



# GRIZZLY GOUGE

OFFICIAL REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM 5 NEWSLETTER

MAY 2012

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## The SITREP

Greetings friends and family of Regimental Combat Team 5. The month of May is finally upon us and, despite the rising temperatures in southern Helmand province, your Marines and sailors remain hard at work in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

In addition to our usual submissions, this month's issue of the Grizzly Gouge includes: a Marine electrician with the RCT-5 utilities section, a section leader with 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion who has gone his entire deployment without Meals Ready-to-Eat, an Afghan National Army-led engineering project in Marjah district, successful district community council elections in Garmsir, and the first installment of the RCT-5 Spouses' Corner.

Afghan National Security Forces and district governments in the RCT-5 area of operations have maintained steady progress over the last month. With the help of the Marine infantry battalions in our battlespace, security and stability has improved across southern Helmand.



MARJAH DISTRICT, Afghanistan - U.S. Marine Cpl. Alonzo Bahena, a rifleman with the Regimental Combat Team 5 personal security detachment and a Chicago native, provides security during an impromptu meeting between Marine leaders and Afghan Civil Order Police here, April 6, 2012. Colonel Roger Turner and Sgt. Maj. Alberto Ruiz, the Regimental Combat Team 5 commanding officer and sergeant major, recently visited Marines and Afghan National Security Forces at several combat outposts throughout Helmand province's Marjah district. Photo by Sgt. Michael Cifuentes.

The opening of the Nawa District Police Headquarters, recently completed after 18 months of construction, was perhaps the most visible development for Afghan forces in the past month. Marine leaders joined members of the Nawa police and district government officials to cut the ribbon on the new facility.

The precinct will serve as the headquarters for all police activity in Nawa and will be home to the district's quick reaction force, operation coordination center, and detention facilities. This new headquarters will provide the Nawa population peace of mind knowing their government has established and properly equipped their local security forces.

In neighboring Garmsir district, significant progress by the local government came in the form of successful district community council elections held there, April 17.

The Garmsir DCC elections were first conducted under the guidance of coalition forces in 2009 and, at the time, only residents in the northern part of the district were represented. With the increased level of security provided by Afghan and coalition forces in recent years, governance has expanded into the southernmost area of Garmsir known as Banadar.

During the most recent elections, the voting process and ballot counting were coordinated and executed by Garmsir district officials. Village elders accounted for more than 2,200 votes to fill 34 council seats in an election that was a breath of fresh air for the people of Garmsir, who had previously lived under insurgent rule with no hope of governing themselves. (See page 9 for more on the Garmsir DCC elections.)

Marjah district saw significant progress in both the development of its local security forces and critical infrastructure over the last month.



KHAN NESHIN DISTRICT, Afghanistan - (From left) U.S. Marine Maj. Gen. Charles M. Gurganus, the commanding general of Regional Command (Southwest), Col. Roger Turner, the commanding officer of Regimental Combat Team 5, and Afghan Border Police Col. Sultan Mahmood, the Helmand province ABP commanding officer, walk away from the landing zone here, April 14, 2012. Photo by Cpl. Alfred V. Lopez.

See SITREP on Page 14

# Marine electrician keeps the power on in southern Helmand

Story and Photos By Sgt. Michael Cifuentes

CAMP DWYER, Afghanistan – Sometimes little luxuries like air conditioning, heat and power go unnoticed... just not in Afghanistan. Marines living on the forward edge of the battlefield in Helmand province know what life is like without the comforts of climate control or electricity. That's why Marines here say it's important to take care of the resources that they have.

Sergeant Ricardo J. Figueroa, an electrician and noncommissioned officer in charge of the Marine Corps Integrated Maintenance Management System serving with Utilities Platoon, Regimental Combat Team 5, said he is not one to slack off when it comes to making sure generators and AC units are in tiptop shape. He knows first hand what sleeping in a tent with no AC or electricity is like in the hot Afghan weather.

One of his most important responsibilities is maintaining all generators used at the many combat outposts and patrol bases in the RCT-5 area of operations. He said proper upkeep entails keeping track of the work put into each generator, ordering new parts, ordering replacement AC units, keeping track of shipping dates, acquiring parts from adjacent units, traveling to Marine positions for hands-on inspections – and the list goes on.

"All of the equipment out here is mission-essential," said Figueroa, a Temecula, Calif., native. "Without the proper maintenance of the equipment, Marines won't have the electrical power to command and control their unit. Normally, as the MIMMS corporal in charge, Figueroa tracks work orders and maintenance inquiries from his desk in the RCT-5 headquarters at Camp Dwyer. With his knowledge and experience, he hashes out plans to send Marines on repair missions or send generator parts to different sites that need the work. He has a team of four junior Marines and a staff sergeant leading his section, who Figueroa said all play their own important roles in staying on top of maintenance at every Marine position in their area of responsibility.



