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President’s message

Greetings, Marines:

This time I promise that I’ll be short. First I’d like to thank Frank, Becky, Ray, Kathleen and Gordon for a great reunion. There was always something going on and the beer and goodies dishes were never empty. I would also like to thank the members who volunteered to help support the association with monetary donations and those who offered to take over difficult positions within the structure of our organization. It was great to see many old friends and see how much older and fatter we have all gotten and also good to have a beer for those that couldn’t make it this year but we know that their hearts were with us and ours with them. Thanks again to Ila Bench for joining us and we hope that you will continue to consider us a part of your family.

The board of officers has spent hours trying to carve out a path that the association should follow to remain a viable organization. We think that we have made some progress and will continue to try to expand our goals.

During this reunion, your association presented to the Commanding General of MCRD San Diego a work of art created by the wife of a Medal of Honor winner and signed by 36 living MOH winners. It will hang in the museum. We will also present one to CG MCRD Parris Island and to the Marine Corps Museum.

One more issue that I would like all of you to ponder and then I will say adios. We have been sending 100 free copies of the Sea Horse to the active battalion each edition. Some think that we should continue this practice, some think that we should stop. WHAT DO YOU THINK? Please let me know by e-mail, or snail mail, or call me.

I know that there is a team working hard on next year’s reunion and I know that it, too, will be a great one. So until then…

Semper Fi,
Jack

2/4 Memorial at the new Marine Corps Heritage Center

Information submitted by Bill Weise and Jack Petrowsky

The association voted in the past to have an appropriate 2/4 Memorial at the new Marine Corps Heritage Center (MCHC), Quantico, VA. The National Marine Corps Museum, a $60,000,000, state of the art facility, is the centerpiece of the 135-acre facility and is scheduled to open in November 2006. Separate from, but close, to the museum will be Semper Fidelis Park, a wooded trail with a chapel on one end and a pond with fountain on the other. The park is where units and individuals may establish memorials, and that is where ours should go.

A committee consisting of General Weise, Fritz Warren, Dale Robinson and Jim Mazy has been appointed and will work on the project for 2/4. Our association has pledged to donate $10,000 to the project, thanks to a donation of $5,000 by one of the members at this year's reunion.
"Thank you, 2/4"

Dear "Magnificent Bastards,"

Time with 2/4 friends at this San Diego reunion was really special! Yes…it was somewhat of an emotional roller coaster, but I expect all of them are like that for most of you! It meant a lot to me to hear from many of you about your experiences with Gene; and now, reading the books written by Randy Kington and Ken Sympson, I’m learning even more about the whole “picture.”

Frank and Becky were great hosts, and the banquet speaker opened an interesting door to give us a peek through his eyes into the present work in Iraq.

Thank you so very much for all you did to make this trip very special for me! I like to think Gene’s spirit was there with us, too!

Semper Fi,
Ila Bench

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**2004–2006 2/4 Association Officers and Chairs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>E-mail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>706 729-0043. E-mail: <a href="mailto:chesty64@usmc.net">chesty64@usmc.net</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.geocities.com.chesty64">http://www.geocities.com.chesty64</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sergeant at Arms</td>
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The 2/4 Association Sea Horse is published quarterly, and is the official newsletter of the Second Battalion, Fourth Marines Association, Inc.
talion COs and the senior enlisted men to reflect that the award should be to an NCO who has not attained the rank of E-6 or above and that the Staff NCOs of the battalion were to be the personnel to do the selection. The selection board is chaired by the Sergeant Major and the company First Sergeants. The final approval is then acknowledged by the battalion commander. More akin to the enlisted selecting their own.

Not to forget our FMF Corpsmen, the association also presents an award to the Corpsman of the year who is also selected during the same process. Just recently this award was named the Walter “Doc” Gorsage Corpsman Award to honor one of 2/4’s all-time great Corpsman who was more Marine then he was sailor. As of 2005, to supplement this award, an anonymous donor also presents the selected Corpsman with a portrait of Ben Franklin on a fresh $100 bill to go along with his plaque.

Col Arnold Eugene Bench, USMC
Submitted by Ila Kelley Bench

(Editor’s note: This is the third in a series of articles on past commanding officers of the “Magnificent Bastards.” Then LtCol Bench was the CO of 2/4 from July 6, 1966, to July 15, 1967. This is a little different from the previous articles in that it is from his wife’s, Ila Bench’s, perspective. Ila, thank you very much for helping all of us know Col Bench a little better. Col Bench died June 22, 2001. Semper Fi, sir.)

He was “A Marine’s Marine,” dedicated, compassionate, loyal, and courageous, with great respect and admiration for Marine Corps comrades, both superiors and subordinates. Several have told him that principles of leadership they learned from him shaped their own careers—some military, and some civilian.

