

NEW CHALLENGES

On September 11, 2001, the United States was the victim of a well-orchestrated attack perpetrated by the terrorist group Al Qaeda, which was allied with the fundamentalist Islamic Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Two hijacked commercial passenger planes were flown into the landmark towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, killing all aboard and over 2,500 on the ground. Within the hour a third hijacked plane crashed into the Pentagon near Washington, D.C., again killing all on board and 125 on the ground. The destination of a fourth hijacked plane remains unknown; the passengers aboard that plane, having been alerted to the other crashes, thwarted the hijackers on their plane, crashing it into a field in western Pennsylvania. All on board were killed.

The attacks shocked the nation and the world. Most American citizens had never imagined that a terrorist attack of such magnitude could ever occur on our own soil. The evening of the attack, President George W. Bush addressed the nation, stating, "Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts . . . America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining." The response to the attack was swift.

War on Terrorism

A homeland defense operation, "Noble Eagle," was set up to provide for defense in the United States, and "Operation Enduring Freedom" was the name given to the military antiterrorism campaign. Just days after the attacks the President approved the Secretary of Defense's request authorizing the call-up of National Guard and Reserve troops, including 75,000 Marines, "to provide port operations, medical support, engineer support, general civil support and homeland defense." Military action followed within weeks. American and British planes carried out attacks on terrorist training camps and military installations in Afghanistan in an attempt to overthrow the Taliban and to shut down Al Qaeda. A broad coalition, including Canada, Australia, Germany, France, and more than 40 countries in the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and Asia, assisted the U.S. in the War on Terror by pledging military, logistical, and financial support.

At Camp Lejeune, the 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (4th MEB) was reactivated in late October to act as an anti-terrorism unit on the front line of homeland security. The 4th MEB, with its 4,800 members, was formed from three existing security and anti-terrorism battalions, an infantry unit, and an additional 2,400 personnel, the first increase of the Marines since the end of the Cold War. Members of the 4th MEB include the 3rd Battalion, 8th Marines at Camp Lejeune, whose sister battalion was bombed in Beirut in 1983, killing 241 Americans; the Marine Security Guard Battalion, headquartered in Quantico, Virginia, which guards embassies and consulates worldwide; the Marine Security Forces Battalion, based in Norfolk, Virginia, responsible for protecting Navy installations and ships; and the Chemical Biological Emergence Response Team of Indian Head, Maryland.





Homeland Defense Training.

The September 11 terrorist attacks also prompted the re-evaluation of military strategies and development of non-traditional tactics for fighting terrorists on foreign and American soil. The anti-terrorist brigade was placed under the command of Brigadier General Douglas O'Dell, and training focused on enhanced marksmanship skills and defense skills against nuclear, biological, and chemical threats, as well as special training for operations in urban areas where terrorists could pose the most serious threat. Training began in late October and combined combat skills with new techniques similar to those used by police in riot situations. Additionally, one unit of 400 Marines was trained to treat victims exposed to contamination. One-third of the brigade

was assigned to protect military and civilian installations in the U.S. and the remainder would be deployed overseas to guard American embassies and consulates.

On November 13, 2001, after months of the U.S.-led military campaign, the Northern Alliance troops, part of the allied coalition, took control of the Afghan capital, Kabul. A month later Camp Lejeune's 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, secured the burned-out U.S. Embassy in Kabul, and hundreds of Marines assumed control of the city airport in Kandahar. Troops from Camp Lejeune and Camp Pendleton took over the airport without a single shot fired and worked to make it adequate for aircraft to bring in food, medicine, and other supplies for Afghans and also for military transport aircraft. Members of the Camp Lejeune-based 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit were airlifted into the facility and began checking for booby traps and mines. The Camp Lejeune Marines brought a U.S. flag to display at the airport that was signed by family members of some of the victims of the September 11 attacks.



Standing guard outside Kandahar International Airport.

Marine reservists were called up for active duty in January; reservists from the 25th Marine Regiment went to Camp Lejeune to fill base positions left vacant by members of the newly formed anti-terror brigade. Reserve units that reported included companies from the regiment in Worcester, Massachusetts; Chicopee, Massachusetts; Garden City, New York; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Albany, New York; Dover, New Jersey; and Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. They include headquarters and service and weapons companies and were called to serve on active duty for one to two years.