MARJAH DISTRICT, Afghanistan – U.S. Marine Sgt. Ricardo J. Figueroa, an electrician and noncommissioned officer in charge of Marine Corps Integrated Maintenance Management System serving with Utilities Platoon, Regimental Combat Team 5, volunteers to carry bread purchased at a bazaar during a patrol here, April 6, 2012. Colonel Roger Turner and Sgt. Maj. Alberto Ruiz, the RCT-5 commanding officer and sergeant major, visited Marines and Afghan National Security Forces at several combat outposts throughout Helmand province's Marjah district. Figueroa, a Temecula, Calif., native, made rounds to every generator at each post to inspect and ensure they were in proper working order.

Staff Sgt. Tony L. Hale, the utilities chief for RCT-5 and Figueroa's direct superior, said their section is responsible for more than \$15 million worth of equipment spread across four Marine battalions in southern Helmand and the regimental headquarters.

"We may not possess the gear, but it's up to us to go out and make sure it's working for those units," said Hale, a native of Kingsport, Tenn.

Hale said one of the most overlooked procedures his Marines handle at each generator is the repairing of wires. Sometimes weathered wires split and splice, and the average Marine would take it upon themselves to repair it. If not done properly, tampering with those wires could kill Marines. Hale said his Marines are usually able to repair these wire before they become a threat.

Figueroa's yearlong deployment with RCT-5 is his second to Afghanistan. Last deployment, he manned crew-served machineguns in the turret of armored trucks during resupply convoys across Helmand province. He providing security as a turret gunner is what was needed most from him at that time, but he never lost touch with his roots as an electrician.

On this tour of duty, Figueroa rarely escapes from his office – with all the help he has from his junior Marines. But when the opportunity arises, he steps up to get a first hand look at the generators under his care.

Sometimes it takes a weeklong convoy for Figueroa to touch down at each patrol base in RCT-5's battlespace.

Recently, Figueroa joined RCT-5 leaders on a tour of several bases and outposts in Marjah and Nawa districts, April 4-8. At every stop, the regimental commander met with the Marines and Afghan allies serving on the base while Figueroa made his rounds to every generator and AC unit.

He took a "look and listen" approach to diagnose the equipment that had issues. Fortunately, he said Marines at each base were taking good care of the equipment.

"Every Marine around here knows that if their generators break down, they're not going to have heat in the winter and AC in the summer," Figueroa said. "So they all pay close attention to them and keep them working."

**See FIGUEROA on Page 12**

## FRO-Zone

“It ain’t so ‘til it’s from the FRO”

Dear Families and Friends,

Everyone is keeping track of the passing days and months in their own ways, myself included, counting this as the 10th FRO article since our inaugural issue in July last year. May is a pivotal month just before we get set to transition towards preparing for homecoming. Before we fast forward to that, we'll offer up more background on a Regimental Combat Team to shed light on what they do.

### Bringing it into focus

An RCT is not an easy-to-understand unit! RCT-5 Headquarters as a whole serves as the direct support link to the infantry battalions operating in their area to keep them winning, moving, supplied, communicating and taken care of. The diagram on the following page will hopefully give you a clearer illustration of how this type of unit is organized. The look of each RCT will change slightly depending on the mission requirements and commander's plan, but will include all aspects of those listed here.

**S-1 (Administration)** – These Marines take care of all administrative aspects of payroll, leave, promotions, legal processes and manpower needs. Includes religious program staff and command team.

**S-2 (Intelligence)** – Our Intel Marines collect data and create products to communicate that data in a meaningful way for combat operations on the front lines. Maps, charts, reports, enemy movements and communications, surveillance, language translation, etc.

**S-3 (Operations)** – The nucleus of mission planning and over-watch for all units within the RCT area of responsibility, the “brain” of the unit, the section that never sleeps. This section also includes all of our advisor teams who are partnered to train and mentor the Afghani military and police forces.

**S-4 (Logistics)** – This busy section is responsible for acquiring and maintaining gear and supplies to support operations. Includes logistical specialists, motor transport, supply, armory and food service Marines.

**S-6 (Communications)** – This is the RCT's largest section with over 100 Marines responsible for keeping everyone communicating via phone, satellite and digital networks.

**Regimental Aid Station (RAS)** – Marines do not have their own doctors or dentists so our Navy corpsmen and officer staff manage all the medical, dental and psychological care for the thousands of Marines who are deployed under the command of RCT-5.

**Headquarters Company Office** – This staff perform a variety of duties from company-level administration, duty scheduling, controlling camp security, managing camp facilities to serving as a communication link between all the other headquarters sections.

**Personnel Security Detachment** – this team of 20+ Marines serve as the security for command team members traveling “outside the wire” (outside the security of an established base, among the local population).

### Upcoming Events

**Saturday, May 19th** – Operation Help A Hero is welcoming RCT-5 families to register for Camp JOY, a special day of supervised fun activities for the kids that allow moms to take a break from the 24/7 parenting duty. The event is on base, register directly with my office before May 4th, deadline is approaching fast.



**Sunday, May 20th, 2-4pm** – The sailing excursion in Dana Point is now full. If you still want to get in, a stand-by list is available when we have cancellations.