Arnold Eugene Bench (better known, except officially, as Gene) was born in Fordland, Missouri, April 13, 1925, to James and Zula Bench, the youngest of four children. His father was a disabled WWI veteran, and the family became very close as they worked together to survive the depression years. Even as poor as they were, (in Gene’s words) “The children were imbued with a fierce sense of patriotism, a catalog of principles and ethics which defy challenge, and a deep respect for our Creator. There was always loyalty to the flag, national holidays, and anything patriotic.”

His parents usually tried to keep access to a cow, whether milking a neighbor’s or owning one, shared some pork with neighbors, and depended a lot upon chickens for food. They sometimes picked cotton, and one winter their main income was from selling walnut kernels they hand-picked from the nuts they gathered from wild black walnut trees that grew in the area. In one of his stories, this is the way Gene described the operation: “Dad devised a clever shucking device to get the outer shells removed from the walnuts. He built a seasoned oak trough that had about \( \frac{1}{2} \)-inch clearance from a car tire, with a flared flume to its front. Then he jacked up a rear wheel of the car off the

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### 2/4 Association PX Merchandise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Items</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Logo patch. 2”</td>
<td>$3.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Logo patch. 4”</td>
<td>$5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logo pin</td>
<td>$5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweatshirt. Red with EGA on back and Sea Horse silhouette on front</td>
<td>$35.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polo shirts. Red, white, blue or maroon</td>
<td>$25.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>T-shirt. Black, green or gray, with full color logo on front</td>
<td>$15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-shirt. 2004 reunion</td>
<td>$10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee mug. Black with white logo</td>
<td>$5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thermal mug</td>
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| Various sizes (rocks, hot/cold). Logo patch between molded plastic. Sets and singles. Check with Jack for sizes and prices. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Books</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What a Life, Randy Kington.</td>
<td>$22.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Images from the Otherland, Ken Sympson.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The First Battle—Operation Starlite, Otto Lohrak.</td>
<td>$25.00</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Videos</th>
<th>Price</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dai Do Memories.</td>
<td>$25.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001 Reunion, Quantico, VA. Includes visits to The Wall, Iwo Jima Memorial, etc.</td>
<td>$10.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ordering Instructions:**

Please e-mail Jack for sizes and item availability. We are looking for suggestions for additional PX items. I am looking at windbreakers, but am being put off by the price. Keep in mind that the PX is stocked by funds from the Association, so we must stock items that will go quickly, both at reunions and during the following year. Shipping and handling equal to USPS charges will be added to each order.

2/4 Association PX  
c/o Jack Petrowsky  
PO Box 7214  
Las Cruces, NM 88006-7214
ground, carefully placing the chute under the tire, with the rear of the car about ten feet from the solid side of the chicken house. With the jacked-up wheel rotating, walnuts were poured into the front of the chute and the hulls were deftly separated from the shells by the spinning tire, shucking them and throwing them against the chicken house. The shucked walnuts, being heavier than the hulls, piled up against the chicken house, and the hulls fell short. Then the walnuts were spread to dry. A careful balance was sought between keeping enough moisture in the walnut meats to maintain weight, and yet be suitable for picking out. A compression-type nutcracker from Sears, Roebuck, which looked very much like a small hydraulic jack, was fastened to a sturdy bench, where Dad cracked washtub after washtub full of walnuts."

![Col Arnold E. Bench—1970](image)

This is the official USMC photograph of Col Bench taken upon his promotion to Colonel.

Gene’s flair for drama was discovered at about age three. In his words: “Dad taught me a little ditty, and at the next community meeting of some sort, I was stood up on a table at the front of the room, and let forth with, ‘When I’m a little man, I’ll do the best I can; when I get a little bigger, I’ll cut a bigger figger.’” (His life proved those words to be true!) Committing to memory was easy and fun for him. Throughout school years he performed in drama groups, and after they moved back to Ava, he also performed at money-raising socials sponsored by the Ava Lions Club.

If you’ve ever wondered what happened to the little finger that was missing from his left hand, this is his description: “It was at the Adams farm that Dad added a new cow to our herd. She was bought in Ava, and it fell to my lot to lead her to her new home. The first mile of the trip home was on a paved highway, and although she was gentle, she had become quite agitated by trucks and other traffic. About a mile from town we turned off the paved road, and she decided to run! She ran for about three- or four-hundred yards and turned into a lane. I saw this as an opportunity to get control again and tried to snub her lead rope around a tree. I wound up in a pile at the foot of the tree with a broken arm, a left little finger missing, and the imprint of the tree from my left cheek to my left knee. I gathered up my broken arm in my right hand and walked to the door of the house in whose yard we had crashed. I knocked on the door with my right elbow, and an older couple came to the door. They were both so taken aback that I had to instruct them in how they could help me. The man was able to regain his composure, and stopped a younger boy than I who was walking along the road. The boy was asked to go back to the paved highway and request the neighbor there to drive me to the doctor. Someone was sent to notify my folks, and they arrived while I was with the doctor. I was given ether for an anesthetic and the doctor proceeded with repairs. I wore a cast on my arm for a month, and went on with my life.”