After two months of intense U.S. air strikes, the Northern Alliance and allied forces routed Taliban forces throughout Afghanistan. Taliban members fled Kandahar, their political and spiritual stronghold, and with the Taliban no longer in control, the allied forces assumed a greater ground presence. In early March

2001 the U.S.-led coalition launched "Operation Anaconda," its biggest ground offensive of the war to date. Focusing their search on the mountains and caves of eastern Afghanistan, more than 2,000 U.S.-led forces spread out in search of hundreds of Taliban, Al Qaeda loyalists, and Osama bin Laden, the Al Qaeda leader. Videotapes that surfaced in Afghanistan indicated that bin Laden was still alive.

U.S. Naval Base Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, was slated to house Al Qaeda and Taliban prisoners, and the first group of captives arrived in January 2002. Over 500 Marines were sent to the base to establish and then guard the prison that was planned to house up to 2,000 Taliban and Al Qaeda detainees. Most of the marines were members of Camp Lejeune's 2nd Force Service Support Group under the command of Brigadier General Michael R. Lehnert. The Camp Lejeune detachment included a rifle company of about 150 infantry Marines to provide security inside and outside the camp's barbed wire walls. Other U.S. bases deploying troops to Guantanamo Bay included Norfolk Naval Station, Virginia; Charleston Air Force Base, South Carolina; Fort Campbell, Kentucky; Dover Air Force Base, Delaware; and Naval Station Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico.

As the search for bin Laden continues, the U.S. continues its campaign to shut down other terrorist organizations. The commander of the 2nd Marine Division out of Camp Lejeune led the Combined Task Force Horn of Africa to northeastern Africa in late 2002. Including about 150 Marines from Camp Lejeune, the task force was part of an international counterterrorism force that operated in that section of Africa known to be a transit route for terrorist organizations operating in Afghanistan and around the Arabian Peninsula. The troops included specialists in administration, intelligence, operations, logistics, and communications. In total, about 800 U.S. military personnel were stationed at Camp Lemonier, Djibouti, working as part of the task force.

Iraq: An Ongoing Mission

In late January 2002 President Bush broadened the anti-terrorist campaign to include countries that harbor terrorist organizations or possess weapons of mass destruction, and he called out Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as countries constituting an "axis of evil." The United Nations began a search for weapons of mass destruction suspected to be in Iraq.

As early as December 2002 the U.S. military began preparing for a possible war in Iraq. Hundreds of Marines were sent to undisclosed locations. In early January 2003 about 7,000 Marines from Camp Lejeune and soldiers and fighter pilots from other North Carolina bases were set to ship out to the Persian Gulf. The Camp Lejeune Marines were part of a Carolina Marine Air-Ground Task Force that included infantry, tanks, amphibious vehicles, supply specialists, and aircraft. A day after the troops embarked on ships for the Persian Gulf, another 7,000 Marines from Camp Lejeune, approximately 4,000 members of the



Keeping watch on the busy street in front of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan.



Marines lower the National Flag during evening colors at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul.

2nd Force Service Support Group and 3,000 from the 2nd Marine Division, were given orders.

The Iraqi conflict, called Operation Iraqi Freedom, officially began March 19, 2003, shortly after President Bush's ultimatum to Saddam Hussein and his sons to go into exile expired. The war began with stealth fighters hitting the



In support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

capital city of Baghdad with Tomahawk cruise missiles and bombs as U.S. and British ground forces move toward the southern Iraqi border. Less than 10 days later Camp Lejeune was mourning the loss of 11 of its Marines killed in Iraq. Another eight Marines, seven of which were stationed at Camp Lejeune, were announced missing after a battle near An Nasiriyah.

On April 3 President Bush visited Camp Lejeune to rally support and offer comfort to the families of the fallen Marines. Bush's speech chronicled Camp Lejeune's successes in Iraq, including securing Iraqi oil fields, pushing back enemy soldiers at An Nasiriyah, and helping rescue a prisoner of war, Army Private Jessica Lynch. Camp Lejeune's Marines also helped liberate the cities of Amarah, Diwaniyah, and Kut.

A day after President Bush's visit the Baghdad airport was secured, and five days later, on April 9, U.S. forces controlled most of Baghdad, with thousands of Iraqis celebrating their liberation. Tikrit, Saddam's hometown, was taken in late April, and on May 1 President Bush announced the end of the initial phase of operations in Iraq.