### April wrap-up

It may have looked like a gray day on Sunday, April 22nd, but that didn't keep over 50 of our RCT-5 and Rear Command families from coming out for a day of fun at the ball park. The volunteer Marines and kid-kickballers took over the field for two games. Our teams, the Super-Dupers and Grizzlies, each finished off the day with one win and one loss. At the adjacent field the little ones were entertained by volunteers from the Dana Point 5th Marine Regiment Support Group manning the stations for flying kites, smashing play dough, creating shaving cream sculptures and table art, blowing bubbles, face-painting, three-legged races, squirt guns, wheelbarrow races, soccer kicking drills and hula-hooping competitions. The hot dog grill was sizzling hot and we served nearly 100 hot dogs (especially during those 7th inning stretches when kids and Marines satisfied their appetites).

I want to express warm thanks to those Marine volunteers who spent their Sunday afternoon running the kickball game, and the volunteers from the Dana Point 5th Marine Regiment Support Group for their support. It's a great day when our families can come out to simply enjoy themselves at a unit event. (See page 13 for event photos)

As always, friends and families, please contact me or your Family Readiness Assistant with any of your questions, comments, ideas or concerns. We remain in touch!

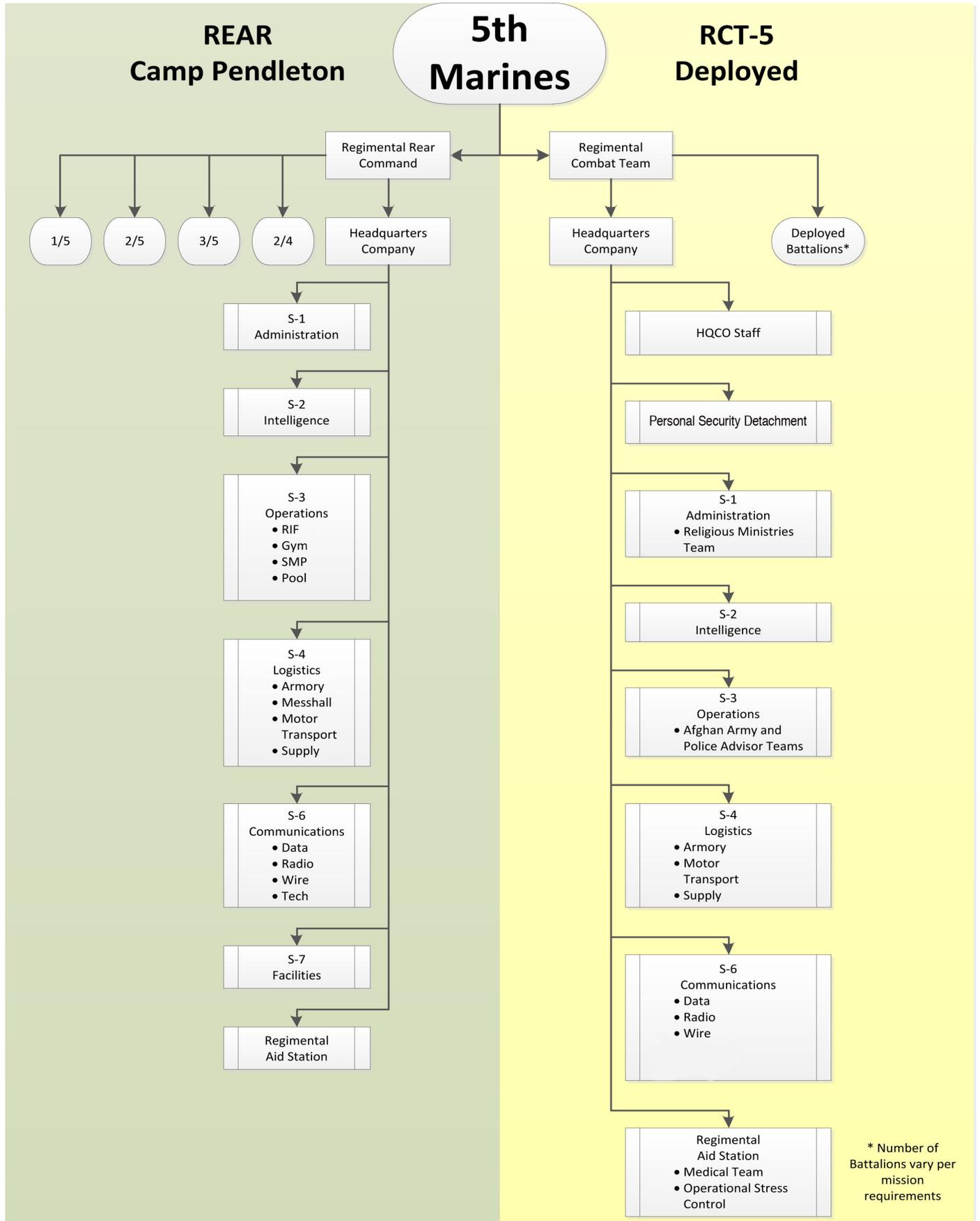


Best always,

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\* Number of Battalions vary per mission requirements

## The Chaplain's Corner

### *“Homecoming: Ensuring a Smooth Landing”*

If you've spent any time at all flying, you've probably experienced one of those silky smooth landings where the aircraft greases the runway. That doesn't happen by accident – and contrary to popular opinion, it usually doesn't happen on auto-pilot. Likewise, as we begin on final approach to homecoming, a smooth Return and Reunion usually doesn't happen by accident either. To achieve a smooth landing, several things must take place.

