

Hawaii MARINE

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CMC says Marines are ready

Jim Garamone

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON — Marines are getting ready to deploy again into Iraq, Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. Michael Hagee told the House Armed Services Committee, Wednesday.

General Hagee stressed to the congressmen that the Marine Corps is heavily committed to the war on terror. He said in the past year, Marines have been engaged in operations from Afghanistan to the Arabian Gulf. Marines have also

been deployed to the Horn of Africa, Liberia, the Republic of Georgia, Colombia, Guantanamo Bay and the Philippines.

He said the Marine participation in Operation Iraqi Freedom last year was the best example of what the Marines bring to battle.

"The 1st Marine Expeditionary Force deployed 70,000 Marines and Sailors in less than 60 days," the Commandant said. "Exploiting the operational speed, reach and inherent flexibility of sea power, the Navy and Marine Corps —

closely integrated with joint and coalition, and special operations — engaged in 26 days of sustained combat operations, fought 10 major engagements, and destroyed eight Iraqi divisions before stopping in Tikrit 500 miles inland."

The 1st MEF then participated in security and stability operations in five Iraqi provinces. The Multinational Division Central/South relieved the last Marine unit in Hillah in September 2002.

The Marines are preparing a return to Iraq, and many of the members of the 1st MEF will have personal experiences they

can bring to the new deployment.

"The Marine Corps is currently preparing to deploy forces to relieve the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment and the 82nd Airborne Division in western Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom 2," Gen. Hagee said. The Marines will deploy in two rotations of about seven months each.

He noted that in preparation for the operation, 1st MEF has analyzed lessons learned from its own experiences in conducting security and stability operations and recent Army lessons learned.



Lance Cpl. Rich Mattingly

Marines from MCB Hawaii, Kaneohe Bay, demonstrated how an elite amphibious force can train and help a fellow master of amphibious assault. In the past 22 years, their efforts have helped increase the population of the endangered Hawaiian Stilts counted at K-Bay, from 60 to 160.

Marines clean up to save endangered bird species

Lance Cpl. Rich Mattingly
Combat Correspondent

Deep, rumbling diesels broke the Wednesday morning reverie of the Nuupia Ponds at MCB Hawaii, Kaneohe Bay, as 26-ton amphibious assault vehicles — bristling with weapons and belching exhaust — thundered into the wetlands.

The AAVs, the Marine Corps' signature assault vehicles, weren't on a mission of destruction or combat support in the ponds, but operating with orders to aid a six-inch tall, endangered bird.

Since 1982, Combat Support Company, 3rd Marine Regiment, has been holding annual "mud ops" in Nuupia Ponds to aid the nest-

ing and foraging habits of the Hawaiian stilt, or Aeo.

"Over 20 years ago, it was discovered that as amphibious, tracked vehicles made their way through the mud of the wetlands, the Hawaiian stilt would follow using the furrows left in the mud to nest," said Dr. Diane Drigot,

See AAVS, A-6

3rd Radio Bn. on the road again to Iraq

Cpl. Danielle M. Bacon
Combat Correspondent

After returning home less than six months ago from Operation Iraqi Freedom, 150 3rd Radio Bn. Marines and Sailors are shipping out again. This time last year, approximately 50 of the Marines were deployed to Iraq as 1st Radio Battalion.

"I wish I had, had a little more time," said Cpl. Israel Campbell, who was a radio operator on the first deployment and is now a systems administrator. "I wanted to get more surfing in and I wanted to take some classes. I guess they will have to wait."

"I am very excited. This is my first deployment. I just have to take one day at a time," said Lance Cpl. Charlene Leavitt, an electronics technician from Portland, Maine.

"I'm nervous, because of the environment that we will be in," said Petty Officer 3rd Class Jennifer Haseman, a corpsman. "I feel prepared though; I went to Field Medical School, which helps us deal with anything medically."

The whole battalion has been preparing for any situation that may arise.

"We are conducting individual training to ensure that each Marine can do their job and accomplish the mission," said Capt. Matt Worsham, the detachment operations officer. "Logistically, we are preparing the equipment, making sure it will work; we are ensuring everyone is physically and

medically ready to go; and we've made sure the families are ready, so when they deploy things are taken care of back here."