Over half of Camp Lejeune's 30,000 troops were overseas in Iraq and other stations during the winter and spring of 2003. With so many members of the community overseas, Project Care, a program first started during Desert Storm, was reinstated. Businesses and residents in



Outside An Nasiriyah.

the Camp Lejeune community worked together to offer discounts or provide services to family members who have to pull double duty when a spouse is overseas. By summer many of Camp Lejeune's Marines began to return to North Carolina in waves.

But the Marines at Camp Lejeune were called again to offer support in the ongoing U.S. military efforts in Iraq. To relieve the approximately 125,000 U.S. troops in Iraq, the Pentagon was forced to draw upon additional Army and Marine units, who, after fighting the initial phase of the war, had left Iraq in the summer of 2003. In January 2004, 25,000 marines, from Camp Pendleton, Twenty-nine Palms, and Camp Lejeune, began to return to Iraq to support the ongoing nation-building effort.

Camp and Community

At the beginning of the twenty-first century Onslow County bears little physical resemblance to its appearance at the beginning of the twentieth century, except for areas located away from towns and modern roads, and in forested and remote areas and old farms. Some other similarities, however, still remain. Although the service and retail industries, and Camp Lejeune, have long replaced agriculture as the economic dynamic of the county, after 100 years agriculture still remains a major factor and many of the cash crops are the same: tobacco, cotton, corn, soybeans, and grains. Livestock, fishing, and logging continue as significant economic contributors. Even shipbuilding has returned in the form of Tiara Yachts, which opened for business during October 1998 and is manufacturing \$1 million, 50-foot yachts at its plant in the Bear Creek area of Swansboro.

Since April 1941, when the first Marines began arriving at the Tent City area, Camp Lejeune has played a key role in the history of the U.S. Marine Corps and Onslow County. This role has already extended into the twenty-first century as the base's marines continue to play a key role in current military operations at home and abroad; to improve upon the execution of its two-phase mission to provide housing, training facilities, and logistical support for MARFORLANT and other assigned units; and to conduct specialized training. Camp Lejeune's superior mission accomplishment has been unequivocally demonstrated by the base's having received four Commander-in-Chief's Awards for Installation Excellence. Since the award was inaugurated in 1984, Lejeune has been selected in 1986, 1991, 1997, and 2000, establishing the base as the top facility in the Marine Corps for outstanding and innovative efforts in operations and maintenance for those years. In the years that Camp Lejeune wasn't recognized as the best base, it usually garnered recognition as the runner-up.

At the conclusion of the century during which it was born, the 153,439-acre Camp Lejeune military reservation contained six major Marine Corps commands: Marine Corps Base; the Combat Element, II MEF; the 16,000-member 2nd MarDiv; 2nd FSSG; the operationally independent MCAS New River, with 2nd Marine Air Wing's MAGS-26 and 29; and II MEF Augmentation Command Element. In the twenty-first century, following the attacks on September 11, 2001, an additional command, the 4th MEB, was reactivated to fight the war on terrorism. The two major Navy commands aboard the base are the Naval Hospital and the Consolidated Dental Command. Also contributing to



Ba'ath Headquarters, Al Kut, Iraq.

Camp Lejeune's active-duty military population in excess of 37,000 are several smaller commands, such as the Navy's Field Medical Service School, a fixture aboard the installation since its reactivation on 1 October 1950. Almost 4,800 military personnel and 3,700 civilians are attached to the Marine Corps Base itself. With over 52,000 military dependents on and off base and 42,000 retirees and their dependents living in the area, the Home of Expeditionary Forces in Readiness currently supports an extended family in the neighborhood of 140,000 people.

Over the passage of years one of the most conspicuous and continuing beneficial changes has been the amalgamation of the military and civilian communities into one. With three-fourths of the active military and dependents living off base, Camp Lejeune's Chaplain has observed that every pastor in town has a congregation that is approximately 70 percent military. This synthesis is also seen in the fostering of close working relationships between the base and adjunct municipalities in almost every aspect of cooperation, including opening the base to local commercial enterprises. For the foreseeable future, Camp Lejeune and Onslow County will work together as partners to provide the best possible support for the FMF units that call Camp Lejeune home.



Special Patrol Insertion/Extraction (SPIE) Rig is a good method for getting a bunch of guys out of a hot spot in a hurry.