First of all, before an aircraft can turn onto final – that is, the last leg of a landing where the aircraft is lined up with the runway – the pilot must receive clearance from the Air Traffic Controller. ATCs have an incredibly complex task of managing many aircraft at a time to ensure all have a safe landing. Any pilot in communication with ATC recognizes that to achieve this, their approach may not go exactly as planned. They may be placed in a holding pattern, waved off or told to 'go around' right up to the point of landing. Likewise, good communication and flexibility are essential in achieving a smooth homecoming. There are a myriad of factors figuring into exactly when any individual Marine or Sailor actually lands back home. The tactical situation, flight delays, and the challenges of funneling home a large number of personnel can all affect the specific date of homecoming. Just as pilots absolutely must be talking to the tower on final approach, likewise you should remain in close contact with our FRO, the RCT-5 media sources and your spouse to determine exactly when we're "cleared to land."

Second, once the aircraft turns on final, the pilot needs to attend to several details. There's an old saying that a good approach makes for a good landing. Proper pitch, power and alignment will always set up an aircraft on the glide slope for a smooth landing. Attitude, just like with people, makes all the difference with aircraft. Keep a steady and proper attitude and you'll avoid a rollercoaster ride down to landing. Remaining on the proper glide slope also requires applying the right amount of power. Too much power at the last minute can result in a seriously botched landing.



*Cmdr. Mark S. Winward is the RCT-5 Regimental Chaplain. He is available anytime for pastoral counseling or personal support by contacting him at [mark.winward@afg.usmc.mil](mailto:mark.winward@afg.usmc.mil).*

Likewise, avoid expending huge amounts of frantic energy at the last minute before homecoming. You'll only find yourself burnt out and, in the long run, make the landing unnecessarily bumpy for all. The last component of a good landing is to maintain good alignment with the runway. Likewise, keep your eye on our touchdown point, be patient, and relax in the assurance that our landing is getting closer.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, a smooth landing of a complex aircraft is a team effort. Not only does a pilot remain in communication with the tower, but a pilot is also getting assistance from his/her co-pilot. God has often been compared to a co-pilot who's with us as we journey through life. Remaining in contact with Him during this sometimes bumpy and always exciting phase of our deployment will make for a much smoother approach and landing. Of course, like a very senior pilot, he [has a whole] lot more experience turning even the most difficult landing into one that greases the runway. So if you're experiencing a bumpy ride during these last few months on approach to homecoming and God is your co-pilot, perhaps you might consider switching seats!

Godspeed,  
CHAPS

CDR Mark Winward  
RCT-5 Chaplain

## Spouses' Corner

*Living well, waiting for the reunion*

By Ingrid Bairstow

They say that time flies when you are having fun, but I have to admit time has passed quickly even while my favorite man has been gone. As that man just reminded me, we are only double digits away from being reunited as a family. Yay! But as we all know, the whole summer still looms ahead of us.

How do we get through it? Well, I asked friends and other spouses I just met how they have managed to take care of themselves so far. Perhaps by sharing their coping expertise, we can find ideas and ways to push through these final weeks of separation.

Valerie Greenberg told me she likes to keep busy. She is on her third separation from her husband in five years. She works full time, goes to school full time and is a volunteer soccer coach and volunteer family readiness assistant.

"I get through it all by making lists," said Valerie, who does not yet have any children.

She makes her lists from Sunday to Sunday, which helps her count-down the weeks until the return of her husband.

Somewhere between her busy schedule, Valerie has read 50-60 books since her husband deployed. Jada Kirby, mother of a 4-year-old and 20-month-old, also said she consumes lots of books. But Jada's true coping secret? Structure. "My kids go to bed at 7 and get up at 7. Having a set schedule is key," she said.

Wearing kids out is Angie Hood's answer. "My sanity is my trampoline," she said. "If I need a break, I tell the girls to go and jump." Angie also clears her head when she exercises and often takes her girls on a 3-mile walk around the neighborhood, one girl on the bike, the younger in a stroller.

**See SPOUSE on Page 8**



*Ingrid Bairstow is the wife of RCT-5 Operations Officer, Lt. Col. Timothy Bairstow*

## Texas Marine cooks on the go in southern Helmand

Story and Photos By Cpl. Alfred V. Lopez

KHAN NESHIN DISTRICT, Afghanistan – U.S. Marine Cpl. Kleber Villalva, a section leader with Echo Company, 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, is currently serving his third combat deployment in southern Helmand.

Villalva, a 22-year-old Houston native, has consumed his fair share of Meals Ready-to-Eat during long training exercises and previous deployments to Iraq in 2008 and Afghanistan in 2010. These packaged meals are a staple in the diet of most Marines and sailors participating in a field operation or serving a combat deployment.

But when he stepped foot here in October 2011, he decided to break from the time-honored diet, and challenge himself to stick to an MRE free selection of food.