When WWII started, the family lived in the town of Ava. After his two sisters and his brother graduated from high school, they all became “connected with uniforms.” One sister worked in California with the Ferry Command; the other sister became a nurse; and his brother joined the Coast Guard. Gene said, “The fourteen months from the start of the war until I entered the Marine Corps were some of the most frustrating ones of my life. I eagerly wanted to ‘fix’ this Japanese ‘thing,’ and my nation looked at me as a school kid!” He stayed in school until midyear, and was one credit short of graduation. He appealed to the principal who waived the credit, and with his dad’s permission, he joined the Marine Corps in February 1943, at age seventeen.

Boot camp was at San Diego, California. In his words, “From the outset, I was ‘chomping at the bit’ to get into the war.” Through testing procedures he was assigned to a technical school in Grove City, Pennsylvania, and for the next sixteen months attended other technical schools in Corpus Christi, Texas, and in New Bern, North Carolina. He finished the schooling with the rank of Staff Sergeant, and within two months, was awarded another stripe.

Gene’s words: “I finally was able to get into the war as an Aviation Radar Chief in a composite air group of F6F night fighters, TBM (torpedo bomber), and Corsair fighters on an aircraft carrier—USS *Block Island*. A part of the group was formed at Cherry Point, North Carolina, trained at El Centro, California, and Barber’s Point, Hawaii, en route to the carrier which proceeded to the Pacific war zone.

“The planes from the ship were used in close air support for the assaulting troops when there was a landing. As soon as an airstrip was captured or built, the air group, or at least part of it, moved ashore and finished the campaign, operating on land. Our first campaign was in the Philippines, and then we participated in various other landings, including the invasion of Okinawa. I always made it a point to get ashore as soon as I could, or take the second sortie of the day by relieving the tail gunner in a TBM."
“Two days before the war ended our ship was assigned the mission of picking up over 700 prisoners of war being held in Taipei, Formosa (now Taiwan). To accomplish this, a group of us went ashore on the east side of the island, commandeered a train, and crossed the island to Taipei where the Japanese obsequiously turned over the prisoners. Although average sized men, none of them weighed as much as 100 pounds. We took the prisoners back to the ship where they were very carefully fed five small, carefully selected, meals a day. We proceeded to Manila, and turned them over to a hospital group.

“We again sailed north, awaiting the orders to invade Japan. Then, fortuitously, the dropping of the second atomic bomb convinced a fanatic enemy to end the war.”

After discharge at the end of the war, Gene returned to Missouri and enrolled in the engineering school at the University of Missouri, Columbia, in the summer of 1946. The campus had used temporary buildings to expand classroom and living facilities to accommodate the returning veterans going to school with the benefits of the GI Bill, and Gene found himself living in a wooden frame building in an area that was referred to as “pneumonia gulch.” There were four men to a unit, and one of his four was named Joe Belshe. Joe was dating Barbara Kelley, one of his high school friends, who Gene met at a basketball game. Gene took a liking to her and asked, “Are there any more at home like you?” It so happened that Barbara was my younger sister, and we lived in the same house on campus. A double date was arranged, and Gene’s world—and mine—was at that moment forever changed! After three months we knew we would be married—it was just a matter of when. The wedding date was August 1, 1948, so we finished our final year of college as Mr. and Mrs. Gene stayed at the university for a master’s degree in guidance and counseling while I taught high school home economics in the nearby town of New Franklin.

In the fall of 1950, Gene began a career in education—setting up a guidance and counseling program plus teaching math—at the high school in Esther, Missouri (a small town southwest of St. Louis). He had maintained membership in the Marine Corps Reserve, so with the Korean War in progress, he was recalled to active duty two months after the beginning of school, with orders to report to the 8th Marines, 2d Marine Division, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, where his assignment was First Sergeant. After about a month there, he received a commission, which required attendance at Basic School in Quantico, Virginia; and probably because of his background in education, he was retained there as an Instructor for nine more months.

