course during deployments it is a good way for spouses to get the best and most accurate information on the situation with their Marines. When the Marines are here, things can happen in a sense of crisis, emergencies and mishaps ... We are always at risk for those kinds of situations in life because of the nature of the Marines' jobs."

Smith, who has served within the KVN since 1996, added that her experiences as

"I think the Key Volunteer Network was a fabulous creation to help families feel connected and give them a place to turn to find out more about their loved ones' whereabouts and duties during a deployment."

Lisa Smith

a key volunteer has given her an appreciation for the various layers involved in the Marine Corps and the myriad of services available to help families.

She had decided to become a key volunteer early on in her marriage to learn more about the Marine Corps and become more active in her husband's battalion.

"I think the Key Volunteer Network was a fabulous creation to help families feel connected and give them a place to turn to find out more about their loved ones' whereabouts and duties during a deployment," Smith explained.

She said it has also allowed her to work closer with her husband, Capt. Gregory Smith, VMFA(AW)-225, who also serves as the family readiness officer for the squadron.

"I think the partnership works well to be able to discuss squadron family matters frankly and to accomplish the tasks at a faster rate," Smith commented. "I also think sharing the duties of a key volunteer coordinator with another spouse has benefited the squadron as we have both banked on our strengths to help the network run smoothly."

If you are interested in becoming a part of the Key Volunteer Network or would like more information on their services, contact Debbie Gray at 577-1322 or visit their Web site at www.mccsmiramar.com/keyvolunteer.html.

Marines help farmers return to date palm roots

Story by Sgt. J.L. Zimmer III

MWHS-3 Combat Correspondent

AL ASAD, Iraq - The Marine Corps' mission of winning the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people brought the air base staff here to a local date palm grove April 17 to foster friendship with the local communities and villages.

A local contractor presented the idea to the Marine Corps "mayor" of Al Asad to allow a group of men from the local communities to clean, irrigate and pollinate a date palm grove containing more than 1,500 of the fruit-bearing trees.

"This date nut grove has been here for hundreds of years," said Master Gunnery Sgt. H. Joseph Wright, deputy mayor, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing. "(The Iraqis) were hired to get the date nut grove back into operation."

One of the benefits the farmers will receive later this year is compensation for months of manual labor in the Iraqi heat and maintaining the grove until it is time for harvest.

"When the harvest comes, 50 percent of the profit will go to the farmers," added the 51-year-old Berkley, Mich., native. "The other 50 percent is given back to the local communities via the civil affairs group."

The money given to the communities by the civil affairs group can be used for anything from rebuilding schools and medical clinics to helping restore trade schools, Wright added.

"The only money the Marine Corps will pay out will be used to purchase the

pump needed to irrigate the field," he said.

One Iraqi, hired to clean and trim the palm trees, is here to work a steady job and make money to support his family.

"Before the Americans came it was difficult for me to support my wife and three children," he said with the assistance of a translator. "Sometimes I would borrow from others, and sometimes I did nothing. Now that the Americans are here, I can support my family with the things they need."

Lance Cpl. Dana L. Cushing, a 28-year-old Toronto native and member of the air base staff, has worked beside some of the locals since arriving in Iraq Jan. 16. She has also been educated by the contractor hired to provide the workers for the farm about the nature of the grove and the people who originally planted the trees.

"These villagers were literally pushed out of their homes (near the date palm grove)," she said. "Some of these people have not seen this date nut grove in 12 years. This has really been a

homecoming for some of them."

"There are more than 20 types of nuts in the grove," she continued. "The contractor can walk through the grove and tell someone the name and type of dates on each tree."

With the help of a translator, another local Iraqi working at the grove was able to express extreme gratitude for the efforts of the Americans to help them rebuild their country.

"In the past we were unable to find work," he said. "The people of my town were angry at Saddam and had nothing to eat but soup. Work is available now that Americans inhabit the base."

A farmer since the age of 12, another Iraqi who was working for the Americans says that this opportunity has given him a chance to support the 10 people in his family.

"My father is too old to work, and now I am responsible for the family," he said. "Before the Americans came, I was a farmer, and what I made was not enough to maintain my family. Before, more than one person in my family had to work to support them. Now I make enough money to maintain my family."