"Being on my third deployment, I figured that I was tired of eating just packaged food," said Villalva. "Sometimes your stomach can get backed up with what they put in the MREs."

**See VILLALVA on Page 8**



tion leader with Echo Company, 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, cooks tuna with his makeshift kitchen during an overnight mobile post here, April 26, 2012. Villalva, a 22-year-old Houston native currently serving his third combat deployment, has been committed to a Meal Ready-to-Eat free diet since arriving in southern Helmand in October 2011.

## ANA engineers construct bridge vital to commerce in Marjah

Story by Cpl. Alfred V. Lopez, photos by 1st Lt. John Nelson

MARJAH DISTRICT, Afghanistan – As Marine forces in Helmand province shift into an advisory role and the capabilities and responsibilities of Afghan National Security Forces continue to grow, the people of southern Helmand are reaping the benefits.

Afghan National Army engineers with 4th Kandak, 1st Brigade, 215th Corps, recently constructed a bridge vital to local travel and commerce to the village of Sera Qalah.

A local elder, Haji Soorgul Aghan, approached the ANA at Forward Operating Base Fiddler's Green, informing them of a road nearby that was being eroded by the water of a canal across which it was built. The ANA engineers, with their Marine advisors in tow, surveyed the site and jumped into action.

"It was an ANA lead effort," said 1st Lt. John F. Nelson, an engineer advisor with the 2nd Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment combat support advisory team and 24-year-old native of Bethel, Conn. "We made few recommendations and let them decide whether or not to listen to our advice."

The bridge is now part of a main road crossing a canal, trafficked by over 30 commercial trucks a day. Vehicles would often get stuck in the water when attempting to cross the degraded road."

The 4th Kandak's leadership conducted an engagement with local leaders, discussing the details of the project. Two weeks later, Bravo Company, 3rd Combat Engineer Battalion, provided materials for their Afghan counterparts, and the project was initiated.



MARJAH DISTRICT, Afghanistan – U.S. Marine Gunner Sgt. Michael H. Foreman Jr., an engineer advisor with the 2nd Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment combat support advisory team, and 33-year-old native of Lisbon, Ohio, watches as an Afghan National Army engineer with 4th Kandak, 1st Brigade, 215th Corps, constructs a bridge here, recently. The bridge is vital to local travel and commerce to the village of Sera Qalah.



MARJAH DISTRICT, Afghanistan – Afghan National Army Capt. Abdullah Tahiri, an engineer with 4th Kandak, 1st Brigade, 215th Corps poses for a photo in front of an ANA bulldozer here, March 13. Tahiri and his fellow engineers recently constructed a bridge vital to local travel and commerce to the village of Sera Qalah.

"During the construction I did not see any issues," said ANA Sgt. Abdul Ahmad, an engineer with 4/1/215. "The locals were kind and allowed us to work without interference."

The engineers moved more than 350 cubic yards of earth, installed two culverts, and built a bypass for military vehicles to access the construction site. The Afghan engineers used their own bulldozers, loaders and compactors to construct the bridge.

"It feels very good to be able to help the locals," said Ahmad. "I think the people are very impressed and happy with the work we did for them. They want us to do more projects."

Only four months ago, the engineer tolai (an ANA company) was acting as a provisional infantry in support of another unit. They are now an able engineering asset, capable of supporting other Afghan security forces and developing infrastructure for the people in southern Helmand.

"Over the course of three days, the elder's faith in the ANA engineers grew exponentially," said Nelson. "He and the other villagers were please and astonished by the tempo of work, abilities of the heavy equipment, and the quality of the finished project."

[Click here for more on this story on the RCT-5 DVIDS page](#)

**VILLALVA from Page 6**

His diet consists of food items sent to him in care packages from his family and his wife, Lauren. Villalva, a 2007 graduate of Cypress Falls High School, has substituted cereal, chicken and tuna from home, for the processed contents of an MRE.

"I did this for the last two months of my last deployment and I liked it," said Villalva. "My parents have always sent me a lot of food in the mail. With all the stuff they send me, I can pretty much feed myself out of my bag for the whole deployment."

"I kind of got everyone else started on it. They've been sent freeze-dried foods too," he added.

Villalva and his platoon maintain a high operational tempo, patrolling through harsh desert terrain and conducting vehicle checkpoints under the glaring sun. They only return to a patrol base every five days to resupply and refuel their vehicles.

"It's not so bad living out of the back of a vehicle," said Villalva. "You just bring the essentials that you need, learn how to live small and appreciate the little things."

At the end of a long day of work, Villalva breaks out his mobile kitchen to prepare a meal for himself and his fellow Marines and sailors.

"It's nice having warm food," explained Villalva. "I've been using a JetBoil [heater] to heat up the food. I brought about seven cans of it for the deployment so I can heat up the food."

"My mom sent me a little pot and a bunch of other things, that's how I made my own little kitchen," added Villalva.

Villalva carefully lays out his cooking tools on a plywood platform, then lights up his portable gas powered heater and begins a well-practiced routine.

Like a seasoned chef, he carefully garnishes a bowl of plain rice with Chicken of the Sea, a sprinkle of lime flavor and a dash of Adobo seasoning.

