

3/1 Pre-Deployment Brief Notes

March 25, 2010

***Opening Comments from LtCol Watson**

Readiness:

LtCol Watson stressed that while this will be a challenging deployment for 3/1, the battalion is extremely well-trained and prepared to meet this challenge and make a real difference.

Connectivity:

Communications during this deployment will likely be very different from previous deployments and LtCol Watson urges families not to expect the kinds of contact available in other deployments.

Marines will have occasional access to phones (most often shared satellite phones) and limited access to the internet. There are a variety of factors that may affect how often a Marine can call or e-mail home, including his in-theater location and his job with the battalion.

Please be patient with connectivity issues and recognize that communications will be limited. If however, a family member needs to get in touch with their Marine or is concerned about the length of time since their last communication, they should contact the FRO, Paul Walters.

There may also be times that the battalion's communication systems are shut down, a situation Marines call "River City"; this could occur in order to preserve operational security before a maneuver or if 3/1 or a nearby unit sustains casualties to ensure that family members are notified through the proper channels. LtCol Watson and SgtMaj Samuels will maintain contact with Paul, even in the case of River City, so if family members need to contact their Marines, they should get in touch with the FRO.

Availability:

Please ensure that you maintain accurate contact information with the FRO at all times. This is essential to ensure that you are receiving important battalion information.

If you are going away from home, even if only for a few days, please update the FRO with your location so that contact can be maintained. This is essential to ensure that any notifications reach you as quickly as possible.

***IPAC Brief**

See slideshow presentation for information on changes in pay during the deployment, including Family Separation Allowance (FSA), Hostile Fire Pay, Hardship Duty Location Pay (HDP-L), Deployed per diem, Combat Leave & Tax Exclusion, and SGLI.

***Marine Corps Family Team Building (MCFTB) brief**

Marine Corps Family Team Building Classes:

MCFTB offers a variety of classes during deployment including In the Midst events for spouses and children, Return and Reunion Briefs, LINKS, and Life Skills classes. These classes not only offer a wealth of information on Marine Corps life, but they can be a great way to get out and meet other Marine Corps families. Classes are available to spouses and to parents of Marines, and free childcare is available when you attend a class.

To Do List:

Spouses should agree on a clear plan for budgeting during the deployment, including how to use the extra combat pay discussed in the IPAC brief. Marines need to ensure that their spouse has access to their LES; MyPay now allows Marines to create an alternate pin so that their spouse can view their LES without the ability to change allotments. It is important that spouses carefully monitor their Marine's LES during the deployment to ensure that the Marine is receiving his combat pay and to ensure that their Marine is not overpaid. If a Marine is accidentally overpaid, even due to a computer glitch, USMC will take that overpayment out of the Marine's paycheck in one lump sum as soon as the error is noticed.

The Navy Marine Corps Relief Society offers 0% interest loans for family emergencies. In order to take advantage of these loans while their Marine is forward spouses needs authorization; Marines must file a Navy Marine Corps Relief Society form or give their spouse a special power of attorney. It is very important to make sure this is done before the Marine leaves.

Marines should also create a special power of attorney for their spouse so that the spouse has the ability to take care of business on the Marines behalf while he is away. Spouses will need powers of attorney to access, for example, any student loan accounts or bills that come only in the Marine's name. Not all banks or credit card companies accept USMC powers of attorney, and it is important to call and check before the Marine deploys.

Spouses should check to ensure that their military ID will not expire during the deployment. This ID cannot be renewed or replaced without a power of attorney while the Marine is forward.

Personal Preparation:

Camp Pendleton offers vehicle storage while Marines are deployed. The cost is \$10 per month with a \$60 down payment up front. This \$60 will cover the first 6 months of storage.

In order to save some extra money during the deployment, forward Marines can be removed as authorized users from their car insurance during the deployment. Just remember to have his insurance reinstated before he returns home!

The Service Members Civil Relief Act allows military members to use orders in order to cancel contracts such as leases. Please note, however, that this Act does not apply to spouses. If a spouse is on the lease, she cannot use the Act to cancel it and unless the leasing agency makes a special exception, she will be held to the terms of the lease. Base Legal offers walk-ins starting at 0700 on Tuesdays and Thursday. This can be a great resource for questions about breaking contracts and leases.

If spouses are going home during the deployment please note that TMO will NOT pay for your moving expenses; this will be your responsibility. Also remember to alert TriCare if you will be going home so that they can set you up with a primary care physician in your area. TriCare suggests that you notify them if you will be leaving the area for more than 14 days to ensure that you will be covered for any emergency medical care during that time.

If a Marine plans to vote while he is deployed, he needs to remember to apply for absentee ballots. This also applies to spouses going home for the deployment.

Children:

Keep an eye to your children's unique needs during the deployment. Letters from dad to each kid is a great way to make children feel special. Deployed Marines can also participate in the United Through Reading program through the Chaplain's office, and children can take advantage of classes offered through MCFTB.