The contractor who hired the farmers said that the ability to work where some of his family members lived generations ago is fulfilling.

"The Marines have given us back what is ours," he said. "I am glad we are able to come back and start over. We are going to take the money and give back to our villages what is theirs."



A local Iraqi farmer displays agility while cutting leaves from one of more than 1,500 date palms in Al Asad, Iraq, April 17. The money from the harvest will be given to the farmers and the local villages. Photo by Sgt. J.L. Zimmer III



A local Iraqi farmer displays an act of balance on a date palm leaf while pollinating one of more than 1,500 date palm trees in Al Asad, Iraq, April 17. The farmers are trimming, irrigating and hand pollinating the trees so the dates can be harvested and sold later this year. Photo by Sgt. J.L. Zimmer III



Sgt. Kenneth E. Farmer from Grants Pass, Ore., looks over his sketch of Sgt. Mark T. Embriani from Reading, Pa., who is writing a letter home to his family at Al Asad, Iraq, March 28. Farmer is a combat illustrator with the Marine Combat Assessment Team, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing. Photo by Sgt. Nathan K. LaForte

Combat illustrator draws life-like images of war in Iraq

Graphic artist supports 3rd MAW with sketches

Story by Sgt. Nathan K. LaForte

MAG-16 Combat Correspondent

AL ASAD, Iraq - The two Marines at the watchtower surveyed the desert expanse squinting to protect their eyes against the bright rays of the midday sun. Their gear was set up perfectly, and each Marine's M-16A2 service rifle was locked, loaded and ready for any enemy attack.

One Marine pointed out in the distance where something or someone was stirring the desert sand off in the distance, while the other lifted his rifle to his shoulder in preparation for anything.

A third Marine sat inconspicuously to the side capturing the entire scene with quick strokes of a No. 2 pencil and sketchbook.

The Marine is Sgt. Kenneth E. Farmer, a combat illustrator with the Marine Combat Assessment Team, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, here.

As a combat illustrator, the Grants Pass, Ore., native, claims pencil and paper as part of his combat essentials.

"During exercises and times of war, we go out and draw sketches to get a feel of what's going on," Farmer said. "I take that feeling and put it into my pictures."

Sgt. Jeffrey K. Thompson, air task order chief, Marine Wing Headquarters Squadron 3, 3rd MAW, explained that Farmer's job sounds simple enough.

"He is an illustrator," he declared. "It's his job to capture everyday life through drawings. He either draws from pictures he takes or does combat sketches at the actual event."

The emotion that goes into the drawings is the reason the Marine Corps sends its combat illustrators into combat, Farmer clarified.

"We capture the feeling of the environment in the artwork," the 25 year old said. "(We do this) so a viewer can look at it and get a sense of what (the) environment is like."

Combat illustration is not a job that someone can just



Sgt. Kenneth E. Farmer from Grants Pass, Ore., adds more detail to the initial rough sketch outline of Sgt. Mark T. Embriani from Reading, Pa., who is writing a letter home to his family in Al Asad, Iraq, March 28. Photo by Sgt. Nathan K. LaForte

walk in off the street and do for the Marine Corps, Farmer noted. The person has to have some talent to begin with.

He said that his road to become an illustrator for the Marine Corps was a long path that started from his childhood.

"Ever since I can remember I've been drawing," he said. "It started with drawing animals when I was young and progressed to things like comics as I got older."

It was later in his teen years while attending Grants Pass High School that the artist began to seriously think about using his art as more than just a hobby.

"In high school I learned to draw realism," Farmer stated. "I learned the importance of it. It led me to continue to improve my drawing skills."

After high school, the new graduate figured that he would put his study of artwork on

hold for a few years. When he joined the Marine Corps his doodling quickly got him noticed.

"I was in (recruit training) and one of my drill instructors saw a drawing I did," he remembered. "He yelled at me first, of course, but then they had me paint our range flag."

The new Marine was assigned to the 7th Engineer Support Battalion at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, N.C. There his skills were quickly put to work not only as a bulk fuel specialist, but also as an artist.

"My (officer-in-charge) used me on field operations to draw overlays of our fuel farms," he explained. "He also had me make terrain models."

