

Marine Graduation Foundation ensuring their families are there

LANCE CPL. JONATHAN G. WRIGHT

Marine Corps Base

He stands tall and proud, puffing out his chest and sucking in his stomach, all the while unable to conceal the grin perpetuated upon his lips. He spotted his parents and two siblings long before his platoon was dismissed and the parents of the new Marines rushed onto the parade deck. He looks over his mother's shoulder as she embraces him and spots a Marine, standing alone, gazing upon all the families. The look in his eyes is like a bullet to the heart.

"The most precious moment in a Marine's life is when he graduates, yet it can be the worst when their families aren't there for them," said John Weant, CEO of the Marine Graduation Founda-

tion. "More than 25 percent of new Marines don't have their families present at their graduation, which is due to financial issues most of the time."

The Marine Graduation Foundation, established in May 2005, is an organization dedicated to donating funds to families who are financially unable to attend their son or daughter's recruit training graduation. Keeping zero percent of all donated funds and directing them straight to families who have asked for assistance, the MGF has helped 623 families in 48 states.

"We realize how expensive trips to graduations can be," said Gretchen Miller, chief financial officer and webmaster for MGF. "It's our way of giving back to the new Marines and their families."

While the MGF is non-

profitable from its donations, the only money it collects is from family day personalized t-shirts for the families in support of their new Marines' companies. The money is used for administrative fees, and whatever is left over is also sent to families. All the patrons are volunteers for the organization.

The weekly donation goal is \$3,550, all of which is sent directly to the families who request assistance. There have been weeks where achieving that goal has been easy, but recently there has been a trend of only a couple hundred dollars a week being collected, commented Miller.

"Due to the economy being the way it is, donations have been low," said Miller. "It is also the lack of public awareness of our organization; if people knew and had a clear un-

derstanding of what we did, more people would donate for the families."

The MGF is an organization which solely relies on public donations to support families' attendance to their new Marines' recruit graduation training, and the only payment they want is knowing they're making Marines' graduations the most memorable moment in their lives.

"All I want and get is the satisfaction in helping new Marine Corps families," said Weant.

Courtesy photo
Staff Sgt. Steven Colon, Senior Drill Instructor for Plt. 3101, Company K, MCRD Parris Island, S.C., stands ready to dismiss his new Marines, Nov. 7, 2008. Recruit training is a Marines' foundation, and their graduation is said to be one of the greatest moments in their lives.



Marine Corps Embassy Security Group Screening

The command visit will consist of an introductory video and brief about the MSG program, followed by screening of all interested volunteers for possible assignment to the MSG program.

Marines who are currently in receipt of orders to MSG school are required to be present for the video, brief and screening.

All Marines who desire to be screened must have in their possession a signed and completed commanding officer's screening checklist, (Phase I and financial worksheet; MCO P1326.6d).

The screening team itinerary is as follows:

- Nov 16- MCAS Cherry Point, T&E Bldg. 4335 at 8 a.m.
- Nov 17- MCAS New River, Station Theater at 8 a.m.
- Nov 18- Camp Lejeune, Marston Pavillion at 8 a.m.

For more information contact your unit career planner or Master Sgt. Hayes at 451-0376.

Female combat instructors make big impact

LANCE CPL. LIA GAMERO

Marine Corps Base

With more than 300 different jobs in the Marine Corps, it's easy to overlook some of the people that play a very important role in a Marine's training. Their hard work goes unseen and yet they are the ones we look to for guidance during the 29-day combat training. They are the female combat instructors.

Female combat instructors are teachers, leaders, role models and support for pipeline Marines at Marine Combat Training.

MCT instructor is a B-billet with a standard duty tour of 36 months. It also fulfills the Special Duty Assignment requirement, which may help Marines advance in rank.

"So many people don't know that they can be a combat instructor instead of being a drill instructor, going on recruiting duty or working as an embassy guard, just to get the same benefits," said Gunnery Sgt. Jeannine Cressman, company gunnery sergeant for Headquarters and Support Company, Marine Combat Training Battalion, School of Infantry East.

Although MCT has existed since 1989, it was not open to female Marines until 1993. This is only a year after the official military occupational specialty of combat instructor was created. Nearly 271 instructors are needed for MCT to operate, and in 2003 only three instructors were female. The numbers have not grown much since then, and female combat instructors are now in high demand.

"Female instructors play such a huge part in the training of Marines," said Lt. Col. Chad Sbragia, battalion com-

mander of MCT Bn-East. "They're as important for the males as they are for the females and vital to the Corps."

The female instructors act as role models for females and more importantly as an example for the male Marines. For example, one part of the training is to complete a 5k, 10k and 15k hike. The hikes are usually where the female Marines look to the female instructors for leadership.

"As the females are starting to fall back on a hike, I try to be the one to show them that it can be done and what they can do to catch up," said Sgt. Lesa Morrison, a combat instructor with Company H. "To the males, it makes them see that females can keep up with the other (male instructors) who are usually a lot bigger than us."

During MCT, male Marines interact with female Marines for the first time, so a combat instructor is one of the first impressions they get of female Marines in the fleet.

"When males come out of boot camp, they sort of have this mindset that females are weak and shouldn't be in the Marine Corps," said Morrison. "Then they come out and see the hard-charging females who can actually pull their own weight and are the ones teaching them the basic combat skills. Then it's like, 'oh hey, they can carry the job out, they are Marines.'"

Sbragia also commented that male Marines need to see the strong females who are leading them throughout the training, so that they can snap into reality and see the type of women they can encounter in the fleet.

"For me, hearing that the males think I'm weaker has always made me push even harder to prove my-

self," said Morrison.

Morrison has been a combat instructor for the past 17 months. As a combat instructor, she teaches new Marines the basics of combat, but also hones her own combat skills. These skills can include continuously demonstrating how to disassemble and assemble weapons such as the M-240B medium machine gun and the M-249 squad automatic weapon, teaching land navigation then going on combat patrols. The instructors also show Marines how to dig firing positions and the procedures to cordon and clear an area with improvised explosive devices.

Sbragia also commented when combat instructors hit the fleet, they are more knowledgeable and competent in their infantry skills, which helps them in their non-infantry billet, and that he would take them out to battle any day.

Being a combat instructor gives females the skills and power to sharpen their traits as Marines, build upon their knowledge and for some, such as Morrison, the chance to prove themselves to others as an equal.

"I've had male Marines come back after the class ended and say, 'You know I had a different picture of female Marines in my head before I got here, but you proved them wrong. You showed that females weren't what I was told they'd be,'" said Morrison. "Hearing that really feels good, because it means that all my hard work is paying off. It means I've done my job as a female combat instructor, to set an example for male Marines."

MCT battalion is in need of more female Marines to become combat instructors. For more information Marines can contact their unit career planner.

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