"The craziest thing my parents have sent me is pizza crust, pepperoni and cheese...I made some pizza for the guys and it turned out pretty good," said Villalva.

In no more than 20 minutes, the Houston native has skillfully primed a hearty bowl, ready to be served to his eagerly awaiting brothers-in-arms.

"He's cooked spam, ramen and chicken bowls for us, made burritos and pizza...our deployment would not have been the same without his kitchen," said Seaman Matthew Charles Dykes, a corpsman with Echo Co., 1st LAR and 23-year-old native of Paramus, N.J. "His cooking has brought a little slice of home to us."



KHAN NESHIN DISTRICT, Afghanistan – U.S. Marine Cpl. Kleber Villalva, a section leader with Echo Company, 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, cooks tuna with his makeshift kitchen during an overnight mobile post here, April 26, 2012. Villalva, a 22-year-old Houston native currently serving his third combat deployment, has been committed to a Meal Ready-to-Eat free diet since arriving in southern Helmand in October 2011. He substitutes tuna, chicken, cereal and other food items he's received in care packages from his family and his wife, Lauren, for the pre-packaged contents of MREs.

**SPOUSE from Page 6**

Taking care of the kiddos solo is one of the biggest strains during deployments. Two ladies told me of ways to get a break that don't involve a lot of money.

One woman hires 10-11 year-olds to help her with supper and bath time at a fraction of the cost of an older babysitter. Norma Ruiz got through many months by trading babysitting with her neighbors, she said.

Norma, who has gone through 10 deployments, also helps the time pass by setting goals every time her husband leaves. "I set a financial goal and a goal to better myself," she said. "For example, this year I am taking a class at the community college."

These methods of managing reflect the personalities of each of us. You may find solace in what these ladies do to get through the day—or, you may have completely different strategies. I do not like being too busy. Having nothing to do but hike with my friend and my dog and putter at home calms me more than pampering, structure or even chocolate. (One of Carole Turner's preferred methods!)

Recently I heard that taking care of yourself can be as simple as surrounding yourself with things that appeal to your five senses: from lighting a candle, listening to your favorite music or munching on a favorite food.

That makes a lot of sense—we have so many pecks on our brain and body every day, we should remember to do something for ourselves even as we enter the last part of the deployment. Ahead of us we have a new challenge: homecoming!

[Click here for more on this story on the RCT-5 DVIDS page](#)

## Successful elections evidence of governance growth in Garmsir

Story and Photos By Cpl. Reece Lodder

GARMSIR DISTRICT, Afghanistan — The Hazar Joft Bazaar was unusually quiet for a weekday morning. Rows of shop doors remained locked. Commercial chatter was minimal. Both workers and patrons seemed to be nonexistent.

Less than a kilometer away, an enormous gathering outside the Garmsir Agricultural High School revealed the reason for the bazaar's inactivity. Thousand of Afghans spread throughout Helmand province's Garmsir district traveled to Hazar Joft to vote in district community council elections here, April 17, 2012.

The elections were first conducted under the guidance of coalition forces in 2009. At the time, DCC seats represented only Afghan citizens in the northern portion of Garmsir surrounding its district center.

In subsequent years, Afghan and coalition forces increased security, allowing district governance to expand further south and reach into Banadar, the southernmost area of Garmsir.

During the current elections, the voting process and ballot counting were controlled and carried out by Afghans. Village elders accounted for more than 2,200 votes to fill 34 DCC seats.



HAZAR JOFT, Afghanistan — Afghan boys curiously observe U.S. Marine Lance Cpl. Alexander Johnson, a rifleman with 4th Platoon, Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, and 20-year-old native of Bayard, Neb., while Johnson and fellow Marines provide security on a partnered patrol with Afghan National Police during the Garmsir district community council elections here, April 17, 2012. During the Afghan-led elections in Helmand province's Garmsir district, village elders accounted for more than 2,200 votes to fill 34 DCC seats. Approximately 200 members of the Afghan National Security Forces worked to secure the voting site by searching shops, vehicles and foot traffic while Marines with 3/3 observed from the periphery. Despite reports of potential insurgent activity during the elections, the event transpired without any incident.

Hajji Abdul Bashir, an elder from Kharako village in northern Garmsir, said the democratic process was a breath of fresh air to citizens previously held captive under insurgent rule.

"The elections were very important for the people of Garmsir," Bashir said. "In the past, we've either lacked a leader or had too many of them. Whoever was the richest or had a rifle became the leader, but now, citizens from all over Garmsir have the opportunity to vote for our government."

Around the city center, approximately 200 members of the Afghan National Security Forces worked to secure the voting site. They carried out the security plan they had devised, searching shops, vehicles and foot traffic while Marines with 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, simply observed from the periphery.

"Without our thorough security plan, there wouldn't have been a peaceful place to vote," said ANA Lt. Col. Zahir Shah, the executive officer of 2nd Kandak, 1st Brigade, 215th Corps. "The people of Garmsir saw their forces around the city providing them security ... and they felt safe because they saw their security with their own eyes."

