USMC colonel observes search for lost heroes of Vietnam War

Story and photo by MC2 (SW/AW) Kenneth R. Hendrix, U.S. 7th Fleet Public Affairs

SIHANOUKVILLE, Cambodia - A U.S. Marine Corps colonel teamed up with personnel from the Defense Attaché Office in Phnom Penh and the Joint POW-MIA Accounting Command, in a search for the remains of three Marines on Tang Island in Sihanoukville Province, Cambodia May 3.

Col. Michael S. Palermo, assigned to the U.S. 7th Fleet staff as the fleet Marine officer, listened to two Cambodian witnesses recall events of the last battle of the Vietnam War, better known as the Mayaguez incident.

"It is intriguing to fly out to a place where there is Marine history," Palermo said. "I served with the gentleman who was the company commander here, who lost the Marines. He's one of those guys that's a true hero.

"He fought in Vietnam, brought his guys here and lost some Marines and was able to live and tell about it, and pass on some of the lessons learned," Palermo added.

On a hot, humid rainy day, 37 years after Lance Cpl. Joseph N. Hargrove, Pfc. Gary L. Hall and Pvt. Danny G. Marshall lost their lives in battle, a seven-member team comprised of four Cambodians, two POW/MIA investigators and Palermo, were looking for new leads into the location of their final resting place.

On May 15, 1975, the three Marines took part in combat operations throughout the day, expending all of their ammunition.

At approximately 8:45 p.m., a helicopter arrived, drawing enemy fire onto the landing zone forcing it from landing.

At approximately 10:15 p.m., another helicopter landed and recovered the remaining U.S. Armed Forces personnel. However, the three Marines were unaccounted for after a check of the beach area was made prior to the helicopter's departure from the island.

Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron Light (HSL) 51, Det. 11, embarked on board the U.S. 7th Fleet Flagship *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19), kicked off the day's investigation by providing air support transportation to and from Tang Island aboard an SH-60F Sea Hawk helicopter. The flight would mark the first time since 1975 that the two Cambodian witnesses returned to the island.

"During the war we were told to fight the war by the leaders," said Khem Khon, through a translator, who was a courier for the Khmer Rouge during the war. "After the war, there is peace now. We try to help as much as we can to find the unaccounted for men who are missing."

It was believed that the Khmer Rouge would toss the bodies of dead troops into the Gulf of Thailand, but the two witnesses say that the Khmer Rouge was actually burying the remains of the slain service members.

Throughout the day in the rain, the two Cambodian witnesses walked up and down the beaches and throughout the terrain of the island, to familiarize themselves with island again.

(Right) U.S. Marine Corps Col. Michael S. Palermo, right, listens to a service member of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces, tell the story of a military helicopter crashing into the Gulf of Thailand May 3. Palermo is on the island observing an investigation search for three Marines lost in the last battle of the Vietnam War on May 15, 1975, during the discovery of the artifacts. Due to the hostile environment the Marine Corps was unable to return to island after the war to search and recover the bodies of the three missing Marines.

"I thought I would be able to help in searching for the site that were looking for, but some how a lot of stuff has changed," Khon said through a translator. "The terrain and jungle area changed a lot."

At the end of the day, a general area was found of where the three Marines could possibly be buried, but ultimately, they were not found and remain missing.

"It is important to bring some closure to the families of the lost Marines," said Palermo.

The ultimate goal of the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, and of the agencies involved in returning America's heroes home, is to conduct global search, recovery, and laboratory operations in order to support the Department of Defense's personnel accounting efforts. Their mission motto is, "Until They Are Home."

Junior surface warfare officer bonuses combined, senior bonus eliminated in fiscal year 2012 plan

From Chief of Naval Personnel Public Affairs

WASHINGTON – Navy Administrative Message (NAVADMIN) 156/12 released May 7 announces the fiscal year (FY) 2012 Surface Warfare Officer (SWO) Critical Skills Retention Bonus (CSRB) and SWO Continuation Pay (SWOCP) programs with major program changes.

