

THE 31ST MEU'S LETTER



Commander's Greeting

To the Family Members of the 31st MEU:

Hello to all. I am proud to have the opportunity to command the 31st MEU and I look forward to getting to know as many of you as possible on Okinawa. For those family members that are in the States, I look forward to communicating with you and sharing our experiences from the Pacific. First, I wish to offer my gratitude to all of you for your past support and shared sacrifices to enable our Marines and Sailors to remain ready at all times and accomplish assigned missions. Without your support, it is clear that we as individuals, as well as this organization, would not be able to do what we do. I would also like to thank those family members and other volunteers that have put forth their time and energy to support our Family Readiness Organization. I look forward to meeting all of you.

This month will be busy as we say goodbye to members of the Command Element and CLB that are PCS'ing to other units in the Marine Corps, as well as the Marines that augmented our staffs for the Spring deployment. We are also giving our farewells to BLT 1/4, HMM-265, and VMA-311(-). Thank you all for a job well done! We will also be welcoming BLT 2/1, HMM-262, and VMA 542(-) as the latest members of our team. We will all get settled in and quickly turn to the important tasks required to safely and effectively prepare to embark and deploy with our brothers in the Navy.

Please pass this newsletter on to anyone we missed, and tell all of your friends about our eMarine webpage and other social media to help get our story out and show off the accomplishments of your loved ones. I would also like to encourage everyone to access e-Marine to get much more information about the MEU in general, our past and future activities, the latest updates, and lots of additional photos of your Marines and Sailors.



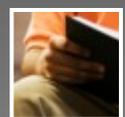
Col John E. Merna

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Deployment Contact Numbers

Family Readiness Officer: Mr. Rich Palma
Cell Phone: 080-1385-7132
Email: richard.palma@usmc.mil
Family Readiness Hotline: 623-4990

INTERNATIONAL DIALING

Family Readiness Officer: 011-81-80-1385-7132
Family Readiness Hotline: 011-81-611-723-4990

Sergeant Major's Message

I rarely quote movies, but I recently watched "Act of Valor" which is based on real acts of valor featuring active duty Navy Seals. Before the Seals go "down range" the Lieutenant addresses the Team:

"Once we step off on campaign and once this bird is ready and we're down range, everything back home needs to be in balance. We aren't going to be worth a damn to each other, or ourselves, if we get over there and something's out of whack. If things aren't right with the family, if things aren't right with the finances or something's off, it's going to put us all out of balance, so we need to have that tight before we launch. Everybody's got each other's back so lets make sure we lock that down so when we're ready to roll, all our focus is on the mission."

These words don't just apply to Navy Seals, but directly to the Marines and Sailors of the 30 BEST MEU! We are a family at the 31st MEU so we need to ensure that our own families, finances, foreseeable future issues are taken care of before we embark on our Fall deployment.

In regards to family, I'd like to personally welcome Colonel John E. Merna, our new Commanding Officer who will lead us from the front. Colonel Merna previously served as the Assistant Chief of Staff for logistics for 2nd Marine Division. He has also previously served as the Commander of Battalion Landing Team 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, during deployments with the 31st MEU in 2006, and the 11th MEU in 2008. Welcome aboard Sir!

Lastly, congratulations to the recent Elementary, Middle, College and High School graduates of Class 2012!

God Bless and Semper Fidelis!
Sergeant Major G.A. "Butch" Vasquez



The DSTRESS Line was developed by the Corps to provide professional, anonymous counseling for Marines, attached Sailors, and families when it is needed most. Initially started on the West Coast as a pilot program, the DSTRESS Line is now available Marine Corps-wide. The DSTRESS Line counselors are either certified civilian clinical workers or trained Marines, Sailors, and Military Spouses.

Call today to speak with one of your own.

Dial 645-7734 from any DSN phone.

Dial 098-970-7734 from any Local Japanese cell phone or Local Japanese landline telephone.