It is required that single parents fill out a Family Care Plan. This form will ensure that children are taken care of if their primary care person becomes incapacitated. Please note that this document is not legally binding and will not override a custody agreement.

Any spouse or child with a special need—from severe asthma to ADD to autism—is required to be registered with the Exceptional Family Member program. The program is a great resource to families, offering programs and services like 40 hours a month of free respite care.

Spouses with children have access to 16 hours per month of free childcare through the Armed Services YMCA during the deployment. This program is available anywhere in the country; spouses outside of the Camp Pendleton area should contact their local YMCA.

Military OneSource is an excellent free source of information and resources available online and by phone 24/7, 365 days a year for all family members. They offer things like translation

services, 12 free counseling sessions during a deployment, and DVDs about deployment for children.

Casualty Notification Process:

In the event of a casualty, CACOs goal is to notify families within 8 hours of the incident; their notification hours are between 0500 and 2400. It is very important to understand the casualty notification process since there have been recent reports of scam artists posing as CACO to gain access to personal information and perpetrate identity theft. Families will always be notified of a death in person. This is why it is essential for family members to keep their FRO informed of any changes of address or trips away from home. CACO will arrive in their Service A uniform (the green uniform), never their dress blues, and will never come alone. When at all possible they will arrive with a chaplain. Families will be notified about injuries or illnesses by phone. If possible the Marine will call himself; if not, the call will come from Headquarters. You will never be asked to provide information about your Marine. Remember when you hear things on TV that no news from your Marine is always good news.

Red Cross Messages:

In case of emergencies, families should utilize the Red Cross message system. There have been some recent changes to the system, and now there is one national line for contacting the Red Cross. The number for the Red Cross is 1-877-272-7337. The Red Cross will only pass messages about legitimate emergencies—births, deaths, or serious injuries—and they will ask for information to verify the emergency before passing the message. Emergency leave is approved by the command on a case-by-case basis, and a Red Cross message does not automatically mean that a Marine will be released to come home.

Communication:

The primary form of communication to Marines deployed to Afghanistan is old-fashioned USPS mail. Another option for families is Moto-Mail (www.motomail.us). Families type their message into a secure online program, their letter is printed, sealed, and either delivered by hand to the Marine or delivered with the mail. MotoMail also has the option for families to upload photos to go with their letter. Please remember not to send any inappropriate pictures!

Care Packages:

Anyone planning to send care packages during the deployment should call the Post Office (1-800-610-8734) for a care package kit, which will include 10 flat rate boxes and packing supplies. USPS flat rate boxes are the best way to send packages to our Marines. No matter what weight, packages ship in these boxes for under \$15, and FedEx and UPS packages do not get to Marines any faster than USPS packages.

***Chaplain Lee's comments**

The chaplain's office will be participating in the United Through Reading program, which gives Marines the opportunity to be recorded reading a children's book and will be provided with a DVD of the recording to send home to their children.

Spouses are encouraged to utilize chaplain support on base.

After the deployment couples will have access to several marriage retreats as well as counseling sessions through Military OneSource.

***FRO Comments**

In the next few weeks Paul will be getting the Mass Communication Tool up and running. The Mass Communication Tool is a system for passing official messages via phone and e-mail during the deployment and is similar to school alert systems and reverse 911. Paul will be testing the system before the main body departure. If you receive a call from the Mass Communication Tool, "US Gov" will appear on your caller ID. You will hear a prompt (a beep) and then the message will follow. You will be asked to press 1 to acknowledge that you have received the message. If you receive an e-mail from the system you will be asked to click on a link to acknowledge that you have received the message. The system will continue to make contact with you until you acknowledge receipt of the message. Note that no casualty information will ever be distributed through the Mass Communication Tool.

The face of the unit website is changing, and the new site should be up and running soon. The web address is <http://www.i-mef.usmc.mil/div/1mar/3bn/default.asp>. The new site will be an excellent source of information during the deployment and will be updated regularly with things like monthly newsletters and approved information.

Mail should be sent to Marines via the company he is deploying with. When copying down addresses please note that each company has a different unit number.

Please be aware of and protect your personal security at all times while your Marine is deployed. Things like yellow ribbons on the house, "Half My Heart is in Afghanistan" bumper stickers, and Twitter and Facebook messages about your deployed Marine put you at risk. They alert the world that your Marine is gone and that you are living alone.

Please also be aware of operational security. Posting information online about troop movement, location, and missions puts our Marines at risk.

***Closing Comments from LtCol Watson**

Be aware that mail is taking about 2 weeks to get from home to Afghanistan. Keep this in mind when sending letter and packages and when looking for mail from your Marine.

Enjoy the leave block! Be aware that the week we come back from leave will be a full work week.

Our deployment window remains the same, and exact dates for movements will not be available until a few days prior.