To be back in “The Corps” felt like home to Gene, and for the next twenty-two years he enjoyed serving as an infantry officer in various positions around the world including: Guard Officer in Naples, Italy; Staff Officer, 3d Marines, 3d Marine Division at Camp Fuji, Japan; Officer Selection Officer, Minneapolis, Minnesota; Student, Marine Corps Intermediate School; Operations Officer, 2d Battalion, 2d Marines (“Second to None”) at Guantanamo Bay during the Cuban crisis; Marine Officer Instructor at Oregon State University from 1963 to 1966; Commanding Officer of 2d Battalion, 4th Marines in Vietnam from 1966 to 1967; Head of the Briefing Branch at CINCPAC in Hawaii; student at the National War College, Washington, D.C. (where he earned another master’s degree, this time in international affairs); staff duty at Marine Corps Headquarters; temporary Senior Officer of a detachment in London, England; and finally, a member of the Inspector General team which traveled out of Washington, D.C.

Along the way he was awarded twenty-one medals, including the Silver Star, Legion of Merit, Bronze Star with gold star and combat “V,” the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry, and the Purple Heart.

After Gene retired in 1973, from thirty years of military service, we moved to Corvallis, Oregon. By now we thought our two children, Rebecca (“Becky”), age fourteen, and David, age ten, would benefit by some stability—especially for their high school years. Some Marine students here at OSU have asked me, what effect their dad’s military career had on our children. From what we have observed, it seemed to be enriching for them to live in different places, learning how to make new friends, adjusting to local customs, and they always seemed to enjoy it. During the considerable traveling we did during leave times, we made a point of observing historical and geographical interests, adding to the benefits of being “gypsies.” One day soon after David began school here (in the fifth grade), I was amused when he remarked to me, “Mom, did you know that many of my friends at school have never been out of Oregon?” I had to explain that people have to live where their parents find work. We were able to travel because our dad’s work happened to be in a lot of different places.

The year that Gene was in Vietnam was probably more psychologically difficult for them than we realized at the time. Becky was seven; David was three. I didn’t allow them to watch news on TV, because there was always more vio-
Here’s a way to help a young Marine option student

At the 2005 reunion, Ila Bench told the members about a Memorial Award and Scholarship fund that has been established at Oregon State University. The fund is in memory of Col Bench, and annual awards are made to assist Marine option students who are on their way to becoming Marine officers. If you wish to contribute, fill out the form, above, and send it to:

The Benton County Foundation
P.O. Box 911
Corvallis, OR 97339

After “I want my gift to be in memory of,” enter “Col A.E. ‘Gene’ Bench.” After “I want my gift to be used for,” write in “Scholarship.” After “Add my gift to the,” enter “Military Science.” Then circle “Scholarship Fund.”

For more information on The Benton County Foundation, go to <www.bentoncountyfoundation.org>. Or call 541 753-1603.

The number of Americans killed that day. One day, I realized that even at age three, David understood the reporting when he said, “My daddy is in Vietnam. Is he going to get killed?” After an instant of quick thinking, I said, “Well, Vietnam is quite a large country, and we’ll hope he won’t be where people are getting killed.” After David was grown up, we discovered that he hadn’t felt comfortable, as a child and teenager, talking to Gene about Vietnam—fearing the memories might be difficult for Gene; but when there was an opportunity to go with the tour group to the area where Gene was with 2/4 in Vietnam, they went on the trip together. It was a very rewarding and bonding experience for both of them. After that, they were able to freely discuss Gene’s original experiences there.

In retirement Gene continued to be active, especially with his favorite hobbies of fishing (salmon, steelhead, trout, bass, clams, crabs, mussels, crawdads, and such), and hunting (deer, elk, bear, and ducks). He worked as an agent with Farm Bureau Insurance (now Country Companies) for fifteen years, and was an area chairman with ESGR (Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve) for several years. Organization interests included the Izaak Walton League (conservation), Silvies Club (hunting group), Mary’s River Masonic Lodge 221, Retired Officers Club of Corvallis, Boy Scouts, Calvin Presbyterian Church, bridge clubs, bowling, and puttering with the computer or around our place.

Being a Marine wife was very enjoyable for me. I loved traveling and living in all of the twenty some houses we made into homes from the time when we were students and educators to this home in Oregon. In each place there were interesting challenges, always love, and a variety of cultures—Naples, London, Hawaii, Minnesota, Virginia, North Carolina, Oregon, and Missouri—more than once in several of the states. In each place, we spent time with sightseeing adventures and local activities, even to picking up some southern accent in the South!