Dial 1-877-476-7734 from any regular U.S. based phone line or U.S. based VOIP Line (*Vonage, Skype, Magic Jack, etc.*).

FREE AND REDUCED LUNCH PROGRAM

The USDA National School Lunch Program is available to ALL students on Okinawa who qualify and are attending DoDEA Schools

Applications for school year 2012/2013 will be accepted starting 1 July 2012

Note: Re-application is required annually
New eligibility guidelines will take effect on 1 July 2012 and can be found at www.fns.usda.gov

For applications and submissions, please contact:
18 Mission Support Group, Bldg. 99, Kadena AB
School Liaison Office
(Behind Dunkin Donuts)
DSN: 632-5932/5934
Comm: 098-962-5932/5934
Email: 18msg.kadenalunchprogram@us.af.mil

Chaplain's Corner: Who is in Control?

Hi, my name is Nick and I'm a control freak. Such would be the beginnings of a support group meeting for control freaks if one were to exist. As many of you are aware, I have been out for the past 30 days recovering from total disk replacement surgery in my neck. Yes, it was a pain in the neck! (Lame pun intended). During our last week at sea during the spring cruise, I was hospitalized for a pinched nerve, ultimately determined to be caused by a slipped disk. After hearing all of the possible diagnoses, including the worst case scenarios, I remember lying back in my hospital bed thinking to myself, "There is no part of this I can control." Then I prayed, "Okay, Lord, let it be as you determine."

Over the past couple of months, I have spent a lot of time thinking about control. The things we can control in life and the things we cannot. I have come to realize that people respond to situations they cannot control in many ways. Some people continue looking for a way to control the uncontrollable; they assume that if they keep fighting, keep driving to control the situation, they will eventually find a way to bend it their will. Unfortunately, all they tend to accomplish is to make themselves and those around them miserable.

Other people become angry, bitter, and depressed believing that someone could have changed the situation but chose not to do so. They blame themselves and internalize those feeling becoming bitter and depressed. Some blame those around them and become hostile and very unpleasant to be around. Others blame God for things they have experienced and ultimately miss out on the blessings of eternity that He offers.

Control in life is really an illusion. The sooner one recognizes this truth; the happier he will be in life. With that in mind, may I turn your attention to what has come to be known as the Serenity Prayer:

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;

Taking, as He did, this sinful world
as it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right
if I surrender to His Will;
That I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with Him
Forever in the next.
Amen

--Reinhold Niebuhr

In My Humble Opinion (IMHO)

Spouses,

Overpayments and underpayments are a common mistake in the military. During deployments and relocation, it is even more common especially in the pay areas that change. Once the mistake is found, the government will take it back, and they will take it back all at once. I have encountered this more than once. This last deployment we were overpaid multiple times. Then in another pay period we were \$700 short! Luckily we were prepared, but that could have really hurt. Many families have had to go into financial counseling because of this. If you watch for those overpayments, you can save the money for the day that the government realizes its error and reclaims those misappropriated funds. Or even better, when you notice a mistake, your Service Member can talk to admin to verify and correct it sooner rather than later. In the case of a serious accounting error, some organizations (such as the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society) can help you survive paying back money or an underpayment by way of an interest-free loan. Because a mistake like this is almost inevitable, I encourage you to watch for this in your spouse's Leave and Earnings Statement (LES).*

- Liz Jensen

*Contact Rich, your FRO, if you would like more information on understanding the LES.

Resource Spotlight: Okinawa Area Emergency Evacuation Plan (OAEPP)

Recent events have highlighted the need for a standardized system of evacuating non-emergency essential personnel and their family members from areas outside of the United States. In the past, the system being used to evacuate Air Force personnel and their families, for example, was different from the way the Marine Corps conducted such operations. Today, military units on the island have adopted the Okinawa Area Emergency Evacuation Plan (OAEPP) as a way to ensure that such personnel and family members can be moved to a safer location without unnecessary delay.

