

PURPOSE IN THE PROCESS: 'America's Battalion' finishes training in Hawaii, prepares for Mojave Viper in California

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Marine Corps Base Hawaii – Kaneohe Bay Story by Cpl. Reece Lodder

KANEOHE BAY, Hawaii - Perched high on a rooftop overlooking a dusty bazaar road, Lance Cpl. Casey Cliff waits. At his last position, he stood static for an hour. Silently scanning the bazaar with his rifle at the ready, he's aware he might be in this position longer. Cliff's experience has taught him patience is necessary, and thus, he waits for his next command.

Posting security, manning vehicle control points and laboring through patrols are second nature to Cliff and many other infantrymen from 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, but their counterinsurgency training at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, from July 25 through Aug. 5, 2011, was a platform for polishing skills they'll soon employ in Afghanistan.



Photo by Cpl. Reece Lodder

Lance Cpl. Dylan Ottney, an anti-tank missileman with Weapons Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, scans his area while providing security in a mock Afghan village during counterinsurgency training at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, Aug. 2, 2011. Over two weeks, 3/3's line companies rotated from classes to two-day training evolutions at Schofield's military operations in urban terrain facility, working through scenarios by practicing patrolling, working vehicle control points and interacting with the role-players. Moving further into their pre-deployment training program, the battalion is preparing for the Mojave Viper exercise at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, Calif., at the end of August. The month long training event will be their final evaluation before deploying to Afghanistan's Helmand province in support of Operation Enduring Freedom this fall.



Photo by Cpl. Reece Lodder

Lance Cpl. Casey Cliff, an anti-tank missileman with Weapons Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, provides security from the roof of a building in a mock Afghan village during counterinsurgency training at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, Aug. 2, 2011. Over two weeks, 3/3's line companies rotated from classes to two-day training evolutions at Schofield's military operations in urban terrain facility, working through scenarios by practicing patrolling, working vehicle control points and interacting with Afghan role-players. Moving further into their pre-deployment training program, the battalion is preparing for the Mojave Viper exercise at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, Calif., at the end of August. The month long training event will be their final evaluation before deploying to Afghanistan's Helmand province in support of Operation Enduring Freedom this fall. Cliff is from Coral Springs, Fla.

On the heels of completing a month of company-level training at Pohakuloa Training Area on the Island of Hawaii in June, the 3/3 Marines returned to Oahu and continued working through their pre-deployment training program, rotating from classes to two-day training evolutions at Schofield's military operations in urban terrain facility.

"This is the best way for us to train on island since we're in a controlled environment," Lance Cpl. Ulises Nava, a machine gunner with Weapons Company, 3/3, said. "We're trying to experience a variety of situations like hasty [medical evacuations], different types of improvised explosive device detonations and pulling Afghan drivers out of cars for questioning, so when we're doing these things in Afghanistan, we'll already have encountered a wide range of scenarios and know how to react to them."

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Whether fresh from the School of Infantry or salty from previous deployments, working through these scenarios under the watchful eyes of training cadre Marines and **Defense Training Systems** advisors forced each Marine to re-evaluate and refresh their perspective.

"For the first-timers, they have to find a happy medium between doing their job and not losing focus, while at the same time being personable and learning to interact with the local people," 1st Lt. Garrett Johnson, a platoon commander with Weapons Co., 3/3, said. "For the senior Marines, they can focus on bettering themselves in their jobs as Marines first, but then they have to re-learn and build upon what they've done before — shoot, move and communicate."

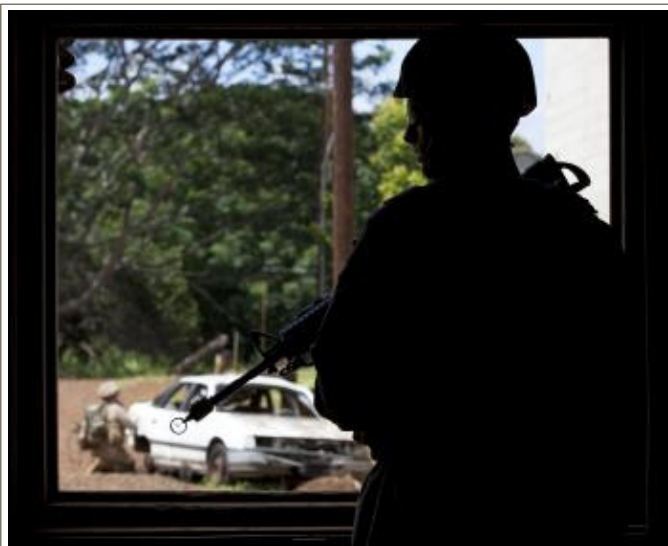


Photo by Cpl. Reece Lodder

Navy Seaman Nathan Martino, a corpsman with Weapons Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, peers through the window of a building while providing security in a mock Afghan village during counterinsurgency training at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, Aug. 2, 2011. Over two weeks, 3/3's line companies rotated from classes to two-day training evolutions at Schofield's military operations in urban terrain facility, working through scenarios by practicing patrolling, working vehicle control points and interacting with the role-players. Moving further into their pre-deployment training program, the battalion is preparing for the Mojave Viper exercise at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, Calif., at the end of August. The month long training event will be their final evaluation before deploying to Afghanistan's Helmand province in support of Operation Enduring Freedom this fall. Martino is from Old Saybrook, Conn.



