

Deployment "Report Card" for the

By SgtMaj A. A. Spadaro of 3rd MAW (Fwd)

Brigadier General A. W. O'Donnell Jr., commanding general of 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing Forward (3rd MAW (Fwd)), and I continue to stand in awe and marvel at the accomplishments that the Marines and Sailors of 3rd MAW (Fwd) achieve daily while deployed to Afghanistan in support of Regional Command Southwest (SW) and the First Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward).

The Marines and Sailors, partnered alongside the Soldiers, Airmen, and Sailors of the Joint Aviation Group – Joint Helicopter Force Afghanistan United Kingdom (UK), make the extra-ordinary look ordinary and the impossible, possible through determined dedication and an innate sense on how to accomplish the mission.

The General and I have flown countless hours with all of the squadrons, viewing first-hand as 5 of the 6 functions of Marine aviation are provided to the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) across the Area of Operations (AO) as we directly engage enemy forces.

Make that 5.5 of the 6 functions. Low Altitude Air Defense assets are here in country providing base defense to Camp Leatherneck. We have watched air assault operations take the fight directly to the enemy, thus allowing the Ground Combat Element to maneuver and shape the battlefield. We have observed countless missions executed in support of the Logistics Combat Element through air delivery drops and close air support for convoy operations.

We have personally witnessed the Marines of Marine Wing Support Squadron (MWSS) receive tasking after tasking to expand airfields and helicopter landing zones across the AO. We continue to marvel at the Marines of the Marine Aircraft Control Group (MACG) as they provide command and control to support the full spectrum of strategic,

operational, and tactical levels of the battlespace. Of course, the wizards behind the curtain are the Marines and Sailors of the Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron (MALS), who operate behind the scenes to provide the critical logistical throughput, which enables all aspects of Marine aviation to seamlessly operate on a daily basis.

I would be remiss in my reporting if I did not highlight a critical aspect of why 3rd MAW (Fwd) has been so successful thus far – the integration with the Joint Aviation Group – Joint Helicopter Force Afghanistan (UK). Group Captain Nick Laird and the Airmen, Soldiers, and Sailors that he leads have allowed 3rd MAW (Fwd) to generate more combat sorties against the enemy with impressive results, which benefit the entire Regional Command (SW).

When you enter the Air Combat

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Element (ACE) compound on Camp Leatherneck and walk into our Tactical Air Command Center (TACC), you'll notice a consortium of personnel with different uniforms and accents. They speak the Queen's English and we speak American—but that is the only difference! What you'll encounter when you walk into our TACC is a mix of professionals committed to taking the fight to the enemy and supporting our Coalition ground brethren. If we could only convince them that we invented “football,” we would all get along!

To date, our pundits have commented, “They ferry generals, troops and supplies.” Yes, we have been known to ferry generals, troops, and supplies—to focus on that misses the mark. That is only one aspect of the enduring missions for 3rd MAW (Fwd). With over 30,000+ flight

hours in the last 6 months and 15+ squadrons participating in the fight: “Not only do we do windows, we display our superiority and dominance of the battlespace.”

The 3rd MAW (Fwd) continually takes the fight directly to the enemy through the employment of every type/model/series of aircraft on the flight lines at Camp Leatherneck, Kandahar, and Dwyer. At any given moment, day or night, the flexibility of generating combat sorties is evident. Our AV-8B Harrier and F-18 C/D Hornet aircraft regularly fly missions in direct support of International Security Assistance Forces with precise and crippling blows to the enemy.

Our MV-22 Ospreys have demonstrated the versatility and adaptability of tilt-rotor aircraft, and have validated that the Osprey is combat ready and capable to deliver our infantry brethren “in every clime and place.” Mission after mission, the speed, range, and flexibility of the MV-22 has shrunk the battlespace.

However, the true workhorse of the ACE is the venerable CH-53. Without fail, CH-53D/E Stallion helicopters have demonstrated their prowess and reliability in heavy lift and troop transport for the entire Regional Command (SW) Coalition.

Our ordnance has “rained down” with incredible accuracy and devastating effects against enemy positions and fortifications. The accuracy displayed by the Cobra's and Huey's would make any Weapons Tactics Instructor proud, and often make the enemy lose their heads when these helicopters fly in support of troops in contact. Our aircraft have delivered everything in the family of munitions to include GBUs, Hellfire's, 2.75” Rockets, 7.62mm, .50-caliber, and 20mm/30mm cannon fire with desired effects – the enemy fears 3rd MAW (Fwd) aircraft!

3rd Marine Aircraft Wing (Fwd)

Putting the “A” in the MAGTF is not just relegated to our flying squadrons. Our MWSS and MACG Squadrons have compiled a list of accomplishments in support of the entire MAGTF that is downright staggering. From building expeditionary airfields and forward refueling sites across the Helmand Province, to providing command and control to thousands of aircraft, and mentoring and partnering with Afghan police with the 31st Georgian Battalion – MWSS and MACG ensure that the “A” in MAGTF is capitalized.

And just when you thought that our workload was at the max, 3rd MAW (Fwd) aided in support of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit when their CH-53E’s were dispatched for flood relief operations in Pakistan. The Wing also provided assistance when the Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 266 (Reinforced) arrived in the AO to prep their aircraft for redeployment.

After six months, one fact about 3rd MAW (Fwd) is clear—our aircraft and personnel bring fear to the enemy and hope to the citizens, who want an Afghanistan free of tyranny and oppression. When Afghani National citizens look up to the sky and see Coalition aircraft, they know that the sound of freedom will ring in their country someday, and it will be the men and women of 3rd MAW (Fwd) who helped secure that freedom.



Brigadier Andrew W. O’Donnell Jr., and Sergeant Major Michael Mack.
(Photo courtesy of Cpl Derek Carlson)



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