While this plan requires a lot of ground work during the preparation phase, it will give Service Members and their families peace of mind, knowing that they can resume their lives if the ever have to pick up and leave for a while.

The OAEPP [website](#) has all the necessary forms for creating your packet. The idea here is that you have all this documentation in a single evacuation information packet (EIP) so that in the event of an emergency evacuation, you can grab the family and your EIP and leave to safety. Six areas are covered in the EIP: introduction, identification of family members and pets, evacuation forms and orders, finance and household good, automobiles and residence, and other important documentation, such as insurance records, school records, funds to transport pets, etc.

Preparedness is key. Like the Family Care Plan, the EIP will be another tool for Service Members to use in their goals of overall mission readiness. It is infinitely better to do the legwork during the calm, rather than chasing down everything when a crisis is at hand. A sample EIP is available on [eMarine](#). There is also an [OAEPP workshop](#) being hosted by 4th Marines on 17 July from 1100 to 1300 at the III MEF Family Readiness Center. Bring your in-progress OAEPP to the workshop and have the subject matter expert provide additional guidance for completing an EIP for your family's needs. Your FRO is also a good source of EIP information.



From the FRO

We are now dead in the middle of our rotation of personnel. Farewell to those who have departed and hail to those who have just joined us. I look forward to being your Family Readiness Officer for the upcoming deployment cycles. I hope you all will attend our pre-deployment brief as it is filled with so much information about the 31st MEU. It is also your chance to ask the Commanding Officer any questions you may have. Dates and times to follow soon.

As you can see we have another typhoon heading our way. We were lucky last time that it turned away at the last moment. Are you ready? You can keep track of the storm via our Facebook site as we will continue to update as long as we have power. You may also receive updates on AFN and the radio at 89.1 FM and 648 AM.

Remember, I am here for you! Do not hesitate to call.

Rich

31st MEU Moments



Find more pictures and updates on our [eMarine](#) page!

Editor's Corner: Spouses' Orange Honors Scholarship Scoop

Spouses,

Are you looking for a little financial assistance to help you with your educational building blocks as you move towards your dream career? Here's a little scoop:

The Home Depot, the world's largest home improvement retailer, is teaming up with Military Spouse Magazine for the very first Orange Honors Scholarship award as the education sponsor. The Home Depot will award a deserving candidate or "Orange Honor" a significant scholarship toward the pursuit of his or her college degree.

An essay (between 750 and 1250 words in length) is to be submitted detailing how earning a college degree would have a positive impact on the candidate's life. Entries can be submitted starting May 28, 2012 through July 3, 2012 at <http://www.baseguide.com/contests/homedepotfiles/homedepotindex.html>. The essay must be entirely original work and must mention what subject area the candidate is planning to study and how he or she plans on using the degree obtained. Essays will be reviewed by our selection committee: Babette Maxwell, Co-founder and Executive Editor of Military Spouse magazine, Bianca Strzalkowski, 2011 Military Spouse of the Year and Melissa Rayworth, Managing Editor of Military Spouse magazine.

Ten finalists will be chosen and then submitted to The Home Depot for final selection of the winner. To be considered for this scholarship, candidates must be the spouse of an active duty service member or the spouse of an active Reservist. There is no restriction on the rank of the spouses military member. Applicants must be already enrolled in school or accepted to be enrolled by the spring semester of 2013. The winner will receive \$10,000 toward tuition paid directly to their school's financial department.

Contact Rich if you have questions about other scholarship or financial assistance resources for helping you towards your aspirations.

Upcoming Events

July

2012

“The time to repair the roof is when the sun is shining.”

- John F. Kennedy

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17 OAEEP Workshop (Courtney bldg. 4319, 1100-1300)	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

Click any  MEU-hosted event to send in your response if you would like to attend.

If you would like to contribute an informational article, an Okinawa experience, or any military experience, send your submissions to the FRO by the third Friday of the month.