For the operations platoon commander, preparing at home goes farther.

"We had a long talk, and I said, 'daddy needs to go and help build schools and medical facilities,'" said 1st Lt. Joe OConner, regarding his three children, who are 1, 3 and 5 years old.

There are a few details that OConner chose to leave out though.

"They don't know that I will be in any danger. In fact, they don't even know that I am taking a weapon," he said.

Although he admits it is hard leaving his children, OConner doesn't regret it.

"I feel so strongly about the role we'll play. That's why I came in the Marine Corps, to save lives."

OConner's spouse is just as supportive.

"I'm scared — not just for my husband. But, that nervousness motivates me to pray more everyday," said Kelly OConner. "It's going to be tough, but I made a commitment to be a Marine's wife."

Other Marines have tried not to give much thought to the deployment. Sergeant Michelle Maceastacio, a motor transport mechanic, said her Marine husband, Pedro, tries to keep things as normal as possible.

"We're just trying to enjoy the time we have until she goes," he explained.

NMCRS celebrates 100 years

Lance Cpl. Megan L. Stiner
Combat Correspondent

The Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society (NMCRS) celebrated its 100-year anniversary on Jan. 23. What once began as a private, non-profit, charitable organization has grown into one of the most beneficial societies the military has to offer. Throughout the past century, the NMCRS has increased its worldwide availability to cover more than 250 Navy and Marine Corps offices,

on shore as well as at sea.

In 1904 President Theodore Roosevelt approved establishment of the Society. At that time, the Navy received a total of \$9,000, which was enough for the Society to begin operations to benefit both the Navy and Marine Corps.

Initially, the main priority of the Navy Relief Society — later changed to the Navy Marine Corps Relief Society, in 1991 — was to help

See NMCRS, A-6



Lance Cpl. Megan L. Stiner

Colonel Richard C. Roten, deputy commander of MCB Hawaii, congratulates Darlene Moreland (center) for receiving the Volunteer of the Year award, while Pat Perry, director of NMCRS, stands at her side.

MCBH NEWS BRIEFS

TAX CENTER NOW OPEN

Service members, retirees and family members can make appointments to complete paperwork required for their 2003 federal and state tax forms at the MCB Hawaii Tax Center.

Walk-in appointments will also be available at the Center, which will be open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. Wednesday hours of operation will be 9 a.m. - 6 p.m.

The Tax Center is located next to the 7-Day Store, Bldg. 455, on Lawrence Road.

Be sure to bring your W-2 forms, bank account routing and checking/savings account numbers, a copy of your 2002 tax returns, and any other forms that will be required for your tax application(s).

To schedule an appointment, call 257-1534 or visit www.mcbh.usmc.mil/sja/sjatax.htm.

BASE CHAPEL TO HOST MINISTRY WORKSHOP FEB. 7-11

Vince Ambrosetti, a mission director, composer, pianist/vocalist and recording artist will be performing a ministry workshop Feb. 7-11 at the MCB Hawaii, Kaneohe Bay, base chapel. A series of events are planned, which follow:

- Feb. 7, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.: Ministry Workshop
- 5 p.m.: Mass: Music and Homely Reflections
- Feb. 8, 9:30 a.m.: Mass of Music and Homely Reflections
- 4 p.m.: Concert
- 5:30 p.m.: Cookout and potluck
- Feb. 9, 7 p.m.: Service of Light
- Feb. 10, 7 p.m.: Resting on God's Presence: Reconciliation and Light
- Feb. 11, 7 p.m.: Gathering at the Banquet Table, The Mass of Thanksgiving.

HAIKU STAIRS

REMAIN CLOSED TO PUBLIC

The City and County of Honolulu has closed the gate to the Haiku Stairs and posted liability and warning signs.

The Honolulu Police Department will greet would-be trespassers who attempt to access the stairs despite the closure.

