

MARINE EXPEDITIONARY BRIGADE - AFGHANISTAN

FAMILY NEWSLETTER



The Command Element of Regional Command (Southwest) in Helmand province, Afghanistan.



From the Commander's Desk:

Dear friends and family,

It is with a great deal of pride in our Marines and Sailors that I write to you today from Kandahar Airfield, where the remainder of Marine Expeditionary Brigade - Afghanistan arrived just days ago. The tireless efforts of your Marines and Sailors over the past year led to these final steps in the transfer of Camp Bastion and Leatherneck over to our Afghan National Security Forces counterparts.



Since my last letter in August, several significant milestones have been achieved. First and foremost, Afghanistan conducted its first-ever peaceful transfer of power with the inauguration of President Ashraf Ghani Amadzaï on Sept. 29, 2014. The very next day, the Bilateral Security Agreement between the United States and Afghanistan was signed, reaffirming our commitment to strengthening the enduring partnership between our countries. Once the BSA goes into effect Jan. 1, 2015, U.S. forces will continue to support the NATO Resolute Support Mission to train, advise and assist the ANSF.

Last but certainly not least, this past Sunday we held our End of Operations Ceremony aboard Camp Leatherneck. United States Marines and Sailors, Soldiers and Airmen from the United Kingdom, and Afghan Soldiers of the 215th Corps stood shoulder to shoulder as the U.S. and U.K. lowered our flags, leaving the flag of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan flying high over what is now their base.

For the past five years, an enduring Marine Corps presence in Regional Command (Southwest) has worked tirelessly to secure Helmand and Nimroz and develop the Afghan National Security Forces so they could now assume full security responsibility for the region. This historic event was a symbolic culmination of the past 10 months of Marine Expeditionary Brigade - Afghanistan's time in Helmand and Nimroz provinces and more than a decade of work carried out by our international coalition forces throughout Afghanistan.

During our final days in Helmand province, your Marines and Sailors worked diligently. Marines from Combat Logistics Battalion 1 and 1st Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, as well as Marine Aircraft Group - Afghanistan, took on some necessary, yet not-so-glamorous tasks. They conducted various real-life support requirements in addition to their primary duties of force projection, force protection, and retrograde and remediation. Their unceasing work ethic kept morale high until the very end.

We are looking forward to arriving at home soon and sharing a meal with our families and friends who have supported us continuously throughout this endeavor. Thank you for all of the care packages, emails, letters, thoughts and prayers during our deployment. The contribution of each and every service member who deployed out here has made this day possible, and your sacrifice and support has played a large role in our ability to carry out this mission. Thank you.

Semper Fidelis,

D. D. YOO

Brigadier General, Commander, Marine Expeditionary Brigade - Afghanistan / RC(SW)



From the Sergeant Major:

Dear family and friends,

Marines have been actively engaged in operations in Helmand province since 2008. During the early months of 2009, it was the Marines who cleared Marjah of enemy fighters. It was the Marines who were given the task of defeating the Taliban in Sangin in 2010. And when the Marines were told to switch from counterinsurgency operations to Security Force Assistance operations in 2012 to ensure the Afghan National Security Forces in Helmand and Nimroz provinces were properly trained, no one batted an eye. No matter the mission thrown at the Marines in Afghanistan, we have always accomplished our assigned task. Because of our successes in southwestern Afghanistan, and the successes of our Afghan counterparts, we have cased the Regional Command (Southwest) Battle Colors.



On Oct. 26, 2014, a formation consisting of United States Marines, United Kingdom Soldiers and Afghan National Army Soldiers flanked our color guard as we conducted our End of Operations Ceremony aboard Camp Leatherneck. While ceremonies may be commonplace in the Marine Corps, this ceremony represented so much more than an ordinary transfer of authority ceremony or change of command ceremony. The End of Operations Ceremony meant an historic end to the Marine Corps' mission in Helmand province. The ceremony meant that Regional Command (Southwest) was officially deactivated. Although most importantly, the ceremony meant that the Marine Corps and our coalition partners have successfully completed our mission. We defeated the enemy and we have setup our Afghan counterparts to continue to succeed and keep Helmand and Nimroz provinces secure.