"All bonuses are continually reviewed to ensure the Navy provides the right incentives to ensure the retention of critical skills to meet Navy mission needs," said Rear Adm. Tony Kurta, director, military personnel plans and policy. "These revisions ensure we have the right mix of incentives to retain the right number of officers with critical skills for mission success."

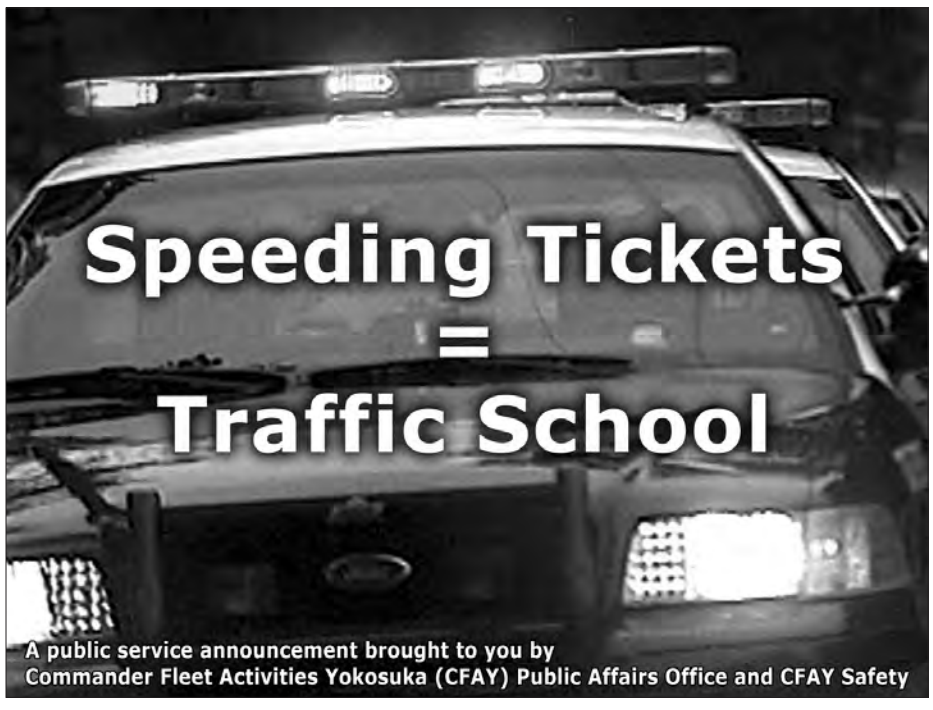
The FY 12 program eliminates the Senior CSRB for previously designated O5 and O6 billets and combines of the Surface Warfare Officer (SWO) Critical Skills Retention Bonus (CSRB) and Surface Warfare Officer Continuation Pay (SWOCP) programs into the Revised Junior CSRB Program. The lieutenant commander SWO CSRB remains unchanged.

A review of the unrestricted line community management resulted in decision to eliminate the CSRB for commander and captain.

Any existing eligible contracts received before Oct. 1, 2011 will continue until the anniversary payments are completed.

The new Revised Junior CSRB consolidates SWOCP and Junior CSRB into a single CSRB program providing the same $75,000 bonus for the same service commitment through two department head tours. CSRB acceptance must occur before six years of commissioned service in order to receive full $75,000 amount and prior to eight years of commissioned service in order to receive any of the bonuses at all. Annual payments are sequentially lost if accepted after six years of commissioned service.

Officer whose six years of commissioned service or eight years of commissioned service anniversary dates fall between Dec. 16, 2011 and the release of this NAVADMIN, May 7 can still take the Revised Junior CSRB if they apply within 90 days of the NAVADMIN's release.

This provision ensures no officer is disadvantaged as a result of the processing time associated with construction and release of the message.

The complete information on the bonus program is in NAVADMIN 156/12 at www.npc.nay.mil.