Hawaii MARINE

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Cherry Blossoms to adorn Hawaii

Robyn Erman
Director of Development,
Parker School

KAMUELA, Hawaii — For the first time, a tribute to local residents and military personnel who lived and worked together at or near Kamuela during World War II will be included as part of the annual Cherry Blossom Heritage Festival, Saturday, Feb. 7. The tribute will be held at Parker School, the site of the USO during World War II.

During those war years, the largest ethnic group on the Big Island of Hawaii was Japanese. When the 2nd Marine Division arrived in Hawaii after the bloody Battle of Tarawa, in December of 1943, the community — then called "Waimea" — numbered about 400 residents.

The first rodeo in Parker Ranch history took place during these years, with both Marines and ranch personnel taking part.

When the 2nd Marine Division departed Hawaii for campaigns at Saipan and Tinian, the 5th Marine Division camp from Camp Pendleton, Calif., arrived at "Camp Tarawa" to prepare for what would be the "Battle of Iwo Jima."

These men used a volcanic hill behind the airport — known as "Holoholoku" — to train for the assault on Mt. Suribachi, where two U.S. flags were raised on Feb. 23, 1945. Following the battle, the 5th Division returned to Waimea to prepare for the invasion of Japan.

The small community was forever changed by its wartime experiences. The Marines brought electricity, paved roads, a dam and reservoir, and ice cream, as well as increased activity for local businesses.



Photos Courtesy of Cherry Blossom Heritage Festival

The Cherry Blossom Heritage Festival 2004 — or "Hanami," the viewing of the flowers in the springtime — is scheduled for Feb. 7 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Kamuela, Waimea, on the Big Island of Hawaii. The event will feature demonstrations, exhibits, crafts and ono food, as well as a performance by the Marine Forces Pacific Band at 1 p.m.



During the war, Tsugi Kaiama opened "Sue's Chuckwagon" and made hamburgers for the Marines training at Camp Tarawa; among them was Ira Hayes, the Pima Indian from Arizona who was part of the second flag-raising on Iwo Jima. Tsugi and her two brothers, Yutaka and Hisao Kimura, (all now deceased) remembered the Marines fondly.

Local Japanese residents not only supported the military by providing services, home-cooked meals and many kindnesses, they also volunteered to serve in the U.S. armed forces. Many, like Hawaii's current U.S. Senator Daniel K. Inouye,

served with great distinction in the 442nd or 100th Infantry Battalions in Europe.

The Pacific War Memorial Association has recorded this history between the community of Kamuela and the U.S. Marine Corps. The



PWMA's predecessor nonprofit, the Camp Tarawa Historical Foundation, raised funds for the construction of the Camp Tarawa Memorial.

The PWMA did the same for the Pacific War Memorial, located aboard Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Kaneohe Bay, on Oahu.

One side of that granite-based flag-raising memorial is devoted to honoring the residents of Hawaii. A "walkway of honor" surrounds the memorial, in which are inscribed stones commemorating the service of many American men and women.

Working with faculty and students (who are learning this history) at Parker School, the PWMA will sponsor an historical exhibit inside the main entrance of the school for the Cherry Blossom Heritage Festival. Film clips from Camp Tarawa will be shown in the theater, as well as a PowerPoint presentation prepared by the students.

The Marine Forces Pacific Band will perform at 1 p.m.

For more information on Camp Tarawa and the Pacific War Memorial/Walkway of Honor, visit www.pacificwarmemorial.org or contact Ms. Alice Clark at (808) 885-8611.

Factoid

More than 50,000 Marines brought electricity, rodeo, hamburger stands and ice cream to tiny Waimea (now Kamuela) during World War II, and recuperated there before returning to the bloody island battles of the Pacific.



Lance Cpl. Rich Mattingly

Firing down range 'in Margaritaville'

Staff Sgt. Jim Dabney, the range safety officer at the R-6 pistol range at the Range Training Facility aboard MCB Hawaii, Kaneohe Bay, coaches Robert Greenidge (foreground) and Ralph MacDonald, both members of Jimmy Buffett's "Coral Reefers" band, on how to fire the M16A2 service rifle correctly at the MCB Hawaii Indoor Simulated Marksmanship Trainer during a tour of the base Tuesday. Jimmy Buffett and the Coral Reefers Band performed a "Salute to the Military" concert Wednesday evening at the Waikiki Shell in Honolulu.