Farmer said he was used as an unofficial unit artist throughout most of his first enlistment, and when the time came for him to reenlist, it seemed as if the Marine Corps

Deployed son honors veteran dad

Commentary by Sgt. Nathan K. LaForte

MAG-16 Combat Correspondent

AL ASAD, Iraq - I recently read a story that my mom wrote to me through e-mail chatter. A story so moving I had to stop and reflect on many things upon finishing it.

Her story was about one man, but the meaning of his story is much more far-reaching than that.

This man walked into a post office in Menomonie, Wis., in early April. He had sort of a stocky build, like most farm-grown men, with salt-and-peppered hair and glasses.

The man waited patiently through the line for his turn to send his slightly oversized package overseas. When he finally reached the window, the woman at the counter told him he needed to fill out a customs form, and he would have to wait through the line again.

The 49 year old mustered all the patience that was in him and started for the customs counter. The postal worker casually asked him where the package was headed as he started away, and he replied, "My son is a Marine in Iraq. This is going to him."

At this, she halted him in his tracks and retrieved the customs forms herself. She allowed him to fill them out there in the front of the line while the other customers waited.

Naturally the other customers started to complain, that is until she informed them that the man was sending a package to his son who was a Marine fighting in Iraq.

To the man's surprise, the customers in line started asking him questions about his son and what he was doing there. Quietly, he replied to all the questions that were asked of him.

When he was asked about his own military service, he choked down the lump that was growing in his throat and said he had served in Vietnam and Operation Desert Shield while in the Navy.

When he told them that his 24-year-old baby boy was now in Iraq, they did something he said he would have never guessed in a million years. Some shook his hand, some hugged him, but all thanked him for his service and for giving his son the moral courage to fight for their country.

This gruff, hard-working, middle-class man found himself choked up by the people's actions. He quickly, with as much composure as he could muster, mailed his package, thanked them for their support of his son and left.

This story could have happened in any place to anyone, and I might not have given it too much thought, but it didn't happen to just anyone. It happened to my father, and I am the Marine in Iraq.

When I received the e-mail from my Mom about this, I didn't know what to think at first. I did get choked up. Yes, sometimes even Marines get choked up.

When I was young, my dad never mentioned his military years to my brother or me. He kept that period bottled up inside as some veterans do. He had seen the horrors of war and didn't wish to dredge those memories up, especially with his two little boys.

He wanted, like most fathers, to protect us from the knowledge of war. As I got older, and particularly after I joined the Marine Corps, my dad started to open up about his life in the military.

He didn't get support for his time in Vietnam. Like most servicemembers, he returned to a period in America's history that was marred by anti-military sentiment.

He had never been thanked before for his service in Vietnam. I cannot imagine what that must have been like; to suffer for your country, watch your friends get wounded and killed and return to a country that didn't respect what you had gone through.

He pressed on and continued, making the military his career, while raising my brother and me almost single-handedly for most of our young lives. He worked hard

Earth Day recognizes environmental issues

Story by Cpl. Kristen L. Tull

MCAS Miramar Combat Correspondent

Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson founded Earth Day more than 40 years ago with the hope of persuading then-President John F. Kennedy to give visibility to environmental issues in politics. After flying to Washington, talking to the right people and holding grassroots protests, Americans were ready to take on the challenges and successes of Earth Day.

For the past five years, the Miramar community has celebrated Earth Day with a fun run and an awareness giveaway.

"This year we had a really good turnout," said Chief Petty Officer Leonardo Mendoza, recycling manager on Miramar and a native of Laguna, Philippines.

About 60 Marines from different commands on station gathered at the Red Course at 6:30 a.m. to show their support, and in turn, receive a free T-shirt. First, second, and third place winners in both the female and male categories of the 3-mile fun run received a free hat as well.

Petty Officer 1st Class Bernard Gladstone, administration specialist with Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron supply and a Santa Fe, New Mexico, native, came in first place for the male runners.

"I wanted to support recycling to help make sure people are aware of keeping the planet healthy as well as the competition," said Gladstone.

Every installation has a recycling center with the goal of reaching 100-percent participation.

"Reaching 100 percent means that no unnecessary items go to the landfill," said Mendoza.

Miramar is currently at 70 percent of their goal.

"Almost everything is recyclable, and I encourage Marines to help us in this fight to preserve our planet," said Mendoza.

