

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

COMMAND ELEMENT
13th MARINE EXPEDITIONARY UNIT
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From: Commanding Officer

Subj: PHONE MESSAGE #4 (3 minutes)

Hello again family and friends of 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit. My name is Colonel David Coffman and I am the Commanding Officer of the 13th MEU.

We are fast approaching the 90 day mark since our departure from San Diego aboard the ships of the Boxer Expeditionary Strike Group. Today is March 28th. We are still operating in the United States Central Command Area of Responsibility in the Middle East. In fact, we have Marines spread out all across this part of the world, from Djibouti to Bahrain to Pakistan. We have completed one training exercise ashore and have just started another one with our partners in the region. Those of us embarked on Boxer continue to support counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden area. And our Heavy Lift Helicopter Det of CH-53Es is still working in Iraq.

You are probably aware of a couple incidents that have happened in the last two weeks. On the 13th of March, one of our AH-1W Cobra helicopters caught fire while hot refueling aboard Boxer. The aircrew egressed safely and the flight deck crew did a terrific job at putting the fire out. We are investigating the cause of the fire and the maintenance Marines of HMM-163 already have the aircraft repaired and will soon put it up for check flights before returning it to the regular schedule.

Much more significant was the collision at sea between a US submarine and our LPD, USS New Orleans during the night of 20 March. Again, no one aboard New Orleans was hurt and the Ship's captain and crew did a great job at damage control. We DO have a hole in the ship however, and she is currently in Bahrain undergoing repairs. We will keep the Marines assigned to New Orleans busy training until repairs are complete, probably by late April.

Both of these accidents remind us how dangerous this business is. For all the things we have done since we left on deployment, I am pleased to report that we have not lost ANY Marines to accident, illness, or combat. The quality of our Marines and their training, and YOUR support and prayers are responsible for that terrific record.

April promises to be equally busy and equally challenging as we continue working across multiple lines of operation in support of Fifth Fleet and CENTCOM. I trust you have also established your own "battle rhythm" for this time of separation and are finding positive ways to stay happy and healthy while your Marine is away. I hope you are also getting out to enjoy some Spring weather.

As always, Mr. Bryan Vaughn and our Family Readiness Team are available to answer any questions or concerns you may have about our deployment or your Marine's particular situation or challenges. Thank you for supporting your Marine and the Thirteenth MEU Team. We miss you and Happy Easter!