During the halfway point of the six-mile-hump, five Marines from Supply Co., Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 24, participated in a four-man carry race against Marines from Maintenance Co. When the race was over, Supply Co. emerged victorious.



Lance Cpl. Megan L. Stiner

'These boots were made for walkin'...'

MALS-24 steps off to refresh military knowledge

Lance Cpl. Megan L. Stiner
Combat Correspondent

Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 24 Marines have just recently begun participating in training that most of them haven't experienced since boot camp. Fully equipped with flak jackets, kevlar, iso-mats and reflective devices, a

group stepped off for a six-mile hike Jan. 22 at 6:30 a.m. from the parking lot of Hangar 103.

"Aviation Marines need to know how to set up perimeter defenses, as well as exercise weapon skills and knowledge. Until now, those issues have not been addressed," said 1st Lt. Ann G. Burke, operations and logistics officer for MALS-24.

The squadron Marines were divided into two platoons: one from Supply Co. and one from Maintenance Co., led by Lt Col. Laura J. Sampsel, the commanding officer of MALS-24.

Aviation Marines rarely have the opportunity to train in field activities because aircraft fly and need maintenance constantly. The squadron is breaking that old tradition by going on quarterly hikes, explained Burke.

During the hikes, a designated duty section remains at the hangar to cover air operations. Four sections rotate quarterly.

"It is hard for aviation units to do this type of training. We support air operations, and they go 24 hours a day. They need us at work, but we need this training," said Burke.

A goal for MALS-24 is to eventually participate in a joint exercise with a ground unit, since skills that are taught to Marines in military occupational specialty (MOS) schools — those dealing with weaponry and field safety — can't be applied in the every-

day work regimen. The squadron is taking steps to refresh their military know-ledge.

The recent hike was the second one that squadron Marines have participated in; the first hike was also six-miles long. The number of miles, however, will increase incrementally during the next few months. The squadron intends to end the year with a 15-mile hike.

"It is different for these Marines, but they enjoy the training," said Burke.

To keep the Marines motivated during the six-mile hike, at the halfway point, Supply and Maintenance faced-off in a four-man carry. Two teams of five participants from each unit raced for a "to-be-announced" prize. Supply emerged victorious.

"This is very difficult training to combine with our primary mission of air operations," said Burke. "However, being in the field is the reason why some of my Marines joined the Marine Corps. If we can't defend ourselves, then we can't do aircraft maintenance."



Foot Facts

Protect your feet to keep your body upright!

- **Begin at boot purchase;** don't rely on old shoe sizes and buy for the larger foot.
- **Buy boots that feel comfortable right away;** don't "break-in" any shoe.
- **Avoid higher heels** and prefer wiggle room for your toes.
- **Wear socks.** Podiatrists recommend a single pair of (maybe) thick socks made of acrylic fibers to draw away moisture caused by perspiration.
- **Get wet feet indoors quickly.**
- **Don't pop blisters,** but if they break on their own, apply an antiseptic and cover blisters with a sterile bandage.
- **Get a podiatrist to treat bleeding** under the toenail to prevent loss.
- **Avoid bunions** at the joints with wider or better-fitting boots.

For more information, visit www.apma.org or call 1-800-FOOTCARE to request a free brochure.

(Courtesy of NewsUSA Featurettes.)

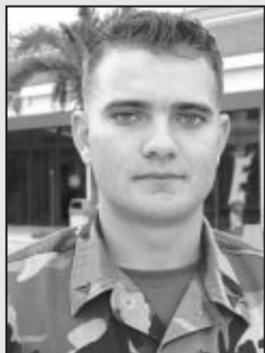


Lance Cpl. Megan L. Stiner

Roadguards are an important safety requirement during moving formations, to watch for oncoming fire or vehicles.

Word on the Street

"Who do you think will win Super Bowl XXXVIII?"