After the race, an Earth Day booth was set up in front of the exchange. All customers had to do was fill out a survey on how much they actually knew about recycling and they received free promotional items such as T-shirts, highlighters, letter openers and stress balls.

"Many of our promotional products are made out of recycled materials, even our coffee mugs are made out of recycled glass," said Mendoza.

Miramar is the only military installation to have their recycling office run by military personnel instead of civilians. They are also the only section to raise their own money, using profits to buy promotional materials that benefit Marines such as the Single Marines Program. Harris said last year the center made more than \$100,000.

"We recycle glass, plastic, scrap metal, cardboard, toner cartridges and even the expended brass left over on the rifle range," said Cpl. Jessica Harris, recycling clerk, Headquarters & Headquarters Squadron, and Collfax, La., native.



Cammied up

(From left to right) Cpl. Brian K. Martin, Lance Cpl. Angel Avila, Cpl. Jonathan C. Grams, Cpl. Samuyen Lor and Sgt. Sean M. O'Brien stand proudly in front of the F/A-18 Hornet they recently painted in the new digital camouflage pattern. Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 314 is the first squadron to paint the new digital pattern on one of its aircraft. The artists spent two challenging weeks painting the unique pattern on the plane in tribute of all Marines. Photo by Sgt. Valerie A. Martinez

SERVICE, continued from page 4

have served before. "We are the smallest of all the military services, but nobody has more respect than what is garnered by a United States Marine."

As he prepares to move into a new life as a full-time college student and spend more time with his wife and son, Spruel hoped that his duties were seen as being fulfilled through the eyes of his superiors and Marines serving un-

der him. Spruel said throughout his career he always had the best interests of both his commanding officer and enlisted Marines in mind.

"He has always looked out for the welfare of all his Marines on base," said Sgt. David H. Nuttall, commanding general's driver, MCABWA, and Santa Maria, Calif., native. "Of course he gives me a hard time all the time, but he makes sure that I am getting somewhere. He is constantly looking out for my best interests."

Chapel weekly schedule of events

Holy Family Catholic Community

- ◆ Mass: 11 a.m. Sunday, 11:30 a.m. weekdays.
- ◆ Rosary: 10:30 a.m. Sunday.
- ◆ Confession: 10:15 a.m. Sunday or for appointments call Father Berchmanz at 577-1333.
- ◆ Religious classes for children for first communion, confirmation: 9:30-10:45 a.m. Sunday.
- ◆ Youth gathering and planning following mass Sunday.
- ◆ Baptism: Normally the first Sunday of the month. Call the chaplain's office for details.
- ◆ Marriage: Call the chaplain for details at least six months before wedding.
- ◆ Instruction in the Catholic faith (RCIA). Call the chaplain's office for details.
- ◆ Scripture Class: 7 p.m. Wednesday in the Chapel classroom.
- ◆ Choir Practice: 6 p.m. Wednesday in the Main Chapel.