Despite reports of potential insurgent activity during the elections, the event transpired without any incident. Bashir acknowledged this safe environment as a sign of progress in Garmsir.

**See ELECTION Page 12**



HAZAR JOFT, Afghanistan — Afghan elders converse outside the Garmsir Agricultural High School while U.S. Marine Lance Cpl. Eric Chrvia (right), a mortarman with 4th Platoon, Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, and 21-year-old native of Hale, Mich., provides security with Afghan National Police during district community council elections here, April 17, 2012.



MARJAH DISTRICT, Afghanistan—U.S. Marine Lance Cpl. Jake Black, a native of Ohio, and Navy Petty Officer Ryan Hall, a native of Ocala, Fla., play catch during an overnight stop here April 4, 2012, while touring the 2nd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment area of operations. The ballplayers are part of their battalion's provisional security detail, who also share responsibilities with the battalion's quick reaction force. Photo by Sgt. Michael Cifuentes.



GARMSIR DISTRICT, Afghanistan - U.S. Marine Sgt. Maj. Alberto Ruiz, the Regimental Combat Team 5 sergeant major, speaks to Marines and sailors with 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, during a visit here, April 13, 2012. Ruiz accompanied Col. Roger Turner, the commanding officer of RCT 5, on a visit to several Afghan and Marine positions in Helmand province's Garmsir district to see the progress of Afghan National Security Forces and district government first hand. Photo by Cpl. Alfred V. Lopez.



KHAN NESHIN DISTRICT, Afghanistan - U.S. Marine Cpl. Sean Grady, a dog handler and pointman with Echo Company, 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, and Ace, an improvised explosive device detection dog, post security during a dismounted patrol here, April 27, 2012. Grady, a 27-year-old native of Otho, Iowa, and Ace have successfully located 16 IEDs, the most of any team in their battalion, since arriving in southern Helmand on October 2011. Photo by Cpl. Alfred V. Lopez

# Aboard Camp Dwyer



**FIGUEROA from Page 2**

Recently Figueroa's job became a bit more demanding. Marines are beginning to consolidate their positions in southern Helmand into larger combat outposts; therefore the generators on those smaller outposts are no longer a priority for new parts. Figueroa said this means it's up to the MIMMS team to constantly stay on top of routine maintenance.

"The best way to keep the generators running is to educate the Marines who live on those forward bases on proper maintenance techniques," Figueroa said.

Figueroa entered the Marine Corps on an "open contract," meaning he was willing to take any job the Corps assigned to him. He said he never had a desire to be an electrician before enlisting. He did have a desire to follow in his father's footsteps, who retired from the Marine Corps a few years before Figueroa enlisted.

Four years later, he said the job is an eye-opener. Figueroa was promoted to his current rank at the beginning of their deployment in September 2011.

**ELECTION from Page 9**

"Five years ago, there were a lot of bad men here and no real government," Bashir said. "I prayed to God that we'd be freed from insurgent rule and receive governance. Today, we have village elders, elections and shuras to discuss issues. It will be a long process for our government to operate on its own, but we have security today ... and our government is continuing to grow."

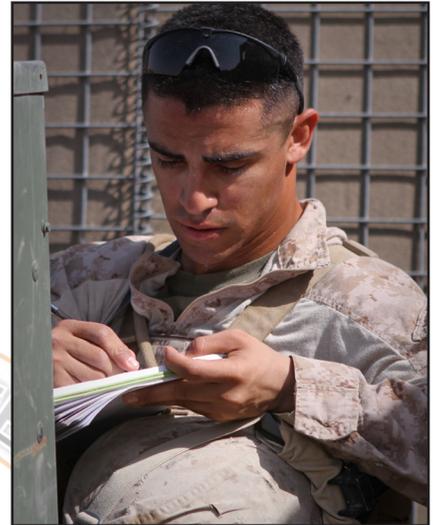
*Editor's Note: Third Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, is currently assigned to Regimental Combat Team 5, 1st Marine Division (Forward), which works in partnership with the Afghan National Security Forces and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to conduct counterinsurgency operations. The unit is dedicated to securing the Afghan people, defeating insurgent forces, and enabling the ANSF assumption of security responsibility within its operations in order to support the expansion of stability, development and legitimate governance.*

[Click here for more on this story on the RCT-5 DVIDS page](#)

Hale said since then, he's been handling responsibilities that are above his grade by giving Marines "the power" that they need. Hale added that he quantifies success when "grunts (infantrymen) return from their countless patrols a day to a cool place to chill."

"All of this has been a life-changing experience for me," Figueroa said. "Sometimes Marines don't have the time to think about if they have electricity and power. So, if my guys and I can do a good job helping them maintain their equipment, then we're making their lives easier. That's what's most important."

*Editor's note: Sgt. Figueroa was promoted to his current rank the first week of May. His current rank is not reflected in the original story at the link below his photo. Regimental Combat Team is currently assigned to 1st Marine Division (Forward), which works in partnership with the Afghan National Security Forces and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to conduct counterinsurgency operations. The unit is dedicated to securing the Afghan people, defeating insurgent forces, and enabling the ANSF assumption of security responsibilities within its operations in order to support the expansion of stability, development and legitimate governance.*



MARJAH DISTRICT, Afghanistan — U.S. Marine Sgt. Ricardo J. Figueroa, an electrician with Utilities Platoon, Regimental Combat Team 5, inspects a generator here used by 2nd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment, April 5, 2012. Photo by Sgt. Michael Cientes.