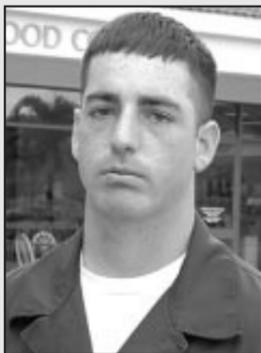
"...Patriots. I like the Panthers, but the Pat's are gonna win."

Lance Cpl. Beau Bergeron
Special intelligence communicator, 3rd Radio Bn.



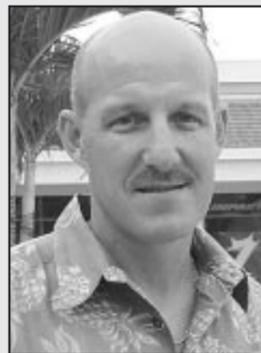
"I've heard that the Panthers are likely to win."

Autumn Steward-Campbell
Family member



"...The Panthers. They're due."

Airman Jonathan David Nelson
Aviation machinist mate VP-9



"I think the Pat's. They've got a good defense and offense right now."

Todd Korth
Arizona State highway patrolman and family member



"I don't really know who's playing. Oh, the Patriots are playing? Well, they are going to win."

Kassie Young
T-Mobile retail Sales representative

EVERY CLIME & PLACE



Petty Officer 3rd Class Mark J. Rebilas



Petty Officer 2nd Class Tiffini M. Jones

Shoving off

Above — The USS Boxer (LHD-4) departs San Diego on a deployment to the Central Command area of responsibility in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom II force rotation, Jan. 14. More than 200 Marines and 900 Sailors embarked aboard USS Boxer are providing amphibious lift for a portion of the equipment and personnel from the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force stationed at Camp Pendleton, Calif., and 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, stationed at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, Calif.

Left — Lance Cpl. Mario Reyes of Chicago says a final goodbye to his family on his cellular phone prior to boarding the USS Boxer.

22nd MEU tests new, deployable college

MCB QUANTICO, Va. — The Marine Corps Community Services Lifelong Learning Programs and the College of Continuing Education have partnered with Central Texas College to deliver three undergraduate college credit courses using a Deployable Learning Resource Center.

The general education classes are GOVT 2301, American Government I; GOVT 2302, American Government II; and HUMA 1315, Fine Arts Appreciation.

The DLRC is the hardware component of the Marine Corps Distance Learning Program that provides Marines with access to the electronic multimedia courseware when they are deployed. Each DLRC consists of a server, local area network (LAN) switch, printer, and 20 laptop workstations. The server stores and distributes all electronic courseware and hosts the necessary management tools to monitor student progress.

The laptop workstations are provided to the deployed Marine students to enable access to the distance learning content. Once the DLRC is networked on the LAN, all computers on the network will have access to the courseware.

Central Texas College is proud to be part of the pilot program delivering college-level courses for MarineNet, a Marine's gateway to education and training online. Central Texas has nearly 40 years of experience in providing education and training to military personnel, and is the largest provider of Servicemember Opportunity College Agreements at the associate's degree level.

The college credit courses that a Marine can take through MarineNet can be applied to a number of associate's degree plans. They can receive up to 35 semester hours of credit from the following evaluations:

- Previous college courses,
- Training and experience in the Marine Corps,
- Challenge tests and
- Training courses completed on MarineNet.

Marines can visit the Web site at online.ctcd.edu/marinet/index_marinet.cfm or e-mail marinenet@ctc-distd.net for further information on this pilot program. Marines in the 22nd MEU can preregister online Sunday.

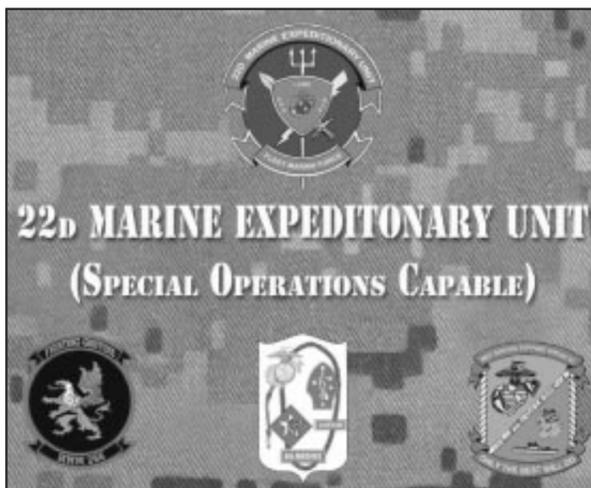
22nd MEU designated 'SOC'

**Gunnery Sgt.
Keith A. Milks**
22nd MEU

CAMP LEJEUNE, N.C. — Months of hard work culminated in the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) receiving its "Special Operations Capable (SOC)" designation Jan. 23.