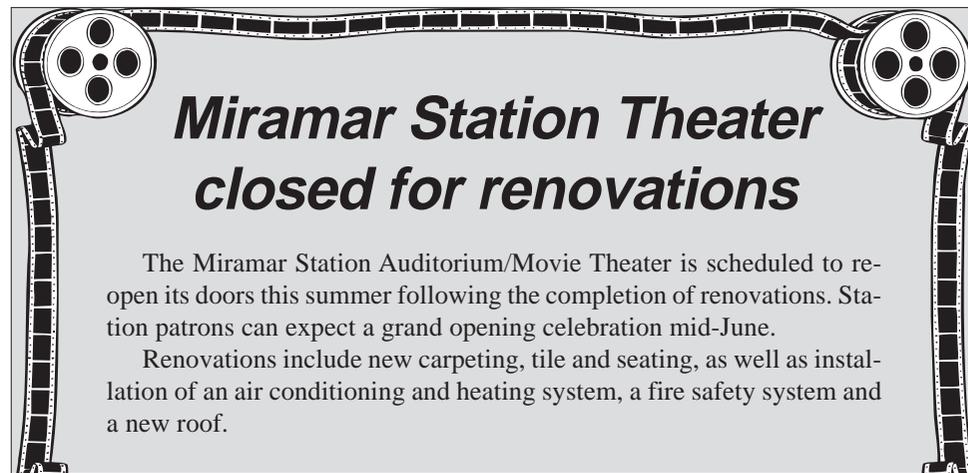
Liturgical Christian

- ◆ Sunday: Choir rehearsal at 9 a.m.
Liturgical worship at 9:30 a.m.
Adult/Youth/Children Bible study at 10:45 a.m.
- ◆ Tuesday: Morning prayer group (Room 4) at 6 a.m.
Contemporary Gospel Service at 7:30 p.m.
- ◆ Wednesday: Crafts and conversation at 9 a.m. Free childcare provided.
Women's bible study at 10:45 a.m.
Baptist service at 7 p.m.
- ◆ Thursday: Liturgical choir rehearsal at 7:30 p.m.
- ◆ Friday: Baptist bible study at 7 p.m.

Jewish

- ◆ First Friday of the month at MCRD San Diego at 7 p.m.
- ◆ Last Friday of the month in Edson Range Chapel Camp Pendleton at 7:30 p.m.

For more information during work hours call the Chaplain's Office at 577-1333 or the command duty officer after hours at 577-1141.



Miramar Station Theater closed for renovations

The Miramar Station Auditorium/Movie Theater is scheduled to re-open its doors this summer following the completion of renovations. Station patrons can expect a grand opening celebration mid-June. Renovations include new carpeting, tile and seating, as well as installation of an air conditioning and heating system, a fire safety system and a new roof.

Name Your Test Day

The Education Office, building 5305, is hosting a special "Name Your Test Day" Saturday at 8 a.m.

The test day is designed for military personnel who can not make it for a normally scheduled test.

Military personnel can take any test that the Education Office offers.

For more information call 577-1801 to schedule a test.

Parent workshop

The Exceptional Family Member Program is hosting a Specialized Training of Military Parents workshop at Miramar May 18 through 19.

STOMP is a nationally recognized source of information for military families who have children and young adults with disabilities and the professionals working with them. The workshop is funded by Headquarters Marine Corps.

The workshop is an opportunity for those families and professionals to gain knowledge and information regarding how to work together effectively to promote success for the child.

The conference will include presentations on laws and regulations regarding education of students with disabilities, communication strategies, wills and guardianship and networking.

STOMP is a federally-funded Parent Training and Information Center serving military families and professionals regardless of their geographic location.

There will also be workshops at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego May 17 and at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton May 20 through 21.

For more information about the conference or to register please call 577-9807/6585.

For more information about STOMP, visit www.washingtonpave.com/stomp.html.

Cinco de Mayo menu

Gonzales Hall invites all Marines, Sailors and their family members, as well as civilian employees, to enjoy a special Cinco de Mayo special lunch menu Wednesday.

The meal rate is \$3.30 for all members receiving commuted rations, all dependents and civilian personnel.

The special menu will include cocido (Mexican soup), Spanish soup, chili con carne, fajitas, beef tacos, burritos, enchiladas, chili verde, Spanish rice, refried beans and Mexican corn.

For more information call 577-1382.

O'Club crabfest

The Miramar Officers' Club is hosting a crabfest dinner today from 5:30 to 8 p.m.

Reservations are required.

The cost for the dinner is \$19.95 for adult members, \$8.50 for children age 5 through 11, and children under 4 are free. Members also received 10 percent off.

The dinner buffet will include clam chowder, mixed green salad, cole slaw, Canadian Snow crab legs, fried shrimp and more.

For more information or to make reservations call 577-4808.

NMCRS Budget Week Education opportunity

The Navy/Marine Corps Relief Society is hosting a Mothers' Day/Cinco de Mayo Budget Week as a part of their 100th birthday celebration.

Sign up to have a budget done at the NMCRS today, and register for a raffle ticket to win either a \$50 gift certificate for a romantic dinner, gift basket or a bouquet of flowers for Mothers' Day.

Miramar circus day

The Culpepper and Merriweather Circus is coming to Miramar Sunday.

The circus will take place south of the commissary, and show times are 2 p.m. and 4:30 p.m.

Tickets are available in advance at the Entertainment Office, building 2524. Tickets are \$6 for adults and \$4 for children. Tickets purchased the day of the circus will be \$7 for adults and \$5 for children.