From our home in Naples we toured much of southern Europe; from London, the British Isles and more of Europe. Living in London, we had the added fun of having the children along, when they were old enough (ages seven and eleven) to benefit from experiences there. Also in London, one of Gene’s duties, as senior Marine in the area, was to host the Marine Corps Birthday. We made it a very special formal dinner occasion at the Grosvenors House Hotel, with several ranking invited guests—members of the staff from the other services, and from the Embassy office—and, of course, all of the Marines. The guests of honor were Sir Peter Hellings, Commandant of the Royal Marines, and his wife. The consequence of that was equally exciting—being luncheon guests in their home with several Royal Marine officers and their wives!

Duty in Hawaii was especially rewarding after the year in Vietnam. We lived in Navy base housing at McGrew Point, in view of the Arizona Memorial, and most of Gene’s work was Head of the Briefing Branch of Headquarters, Pacific Command. That meant that early every morning he reported to a star-studded audience the previous day’s activities and
operations of the military units in the Pacific area—
including, of course, Vietnam. He was always especially
interested in the work of Battalion 2/4, and I remember that
he was very sad when he reported the battle at Dai Do. The
two years there seemed like a wonderful, long vacation
when we had time to enjoy the beaches, and to have R & R a
couple of times on the Big Island at a resort near the Kilauea
volcano.

Being in Cuba during the missile crisis was quite a chal-
lengeing assignment for Gene. The battalion had just finished
training exercises in Vieques, and was loaded up to return to
Camp Lejeune, when it was ordered to proceed to Guan-
tanamo Bay without delay. The troops, of course, were
primed for action, so as operations officer, Gene and his
staff had to use a lot of imagination to invent activities to
keep them occupied while waiting to see if they would be
needed. The Cubans on the other side of the fence some-
times taunted, which didn’t help the situation. To distract
them, the Marines did such things as change the numbers on
vehicles frequently to make it appear that the vehicles they
were using were more numerous; set up a dummy device to
look like an electronic receiver of some sort, to which a per-
son periodically walked, as if checking it, wrote on a pad,
and walked away; they even conducted a mustache-growing
contest; and many other things I don’t remember.

I could write a book about our fifty-three years together!
(Who knows, maybe I will!) Life with Gene Bench was an
adventure with a capital “A”! I was a rather conservative,
naive dreamer, curious about faraway places and the people
who lived there. Gene made it possible for some of the
gypsy in me to be satisfied! I think Gene felt that his work in
Vietnam was his most challenging professional adventure.
I’ve heard him say that he “left a large chunk of his soul”
with the many dedicated Marines with whom he served—
some who even gave their lives to their service. He talked a
lot about his “Magnificent Bastards” during his final illness.
But we would both agree that our greatest and most reward-
ing adventure was becoming parents to Becky and David—
learning and growing with them and their mates, Brian and
Michelle. Then, experiencing the joy of being grandparents
to Leah, Thomas, and Evan—and great grandparents to
Maureece! All of this isn’t to say there haven’t been some
down times—especially separations when Gene had unac-
accompanied duty, but we discovered that with every problem
came some blessings and learning experiences.

Even with the diagnosis of cancer, we didn’t panic—it was
just another assignment, another battle to try to win. The
words “in sickness and in health” became not merely words
in marriage vows, but truths that go to the very heart of shar-
ing one’s life with another person. They emphasize the truth
of “Love is patient and kind—love bears all things, hopes all
things, endures all things. Love never ends.” And, after all,
love is all that matters! We received an awesome outpouring
of love from family and friends, far and near. There were
many letters and calls from Marines who had served with
Gene in years past. Those helped him more than medicine!
Gene’s final day of life was my birthday. A quartet of teenage young men from our church, good friends of Gene’s, came that morning, along with our pastor, his wife, and daughter, to sing for us (a cappella). After three or four songs the boys beautifully sang from the church hymnal, they sang “The Marine Corps Hymn” with gusto! (They had looked it up on the internet and learned it especially for Gene!) Then they concluded with singing “Happy Birthday!” During the afternoon he visited separately with each of our family members, and his sister who had been with us for a few days, to bid his final farewells. In the evening, he had a bite of birthday cake with all of us, humorously contributed some jokes, and settled in for the night. Death came in his sleep early the next morning. I like to imagine that when he received his final orders from the Supreme Commander of us all, they read, “Well done, My faithful servant. I am ordering your spirit to proceed to My Presence on Saturday morning, June 22, 2001, via the 2/4 reunion at Quantico, Virginia. Your ‘Magnificent Bastards’ will be having their Memorial Service at that time, and they will feel your spirit there with them.”