The long and difficult journey began in August when the MEU, commanded by Col. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., assumed operational control of its major subordinate elements: Battalion Landing Team, 1st Bn., 6th Marines; Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 266 (Reinforced); and MEU Service Support Group 22.

Evaluators from the II Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) followed the MEU's five-month progression through combat courses, three at-sea training exercises, urban combat training in South Carolina, and most recently, its SOC exercise in



The 22nd MEU received its "Special Operations Capable" designation Jan. 23, five months after assuming operational control of its major subordinate elements: Battalion Landing Team, 1st Bn., 6th Marines; Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 266 (Reinforced), and MEU Service Support Group 22.

January.

The SOC program was begun in 1985 when the Corps established a standardized training and evaluation program for all outbound MEUs.

"Today marks the end of our dedi-

cated training phase," said McKenzie in an address to key staff members from throughout the MEU. "The entire MEU has met my commander's intent to this point, and we're ready to deploy. As of today, our focus is to prepare for combat operations."

The unit's mid-February embarkation aboard the amphibious assault ships Wasp, Whidbey Island, and Shreveport will mark the nineteenth time the unit has sailed forth into harm's way.

"We've been working really hard so it's a huge relief that the pre-deployment training is over," said Lance Cpl. Jeremiah Braudrick, of Kingston, Ohio, a mortarman with BLT 1/6's Weapons Company. "We're all excited and ready to get on ship next month and get in the fight."

For more information on the mission, organization, and status of the 22nd MEU, visit the unit's Web site at www.22meu.usmc.mil.

Sergeant Major lives by the code

Cpl. Danielle M. Bacon

Combat Correspondent

U.S. MARINE CORPS FORCES PACIFIC, CAMP H. M. SMITH — There is no missing him as a Marine, whether it's in uniform or not. It is not that the hair cut alone is a dead give away, but the combination of a bulldog physique and an intense stride gives away the sergeant major of Headquarters and Service Bn., Marine Corps Forces Pacific, as a motivated Marine.

The Corps is etched on each line of Sgt. Major Juan D. Williams' seasoned face and in every fragment of his heart, which is why he enlisted for the eighth time Jan. 14.

"He is dedicated to 'his Marines,'" said Col. William S. Febuary, commanding officer of Headquarters and Service Bn., MarForPac. "His Marines" are every rank from the youngest private to the senior general.

Looking around, 27 years of well-earned memories, pictures, letters of achievement and memorabilia from his days as a drill instructor line his office walls. Notebooks of knowledge, drill manuals and other memories line his bookshelves, but the Marine Corps wasn't always Williams' first choice.



Cpl. Danielle M. Bacon

Williams has spent 27 years living and breathing the Corps.

As a young 19 year old from Brooklyn, N.Y., he first set his eyes on the Army, but he soon "saw the light" by recruiter Staff Sgt. Artis Washington.

The recruiter spent just a few seconds telling Williams about the Marine Corps,

and he was sold.

"He told me, 'if you want to see the world, fight for freedom and be given direction, then the Marine Corps is the place for you,'" Williams recalled.

The recruiter wasn't kidding when he said, "you will see the world." Since graduating from Military Police School in Fort McClellan, Ala., Williams has worked in more than 20 different units and served in twice as many billets all over the world.

It was at his duty station, Camp Lejeune, N.C., that Williams re-enlisted the first time.

"I was contemplating joining the police force instead of re-enlisting, but I didn't receive a reply to my inquiries," Williams remembered. "My first sergeant, 1st Sgt. Jack Clagg, gave me the letter after I had raised my hand [and swore in]!"