Following the ceremony, Marines and Sailors began making their way to the flightline to depart Helmand province for the final time. During the next 24 hours, we each got onto our assigned aircraft and flew to Kandahar Airfield. We are now in Kandahar doing the final things to get ready to return home. We have completed a successful deployment and the Marine Corps has completed a successful campaign in Helmand province. I could not be more proud to be a part of Marine Expeditionary Brigade - Afghanistan and to have served alongside your Marines and Sailors. It was an honor to serve during such an historic time in Marine Corps history.

I would be remiss if I didn't talk about the tremendous sacrifices made during the Marine Corps' more than six years spent deployed to Helmand province. Many Marines and Sailors gave the ultimate sacrifice fighting to ensure Afghanistan would no longer be a safe haven for terrorists. Many more have been wounded in action fighting against the faceless enemy. All Marines and Sailors gave what we expect of all of our service members - 100 percent all the time.

To our families and friends who sacrificed while their loved ones were gone for several months at a time - thank you. Thank you all for your support not just during the past ten months, but during the past several years of operations in Afghanistan. We are all looking forward to putting the finishing touches on this deployment and on the Marine Corps' time in southern Afghanistan.

Semper Fidelis,

D. E. BERRY, JR.

Sergeant Major, Marine Expeditionary Brigade - Afghanistan / RC(SW)



eMARINE

... delivering readiness information to Marines & those who support them



From the Command Master Chief:

To our family, friends and loved ones,

Many things have changed since the last time I wrote in August. The biggest change for me was redeploying. I left Camp Leatherneck during September to go back to Camp Pendleton and get prepared to receive the remaining Sailors and Marines still forward deployed with Marine Expeditionary Brigade - Afghanistan. We have stood up the rear element at Camp Pendleton and are anxiously awaiting our fellow Sailors and Marines to return very soon.

I have kept in close contact with the forward command and am very proud of their accomplishments. They recently left Camp Leatherneck and ended the Marine Corps' mission in Helmand province - a very successful mission. Throughout the Marine Corps' more than five years of combat operations in southern Afghanistan, Sailors and Marines have served side-by-side. Our Forward Resuscitative Surgical Suite and Shock Trauma Platoon Sailors stood ready and capable until the very end. We began our mission in Afghanistan with our Marines, and we ended our mission together at the very end.

We are greatly looking forward to the homecoming of our brothers and sisters-in-arms, and we know that you are greatly looking forward to reuniting with your loved ones and friends as well. Your patience and devotion throughout the past year, particularly throughout the past 10 months, has been a monumental piece of our ability to accomplish our mission with fervor and tenacity. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you for your continued support.

Semper Fidelis,

F. DOMINGUEZ

Command Master Chief, Marine Expeditionary Brigade - Afghanistan / RC(SW)



Chaplain's Corner:

Greetings MEB-A families and friends!

Redeployment is around the corner for those Marines and Sailors who haven't already made it home, and life is moving at a rapid pace here as well. Throughout the past couple months, we have been working diligently to prepare for the move out of Camp Leatherneck, and now, as we tie up any remaining loose ends at Kandahar Airfield, we are diligently preparing for our move back home.

One of the critical training pieces we do prior to redeployment is a "Warrior Transition" brief. This is an opportunity for your loved ones to be reminded of the changes we must deal with upon return and the stress that these changes can cause. I take the opportunity to tell Marines and Sailors that it is up to them to determine whether the change they experience is good change, bad change, or change that just doesn't matter. Along with this, they are reminded that "how it used to be ..." may no longer apply. In fact, chances are "how it used to be" will no longer apply.

