



For more information, contact Bryan Driver, Plans Policy and Analysis Directorate, Personal and Family Readiness Division, HQMC at (703) 784-9517 or email: bryan.driver@usmc.mil

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Despite War, Marines seek to outrun the competition

HQMC (MR) QUANTICO, VA – Top Marine runners from the Corps will battle their service rivals without pause from the operational tempo or wars in Iraq and Afghanistan at the Marine Corps Marathon in Arlington, Va., on Sunday, Oct. 25th,

The Armed Forces Marathon (MCM) is held annually in conjunction with the Marine Corps Marathon. It is the top distance running competition between the different branches of the U.S. military services, including the: U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard.

This is the 34th running of the Marine Corps Marathon. The Armed Forces Championship has been a part of the race since 1998.

"The other Services can have an easier time in pulling together a team," said Maj. Billy Canedo, Operations Officer for Marine Sports and Athletics. "Running teams in the other Services can groom their runners early, bringing them up from Service Academy cross country and track teams and we don't have that luxury," said Canedo.

Roughly one-third of the Marines that are part of the All Marine team can be expected to be deployed at any one time. For example, 1stLt Erin Demchko will be competing in the Marine Corps Marathon despite being back from Afghanistan less than one week before the race. Demchko was deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom for a seven month deployment with Marine Wing Support Squadron 371.

"Marines on the team are considered Marines first, and they have to fit their training into their normal workday and unit work-up schedules, which can be in any climate and place," said Canedo. "Their level of dedication is impressive."

In addition to the race in Arlington, there will also be a similar race conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan by Marines forward-deployed there. Maj. Lauren Edwards of Combat Logistics Regiment Two is serving as the race coordinator for Marine Corps Marathon Forward (Afghanistan). A total of 258 runners have registered for the 26.2 mile race in Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan.

"Training here is an absolute challenge," said Edwards. "The summer months were brutally hot. You're at altitude, you're in moon dust, on gravel...and the air quality....between the burn pit and the dust from the roads...wow, the air quality is terrible," said Edwards. Higher altitude training presents unique challenges since the air is thinner. At higher altitudes the body has to produce more red corpuscles in the blood stream to capture the scant oxygen and carry it from the heart to the extremities.

"Not a run goes by where we don't get absolutely dusted by the convoys or that our throats aren't absolutely burning from the air," said Edwards of the running environment around Camp Leatherneck. Due to security reasons, Marines are only allowed to run inside of the camp perimeter.

"I'm so fortunate to have been able to train with Erin (Lt Demchko). Usually the team is all spread out and we only get to see each other at the races. Despite the lack of sleep or the crazy work days, I'm in so much better shape than I would have been without her here. I'm so very excited for her and the rest of the team," said Edwards.

This year the All Marine team competing in the Marine Corps Marathon includes: LtCol. Alexander Hetherington from Oceanside, CA; Capt. Rick Jennings from Albany,

GA; LtCol. Thomas Blackwell and Capt. Maureen Carr from Arlington, VA; 1stLt Erin Demchko from Yuma, AZ; Maj. Kristin McCann, 2ndLt Adam Crandall and Sgt. Ryan Ellis from Miramar, CA; Sgt. Billy Van Vianen from Camp Lejeune, NC; 2ndLt Kyleigh Millhouse from Pensacola, FLA; SSgt. Tyler Hubbard, Capt. Michelle Macander and team captain Col. Steven D. Peterson from Quantico, VA

"We've got some really strong runners this year, and I think they are going to do extremely well at the actual MCM as they compete against the British Royal Navy and the rest of the US Armed Forces. As for the rest of us here in Afghanistan...we'll be with them in spirit. Train Hard, Race Well," said Edwards.

Edwards volunteered to serve as the de facto race director for the Marine Corps Marathon Forward (Afghanistan). She worked with the Marathon Staff, headquartered in Quantico, Va., to outline a course, obtain competitor shirts and prizes and for all of the back office administrative functions that are required to have a well-organized race. While the scoring is separated, competitors entered in the race in Afghanistan and Iraq are considered officially registered as participants in the Marine Corps Marathon in Arlington, Va.

Runners for the All Marine Running Team are picked from the ranks. They are selected based on past performance and recorded finish times. Marines in active duty and reserve status are welcome to apply. An application for the team is available on the Marine Sports homepage at: (<http://www.usmc-mccs.org/sports>).