Brothers in arms
In Fallujah, U.S. Marine advisers are trying to develop a few good men
By Julian E. Barnes

FALLUJAH, IRAQ—For two nights in a row, shadowy gunmen took a few potshots at the Iraqi soldiers that 1st Lt Khalid Abdul Rahman Muhamad sent on patrol through Fallujah’s Jolan district. That’s hardly an uncommon occurrence, and typically, Muhamad would just report the incidents to U.S. Marines tasked with securing the northwest section of this restive city. But this time, for the first time, Muhamad turned to Marine Corps Maj Larry Huggins and offered his own plan to rout out the insurgents with a nighttime raid.

That may not seem like much of a development, but even such a nascent show of initiative is taken as evidence of progress. It is just what the U.S. military is hoping to encourage through a nationwide experiment that is putting small deployments of American troops alongside their Iraqi counterparts to provide around-the-clock training, support, and encouragement. In fortified outposts here, for the past four months, Huggins and his team of advisers have lived and worked with the jundi, Arabic for soldiers, of the 2d Brigade of the Iraqi Intervention Force, a division of the Iraqi Army. The concept is that having Marines constantly work with Iraqis will build up strong Iraqi forces faster than can be done through the conventional combination of classroom training, exercises, and occasional joint patrols. And since the Bush administration links U.S. military withdrawal to the readiness of Iraqi defense forces, U.S. soldiers and Marines see success in this style of training as America’s best hope for a ticket out of Iraq.

Still, no one should underestimate the challenges. While some former Saddam Hussein-era soldiers have joined the force, many Iraqi recruits have no military background. In any event, American officers are trying to create a fresh mind-set along with a functional structure. Under Saddam, for instance, there was no seasoned corps of noncommissioned officers, the senior enlisted soldiers who enforce discipline and direct training for lower-ranking soldiers. In the old Army, officers gave orders, unresponsive to feedback from below. The Americans hope to model the new Iraqi Army on the U.S. military, yet that adds to the enormity of the task.

Training wheels. The past four months, the Marine advisers in Fallujah acknowledge, have been a slow crawl. Even the simple things—like getting Iraqis to pay attention on guard duty or refrain from shopping while on patrol—have been difficult to accomplish. So Muhamad’s initiative was regarded as something of a breakthrough; it was the first time that one of the company leaders had identified a problem and proposed a solution. Huggins agreed with Muhamad’s assessment: There was a likely problem with insurgents in the Jolan district. Huggins urged Muhamad to refine the plan with his platoon leaders and then take it to the commander of the 2d Battalion, Col. Raed Jasem Edan. Behind the scenes, Huggins was working to get backing for Muhamad’s plan—a fairly basic nighttime operation that would establish a line of jundi and then send a patrol to draw fire and flush the gunmen from their positions toward the waiting cordon of soldiers. “This is the first time the training wheels will be coming off,” Huggins says.

All Army recruits, including the Fallujah force, go through a basic six-week training course. The military claims it has so far trained and equipped 169,000 soldiers with a goal of having a 240,000-man Army a year from now. But “trained” is a relative term in Iraq. The Marines in Fallujah say the “trained” recruits are very raw. Indeed, they run them through another two weeks of training in Fallujah before putting them on the street. In other parts of the country, Iraqi troops have reported that they face suspicions from American soldiers. But in Fallujah, the Iraqi jundi who speak English say they believe they get respect from the Americans, at least the ones living at their bases. First Lt Kahdim Ali Kahdim, a battalion surgeon, cites a strong friendship with the Marine advisers. “I am trying to learn how the American officers think,” he says. “I follow their suggestions, and I suggest things too. We try to find the best way for success for all.”

There are two groups of Marines that work with the Iraqi military in Fallujah: the Marine advisers, like Huggins, who live in the Iraqi compounds with the jundi; and the Marine rifle companies that have formal responsibility for securing Fallujah. Huggins has the fit physique and military haircut of a central casting Marine, but he has an easy, if sometimes wry, smile that puts his Iraqi tutees at ease. Whenever something involving the Iraqi military goes out of kilter, he smiles and says: “You just can’t make this stuff up.” He possesses the most important attribute for a military adviser: patience. The Marine riflemen split their attention between conducting their own operations and training the Iraqis, and
some advisers complain that the training mission sometimes gets shortchanged. Often infantrymen will not include Iraqis while they plan operations—for fear that advance word will leak out. And the riflemen may show less patience and understanding than the advisers.

In the morning sun last week, a group of Marine combat engineers, part of the rifle company, trained a group of Iraqi jundi to erect fences made of sharp concertina wire. It is the first class the engineers have taught for the Iraqis, and these Marines are not impressed. “The biggest problem is the work ethic. I am used to working with Marines, and Marines have a different attitude,” says 1st Lt Robert Spalla. “In the afternoon when it gets hot, the Iraqis start to whine. It is a challenge.”