"He is a motivator. He backs up his Marines for anything. He always ensures that they are ready to go," said Master Gunnery Sgt. Iosefa Elisara, the MarForPac career retention specialist

noncommissioned officer in charge.

The 47-year-old sergeant major's drive doesn't stop at the Marines and Sailors he comes into contact with. It influences his home life as well.

Williams and his wife have been married for 24 years. It was the Corps that brought them together.

"My wife [a native of Seoul, Republic of South Korea] comes from a military background. Her father was in the Korean Marine Corps and her brother was in the Korean Army," Williams explained. "She has always supported me throughout my career ... always by my side, ready to move where the Marine Corps sends me.

"My daughter, graduated from the police academy [on Jan. 9] and her instructor told me, that she really has drive and motivation," said Williams, adding that his son, who attends college, feels like he has been in the Marine Corps his whole life.

"If I could go back and do it all over again, I wouldn't change a thing," Williams said of his life's experience.

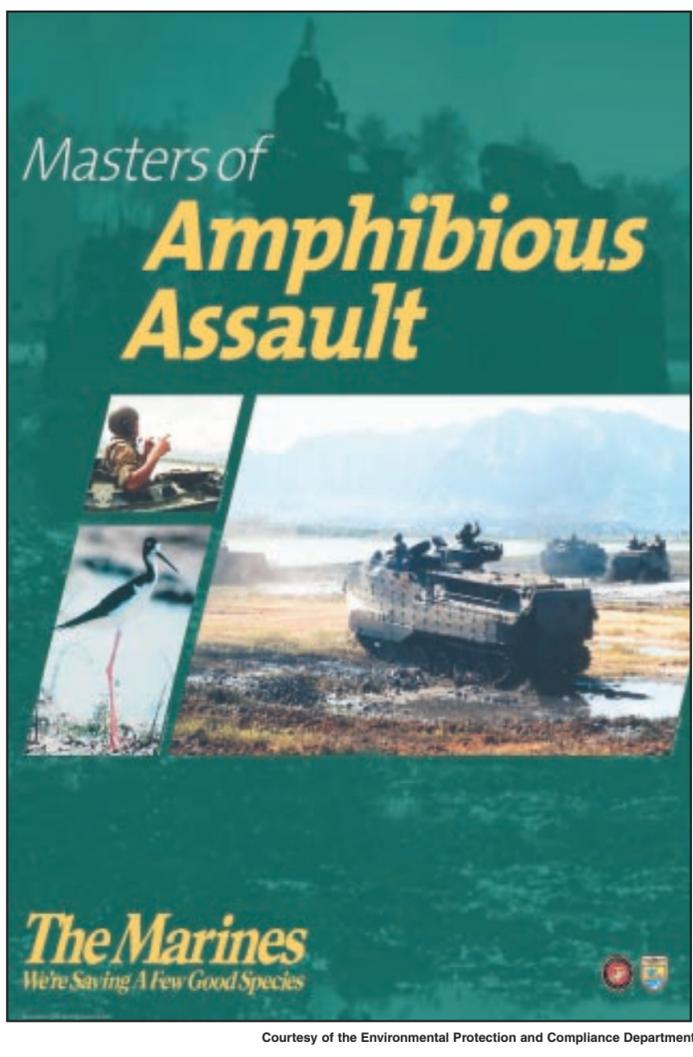
Poster unveiled

To recognize the Marine Corps' important environmental work, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service teamed up with the Corps to unveil the sixth in a series of "We're Saving a Few Good Species" posters during a ceremony Wednesday.

Representatives from Headquarters Marine Corps attended the ceremony, as well as other noted guests.

The new poster was unveiled before the backdrop of Combat Support Company, 3rd Marine Regiment, AAV crews completing the churning the Nuupia Ponds at MCB Hawaii, Kaneohe Bay.

Brigadier Gen. Jerry C. McAbee, commanding general of MCB Hawaii, said the poster highlights operations at the ponds and helps spread the message that military readiness and training are not mutually exclusive with environmental awareness.



AAVS, From A-1

natural resources management specialist for MCB Hawaii.