For coupons and more information visit www.mccsmiramar.com.

Starting Tuesday and every Tuesday after, a representative of the University of Oklahoma will be at the Education Office, building 5305, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. to answer questions about distance learning.

A representative from Cameron University will also be available and both will also discuss master's of business administration degree programs and Marine Corps wide distance learning programs.

For more information on the event call (760)385-0468 or contact the Education Office at 577-1801.

NASCAR exhibit

The Miramar Exchange will present a NASCAR showcar exhibit in the exchange parking lot today from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The featured showcar is car #38 Dodge, driven by Kasey Kahne, a top rookie finisher in four races.

For more information on the exhibit visit www.mccsmiramar.com.



For information on deployed 3rd MAW Marines and Sailors, call the Dictaphone at 1-877-616-8762. For more information, call 577-7397/7294.

POST,
continued from page 4

staff noncommissioned officer in charge, Marine Aircraft Group Detachment A, Naval Air Station, South Weymouth, Mass.; rifle range SNCOIC and chief marksmanship instructor, MCRD Parris Island; first sergeant, weapons company, 1st Bn., 3rd Marine Regiment, Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii and first sergeant of Instructor/Inspector Staff, in Columbus, Ohio.

Howard's personal awards include the Legion of Merit, Meritorious Service Medal, Navy Commendation Medal, Navy Achievement Medal with one gold star and the Good Conduct Medal with one Silver Star and two Bronze Stars.

GRAPHIC,
continued from page 8

had set aside the perfect job for him.

"I was in Korea when one of my staff sergeants told me about an opening in the graphic arts field," he recollected. "My career planner told me I had to submit a portfolio of my work. It was approved, and I re-enlisted."

A few duty stations later, the official Marine combat illustrator found himself here with a camera in hand. Drawing was second

nature to Farmer, but the camera was something that he knew little about, yet needed for his job.

"If I take my own photographs, I can draw what I want (from the photo) instead of hoping to find (what I want) in someone else's photos," he explained. "I received a quick (tutorial) on how to use the camera and was fortunate enough to learn a lot in an afternoon."

Ideally, the artist said he prefers to draw an event as it happens.

A question he is often asked is why the Marine Corps would have artists around when they have photographers.

Thompson said he realized the difference in having an artist around after spending only a few short months with Farmer.

"Sometimes a drawing can capture an emotion better than a picture," the Livonia, Mich., native explained. "It's not just a duplicate of the original but an interpretation of what's going on."

The 32-year-old reserve sergeant explained that Farmer's artwork is important to the Marines out here in the field with him.

"It does a lot for the unit," he noted. "It makes it seem that we're doing something so important that they have an artist out here to capture it."

"When people see themselves in his drawings, they get a sense of pride," he continued. "When he spends his time drawing you, it makes a lasting impression."

For Farmer, he said that artwork is a way for him to go within himself.

"Art for me has always been an escape," he said. "It's where I can go to get away. I don't think about anything else."

"If you're drawing something you're passionate about, it's easy to do," he continued. "If you love art, it's not about easy or hard, you're just drawing."

Farmer realized that being an artist is the perfect job for him. He said that his devotion to his country has lined up with his talents, making it a winning combination.

"I wanted to do something for my country," the artist concluded. "I never thought I'd be drawing (history). It's something most artists never get to do. It's a once in lifetime opportunity."

VETERAN,
continued from page 8

during the day and even harder at night to take care of us.

Throughout my whole childhood and young adult life, he gave his life for us

and for his country.

I was so moved to find out that he had finally received the thanks that he so richly deserves. I have been, and will always be, proud of the sacrifices he has made on and off the field of battle.

I think about him a lot as I sit in the desolate vastness of Iraq's desert landscape. I am proud of him and every other military servicemember who has paved the way for us now.

They have earned my, as well as many other people's, respect for the sacrifices they have made.

Every day I can only think of making him proud. I can only think of somehow doing justice to the legacy he has left behind.

I hope that I am doing that here. I hope we are honoring the men and women of the military who have come before us.

They have shown that defending our nation is not easy.

We have answered our nation's call to rise up. We have been trained and hopefully have gained the tools to win this war. We will do our best.

Rest easy dad and fellow veterans. We'll take it from here.