Night shift. By western standards, many of the raw Iraqi recruits are slackers. But there is a cultural difference at play. In the Middle East, activity stops during the hottest part of the day. And at midnight, when the primary Marine Corps shift is heading to bed, the Iraqi command posts are frequently abuzz with activity. SSgt Tom McCarty, one of the American advisers, says it is hard for many of the Marines to grasp that there is an Iraqi way of doing things. Some Iraqi habits, McCarty says, should be discouraged, even if they cannot be stopped—like slipping away from post to shop at the market. But in some cases, McCarty says, the Marines could learn something from the Iraqis. Though Marines refuse to allow any civilians to walk past a foot patrol, the Iraqi Intervention Force patrols refuse to stop women or children. “In some ways I think the IIF have the right idea,” McCarty says. “You want to interfere with the local populace as little as possible.” Proximity has earned the Iraqi troops some measure of respect: “These guys are about the bravest guys around,” McCarty says as he walks on patrol with the jundi. “Most guys don’t see that because of the ugly-American mentality. Some guys never get beyond the bad Iraqi BO or the fact that these guys eat with their hands. But here, it’s me and one other Marine; my life depends on them. And I sleep good at night knowing these guys will protect me.”

McCarty says the Marines would be better off just giving the Iraqi military formal control of Fallujah. But Marine officers like Huggins and Col Mark Gurgenus, who oversees military operations around Fallujah, disagree. The Iraqis need more skills before control is handed over to them. Move too fast, they say, and that will set up the Iraqis for failure.

Fallujah is very much still a scarred city trying to rebuild after last November’s intense battle between U.S. forces and Sunni insurgents. While the bulk of the Iraqi Army’s efforts go into conducting patrols and manning checkpoints, there is the occasional modest humanitarian relief mission. As about 250 schoolgirls looked on last week, the jundi unloaded supplies from the back of a Marine humvee including Beanie Babies, jump-ropes, notebooks, and pens into a classroom for the teachers to distribute. Of course, nothing in Iraq is simple: The next day, parents complained that the teachers didn’t distribute the supplies and instead took them home. “You can’t make this stuff up,” says Huggins. “I’d like to think the semester is coming to an end and the teachers decided to save it for the fall, but I am not so naive.”

As more civilians have begun returning to Fallujah, so has the scourge of the Iraq war, the improvised explosive device. The Marine advisers for the 2d Brigade, who just recently received armored humvees, and the Iraqi soldiers, who pile in the back of small unarmored Nissan pickup trucks, have begun to avoid some of Fallujah’s main streets because of the threat of bombs. Last week, the 2d Battalion found several roadside bombs before they could be triggered. The 1st Battalion, which patrols northeast Fallujah, was not so lucky; a roadside bomb went off as a mixed patrol of Iraqi soldiers and U.S. Marines passed by, killing Pfc Joshua Klinger, 21, of Easton, Pa. The Iraqi Intervention Force is just as much a target as the Americans, in part because it is a largely Shiite group in an overwhelmingly Sunni city. (Indeed, some of the jundi say they are former members of Moqtada al-Sadr’s militia. When they plastered pictures of Sadr on the company cars, the Marines ordered the pictures removed.)

The growing number of civilians and the rising threat of bomb attacks have led to a growing number of confrontations between Iraqi troops and Fallujah residents. Ka-pop! At the sound of an AK-47 firing from the rear of the patrol, MSgt Dan Whitton started moving toward the sound. “Escalation of force!” shouted a Marine infantryman. A white pickup truck continued to approach, and an Iraqi jundi fired a second shot, hitting the driver’s door. The pickup stopped. The driver, hit in the leg, was not seriously injured and was sent to the hospital in a taxi. Back at the company base, Whitton praises the jundi: “Very good aim; he did very good.”

But a similar confrontation the next day does not go so well. During another patrol, an Iraqi jundi stopped an approaching vehicle, only to have the car behind it swerve and drive forward toward the patrol. According to the Marine adviser, the jundi dropped to his knee and fired at the approaching car. But the car swerved again, and the bullet slammed into the previously stopped vehicle, killing the driver. A few hours after the incident, Huggins huddled with Capt Jody White, who leads the Marine infantry unit that oversees this section of Fallujah, to discuss the repercussions and compensation for the victim’s brother. “We have to take care of him,” White said. “If not, he is a prime candidate for the insurgency.” Huggins nodded: “If not actively, then passively.”