Photo by Cpl. Reece Lodder

Lance Cpl. David Engel, an anti-tank missileman with Weapons Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, uses a mine detector to sweep for mock improvised explosive devices during counterinsurgency training at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, Aug. 2, 2011. Over two weeks, 3/3's line companies rotated from classes to two-day training evolutions at Schofield's military operations in urban terrain facility, working through scenarios by practicing patrolling, working vehicle control points and interacting with Afghan role-players. Moving further into their pre-deployment training program, the battalion is preparing for the Mojave Viper exercise at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, Calif., at the end of August. The month long training event will be their final evaluation before deploying to Afghanistan's Helmand province in support of Operation Enduring Freedom this fall.

Quietly patrolling through a buzzing bazaar where the animated bantering of Afghan role-players and upbeat traditional music resonated through parallel buildings, the Marines collected information, investigated IED threats and built rapport with the local nationals by working to overcome language barriers.

"We have just enough of everything we need to train here, and it's realistic because it gives us the sounds, sights and smells we'll experience in Afghanistan," Johnson, from Oakland, Calif., said. "This provides us the one spot where we have a lot of role-player interaction and can still practice counterinsurgency operations. It's not until you're deployed that you see the importance of the daily interaction with the locals. If you're not used to an environment like this, then it can teach you to prevail by having a better idea of how this kind of [social] environment will affect you in country."

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Despite being simulated, the mock casualties, IED detonations and small arms fire served as jarring reminders of what the Marines need to prepare for, and forced them to work under pressure.

"Experiencing all the little stresses in training now prepares us to deal with them overseas," Staff Sgt. Edward Erdmann, a platoon sergeant with Weapons Co., said. "Even the Marines who were in Afghanistan on our last deployment are learning things this time."

Progressing toward the end of their pre-deployment training program, the 3/3 Marines are preparing for the Mojave Viper exercise at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, Calif., at the end of August. The month long training event will be their final evaluation before deploying to Afghanistan's Helmand province in support of Operation Enduring Freedom this fall.



Photo by Cpl. Reece Lodder

Pfc. Brandon Binsfield, an anti-tank missileman with Weapons Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, speaks with an Afghan role-player and an interpreter while providing security in a mock Afghan village during counterinsurgency training at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, Aug. 2, 2011. Over two weeks, 3/3's line companies rotated from classes to two-day training evolutions at Schofield's military operations in urban terrain facility, working through scenarios by practicing patrolling, working vehicle control points and interacting with Afghan role-players. Moving further into their pre-deployment training program, the battalion is preparing for the Mojave Viper exercise at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, Calif., at the end of August. The month long training event will be their final evaluation before deploying to Afghanistan's Helmand province in support of Operation Enduring Freedom this fall. Binsfield is from Duxbury, Mass.



Photo by Cpl. Reece Lodder

Pfc. Brandon Binsfield, an anti-tank missileman with Weapons Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, posts security in a mock Afghan village during counterinsurgency training at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, Aug. 2, 2011. Over two weeks, 3/3's line companies rotated from classes to two-day training evolutions at Schofield's military operations in urban terrain facility, working through scenarios by practicing patrolling, working vehicle control points and interacting with Afghan role-players. Moving further into their pre-deployment training program, the battalion is preparing for the Mojave Viper exercise at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, Calif., at the end of August. The month long training event will be their final evaluation before deploying to Afghanistan's Helmand province in support of Operation Enduring Freedom this fall. Binsfield is from Duxbury, Mass.

Since Mojave Viper will have an aggressive operational focus at the battalion level, Johnson said working on the company and squad levels at Schofield would prove to be a valuable stepping stone in preparing the Marines for their final evaluation in California.

Even though the training was short, Nava said it would make a significant difference in the long run by allowing the leaders to learn their Marines' capabilities — and then employ them accordingly.

"For the Marines who gained experience on the last deployment, it's now their turn to put their leadership skills into play for the new Marines," Nava, from Elgin, Ill., said. "Since then, a lot of the senior Marines have moved on, so now it's our turn to carry on what they taught us."