Your loved ones are also told that they should not assume what their role in the family upon return is to be. I suggest the key here is to negotiate, negotiate, negotiate. Talk about these things. Assumptions can cause friction and friction causes stress. Lastly, I would remind you, as I remind them, to keep expectations real. Keep in mind that if there are issues in your relationship that are outside your scope of expertise, seek help through your unit chaplain, MCCS Counseling services or MilitaryOneSource. They are wonderful resources and remember, it's not the weak person who seeks out help, it's the smart person who does this. Blessings to all!

Semper Fidelis,

T. H. HUNT

Chaplain, Marine Expeditionary Brigade - Afghanistan / RC(SW)



Marines, Coalition end operations in Helmand province, Afghanistan



Photo by Sgt. Dustin D. March

▲ Marines and coalition service members lower the NATO, United Kingdom and United States flags during an End of Operations ceremony aboard Camp Leatherneck, Helmand province, Afghanistan, Oct. 26, 2014. The ceremony marked the end of operations for Marines and British service members in the province.

▼ Marines load onto a KC-130 aircraft aboard the Camp Bastion flightline, Oct. 27, 2014. The last Marines and U.K. service members boarded fixed wing and rotary wing aircraft throughout the morning after completing more than five years of operations in Helmand province.



Photo by Staff Sgt. John Jackson

To see more photos of Marines, Sailors and our coalition partners in RC(SW) and to read stories about operations in southwestern Afghanistan, [click here](#).



Photo By Staff Sgt. John Jackson

Brigadier Gen. Daniel D. Yoo, Marine Expeditionary Brigade - Afghanistan commanding general, waves goodbye to Maj. Gen. Sayed Malouk, the Afghan National Army's 215th Corps commander, on the Camp Bastion flightline, Oct. 27, 2014. The Marines and U.K. service members ended their more than five years of operations in province and depart Helmand for the final time.



Photo by Staff Sgt. John Jackson



▲ Marines load onto a KC-130 aircraft aboard the Camp Bastion flightline, Oct. 27, 2014. The last Marines and U.K. service members boarded fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft throughout the morning after completing more than five years of operations in Helmand province.

➤ Brigadier Gen. Daniel D. Yoo, right, Marine Expeditionary Brigade - Afghanistan commanding general, and Sgt. Maj. Doug Berry Jr., MEB-A sergeant major, case the Regional Command (Southwest) battle colors during the End of Operations ceremony aboard Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, Oct. 26, 2014. The ceremony marked the end of operations for Marines and British service members in the province.

▼ The final six aircraft prepare to depart the Camp Bastion flightline, Oct. 27, 2014. The last Marines and U.K. service members depart Helmand province for the final time, ending more than five years of operations in the southwestern province.



Photo by Sgt. Dustin D. March



Photo by Staff Sgt. John Jackson

Marine Expeditionary Brigade - Afghanistan

Promotions

The following MEB-A Marines were promoted to their current rank during September 2014.

LCpl. Andrew O. Winegard
** Cpl. Darien Bjorndal
** Cpl. Zachery E. Kleindl
** Cpl. Natasha M. Lopez
Cpl. Travis C. McQueen
Cpl. Alexander Virula Jr.
Sgt. Eduardo Fuentesterraza
LtCol. Bryan C. Hatfield
LtCol. Lawrence D. Nichols

The following MEB-A Marines were promoted to their current rank during October 2014.

LCpl. Timothy G. Buchanan
Cpl. Connon P. Polston
Sgt. Taylor M. Bohman
Sgt. Shawn D. Hoffman
Sgt. Jeremy C. Schacht
SSgt. Albert J. Bryant
SSgt. Mario D. Guardado
GySgt. Mikel K. Goodman
GySgt. Andrew W. Howard
GySgt. Trevor J. Koch
GySgt. Daniel R. Mildbrand
GySgt. Jeremy B. Willet

*** Indicates combat meritoriously promoted*



Marines stand in formation during a promotion ceremony aboard Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, during October 2014.