Back at battalion headquarters, Huggins sat down with LtCol Saleem Naem Hatab, the 2d Battalion executive officer, to discuss the incident. The Iraqis report that indeed the family of the slain man is angry and Huggins wants to talk about delivering financial compensation. “We want to bring money to family on Wednesday,” Huggins tells Hatab. “No good,” he responds. “Thursday?” Huggins asks. Hatab seems not to understand. Huggins tries again: “Tomorrow, next tomorrow, next tomorrow.” “Yes maybe,” Hatab answers. “Not Wednesday, but Thursday. Three days?” Hug-
gins asks. “Three days,” Hatab agrees. When the interpreters are not around, such is the pace of conversations at the Iraqi base.

With light seeping through the bullet holes of last November’s battle, the metal gates of Jolan homes glowed like star charts as Lt Muhamad launched his midnight operation. With Huggins standing nearby, Muhamad followed his men down the alleys of the market district as they looked into courtyards for curfew violators. Above a Marine unmanned plane buzzed in the sky. The soldiers moved according to Muhamad’s plan and their American lessons, stopping at phase lines and reporting their progress. The idea is to squeeze the curfew violators between a patrol advancing from the north and a cordon of soldiers stationed at the south.

The sweep netted just one curfew violator, who said he was out checking his generator at a neighboring house. The story does not ring true to the Iraqis, and under questioning he admitted he was sneaking out to play poker with a neighbor. “First he moved from that house to fix the generator,” says Kahdim, the battalion doctor. “Now it’s a poker game.” Huggins smiles and shakes his head. Turning to Muhamad he asked, “Does anyone in Fallujah tell the truth?” In English, Muhamad answered, “No, not Fallujah.”

“Tomorrow tomorrow.” Despite failing to net any insurgents, Muhamad’s operation is considered an important, but small, success. “This is not going to happen immediately,” Capt Tim Eichhorn, Huggins’s deputy, said the morning after the raid. “As the Iraqis say, it will be ‘tomorrow tomorrow.’” McCarty, listening in, agrees. “If the Iraqis say ‘tomorrow tomorrow’ it could be days, or it could be years,” McCarty says. “And if we are going to get it right, we are going to have to stay for years.” Hatab, the Iraqi battalion executive officer, has a very precise answer for when “tomorrow tomorrow” will come, and the American advisers will no longer be needed. “Five years,” he says in English. “Five years, police and Army good.”

Iraqi Army officers may have greater patience for a large U.S. presence than the Iraqi people—or the American public. But the Iraqi Army may have to re-evaluate its timeline. For now, though, the Iraqi troops have the help, and the training wheels remain in place.

* * *


Looking for friends of Wayne Simpson
Submitted by Joseph W. Simpson

My father was Lance Corporal Wayne M. Simpson. He was in 2/4, Company H, from 1964 to 1967. He was involved in Operation Starlite. He received a Navy Commendation with Combat V and a Purple Heart during that engagement. If anyone knew him or has any information, please let me know. Contact me by phone at 630 542-3185 or by e-mail at:

<joseph3r@worldnet.att.net>.

2d Battalion, 4th Marines Association 2005 Reunion group photograph

A hearty thank you is due to Becky Valdez for her work in organizing the 2005 reunion. And for providing the reunion photos for this issue of the Sea Horse! Semper Fi, Becky.
A few scenes from the 2005 reunion of the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines Association
Membership Application, Second Battalion, Fourth Marines Association

Name: __________________________________________________ Home phone: (____)__________

Address: __________________________________________________ Work phone: (____)__________

E-mail address: ________________________________________________

Current rank if active duty or highest rank if discharged or retired: ___________________________________________________________

Personal awards and decorations: _______________________________________________________________________________________

Period(s) of service (total): From______ To______; From______ To______; From______ To______

Period(s) with 2/4: From______ To______; From______ To______; From______ To______

Place(s) served with 2/4: ____________________________________________________________________

Unit(s) assigned to while with 2/4: Company___Platoon___; Company___Platoon___; Company___Platoon___

Other military affiliations: ______________________________________________________________________________________________

Married ___ Single ___ Widowed ___ Spouse or significant other’s name: ______________________________________

Dues Information

Life membership can be paid in up to three installments over a period not to exceed nine consecutive months. Dues guidelines are the same for Regular Membership and Associate Membership. Please indicate below the type of membership you desire.

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<td>Life Member</td>
<td>__ 54 and under:</td>
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Please mail checks (payable to “2/4 Association”) and application to:

2/4 Association
2/4 Association
6122 Shasta Street
Englewood, FL 34224-8161

If you have a picture of yourself, either as an individual or in a group setting, from your Marine Corps/Navy years (boot camp, cruise book, etc.) and/or a recent photo, please enclose with this form. Also, please identify all persons in each photo. The photos will be returned after scanning. The scanned photos, along with the identification information, will be assembled into a computer CD photo album for historical purposes of the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines Association.

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