[Click here for more on this story on the RCT-5 DVIDS page](#)



HAZAR JOFT, Afghanistan — An Afghan boy walks alongside U.S. Marine 1st Lt. Steve Rimmer, the 4th Platoon commander for Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, and a 29-year-old native of Knoxville, Tenn., while Rimmer and fellow Marines partner with Afghan National Police on a security patrol during the Garmsir district community council elections here, April 17, 2012. During the Afghan-led elections in Helmand province's Garmsir district, village elders accounted for more than 2,200 votes to fill 34 DCC seats. Approximately 200 members of the Afghan National Security Forces worked to secure the voting site by searching shops, vehicles and foot traffic while Marines with 3/3 observed from the periphery. Despite reports of potential insurgent activity during the elections, the event transpired without any incident.

# RCT-5 Family Fun



## SITREP from Page 1

Through the mentorship of civil affairs Marines operating under 2nd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment, 20-30 Afghan contracting companies are contributing to the development of infrastructure in the Marjah. This infrastructural growth has been especially evident in the steadily increasing school attendance, as Afghan students are moving from temporary facilities to permanent structures built by these contractors.

Also in Marjah, members of the National Interdiction Unit, an Afghan special forces unit focused on counternarcotics, continue the trend of Afghan-led operations to crack down on the illegal drug trafficking throughout the Bari Desert, west of the district. The NIU and their partners with 2nd Bn., 9th Marines, have had great success, capturing and destroying more than 6,000 pounds of narcotics over the last month. These counternarcotics operations target a key source of funding for the insurgency in southern Helmand. Their success has dealt a critical blow to insurgent efforts in the region, a particularly important accomplishment as coalition forces prepare to transfer lead security responsibility of the remainder of southern Helmand to Afghan forces and the district governments.

The Grizzly Gouge will continue to keep you informed on the actions and operations of RCT-5 Marines and Sailors for the duration of their deployment in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. The next edition of the Gouge is scheduled to be released the first week of June. The RCT-5 Public Affairs Office will continue to publish stories and photos detailing RCT-5's deployment from beginning to end. The two best places to see periodic coverage of events from southern Helmand province are the official RCT-5 Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/RegimentalCombatTeam5](http://www.facebook.com/RegimentalCombatTeam5)) and the RCT-5 DVIDS page (<http://www.dvidshub.net/units/RCT5-MD>).

## Congratulations to the following Marines on their promotions!

Cpl. Robert Garcia, Police Advisor Team  
Cpl. James Legg, S-6  
Cpl. Andrew Palser, S-6  
Cpl. Zachary Rowe, S-6  
Sgt. Pablo Flores Jr., S-4  
Sgt. Leonard Tavares Jr., S-4

## From the Dana Point 5th Marine Regiment Support Group

On the horizon is an incredible afternoon sailing voyage – Sunday, May 20 – for our women and children of the Fifth Marines. Generous Dana Pointers have donated their vessel to provide an unforgettable journey on the high seas for all ages! This adventure at sea will be on an 82-foot Historic Schooner, Curlew, out of the beautiful Dana Point Harbor. It will be a special event for the families of our Marines and Sailors and we can only hope that times like these will help you through the days until RCT-5 comes home. Special thanks to our wonderful Friends of our 5th Marines! We could not do what we do for our Regiment if not for the kind and generous communities surrounding us! Though there is a waiting list, please contact Kim Merkel and keep your fingers crossed so you may join the fun.

Our priorities now are to fundraise for an enduring tribute in the Memorial Park at San Mateo for our Fallen Heroes of Operation Enduring Freedom. Plans are underway and we are working closely with your Regiment so we may provide a Memorial where Marines and families can come and pay homage. Longer-range plans for the park also include monuments for other wars in which the Fighting Fifth has proudly fought.

DPSG is also prioritizing continued renovation of the Lt. Vincent R. Capodanno Memorial Chapel and its grounds, and also enhancing and improving its training facilities.

We are honored and privileged the City of Dana Point has adopted our Fighting Fifth Marines and hope that we may continue to support and take care of you and your families as you are taking care of ours. Thank you for fighting for our freedom and we appreciate the sacrifices you are making at home and abroad.

Visit our website [DanaPoint5thMarines.com](http://DanaPoint5thMarines.com). Click on the link titled "Join our email list" and enter your email address. Keep informed about our news, information, fundraising activities, and great community events. Visit [Facebook.com/DanaPoint5thMarines](https://www.facebook.com/DanaPoint5thMarines), click the LIKE button and tell your Facebook friends about DPSG. Follow us on [Twitter.com/DanaPoint5thMar](https://twitter.com/DanaPoint5thMar) for instant updates.

Yours in Service,  
Terry A. Rifkin

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## Family Readiness Assistants

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