The Marines quickly altered the path they took to the sea in order to protect the stilt. A plan was hatched to increase the bird's dwindling population while giving amphibious vehicle drivers new training opportunities.

Now, once every year, the 3rd Marine Regiment's AAV platoon hits the mud for some environmentally friendly field operations.

"We get to go out and give our drivers "stick time" on unfamiliar terrain that we normally don't have an opportunity to train on," said Staff Sgt. David Hickman, amphibious assault vehicle section leader, CSC. "At the same time, it lets us protect the environment and clean up Nuupia Ponds."

"It's really a symbiotic relationship between the AAVs during the mud ops and the Hawaiian stilt," explained Drigot. "The tread marks fill in with water in such a way that the stilts' nests are protected by a little moat that increases the hatchling survival rate."

The AAV crews aren't just creating nesting opportunities for the birds, however. The churning of the huge, steel tracks during the Ops also rids the ponds of both an invasive weed and a species of tree, neither of which is native to Hawaii.

"The pickleweed thrives in wetland conditions, but it completely covers the mudflat that the stilts and other species need access to in order to forage and breed," said Drigot. "The red mangrove tree, common to Brazil, chokes out the wetlands as well. The AAVs take care of them both."

The number of Hawaiian stilts counted at the Nuupia Ponds Wildlife Management Area has grown from around 60 in the early 80s to more than 160 today, said Drigot.

"Mud Ops is one of the most successful military environmental programs in the Department of

Defense," she added.

Lance Cpl. Owen Kintzley, AAV crew chief, CSC, agreed that it was a unique opportunity to train and help make a difference.

"These ponds are the only place like it on Hawaii for this kind of training," he said. "Getting to do the Mud Ops

here will help us be prepared for this kind of terrain in combat. It's a once-a-year chance."

The Mud Ops have become an annual tradition at MCB Hawaii, Kaneohe Bay, and the Hawaiian stilt population should continue to grow with the help of a few Marines and their AAVs.

NMCRS, From A-1

spouses and children of deceased active duty service members by awarding them grants for finances and schooling. During the Great Depression, the Society helped families who needed assistance because of the recent economic plunge. It also provided assistance with natural disasters.

World War II was a turning point for the NMCRS. The National Citizen's Committee was formed to help raise money for the Society. A total of \$10,000 was raised by the efforts of the committee, and it was then possible for the Society to expand its categories of aid. Thus it began giving assistance in various areas such as with child care, duty station moves and family budget awareness. Volunteers also began running thrift stores and sewing layettes for newborns.

Originally, the staff of the NMCRS consisted of 19 volunteers. Since then, that number has grown to more than 3,000. Throughout the past decade, the NMCRS has assisted more than three million active duty and retired Marines and Sailors and their families with more than \$1 billion in interest-free loans and grants.

The NMCRS has also aided service and family members during the terrorist attacks on the USS Cole and at the Pentagon, and during many natural disasters such as Hurricane Isabel and the devastating California forest fires.

Recently, the NMCRS rec-

ognized recipients of the 2003 Hawaii Volunteer of the Year and Kokua awards.

Sarah Bass and Esther Adams received awards for work at the Pearl Harbor location; Darlene Moreland and Tanya Campbell received honors for work at Kaneohe Bay.

"The individuals chosen represent all the volunteers. No one person can accomplish such marvels without the help of the entire Hawaii family," said Paul H. Belanger, director of NMCRS Pearl Harbor.

Another individual who was recognized in this year's ceremony was Pat Perry, or "Auntie Pat" as she is referred to by the Society.

Perry is currently the Society's longest standing employee; she's been with the NMCRS for 43 years. When she was hired in 1961 as a bookkeeper at the Barbers Point Naval Air Station, she was making 90 cents per hour. She came to Kaneohe Bay in 1977 and has since become the director of the office.

"I retire in two years, and when I do, I am going to come back as a volunteer and win every award the Society offers," said Perry.

Society members and volunteers show intense dedication and enthusiasm — a perfect compliment to their accomplishments during the past 100 years.

With a growing number of offices, volunteers and members, the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society hopes to have even more success in its second century of service.