

Sir Commandant & SEDNVC Sweet:

Since my initial email SITREP of 19 September 2017, I have conducted a personal disaster area visit and assessment on 24 & 25 September, which was documented by photographs taken by Robin Barker, Department of Florida Public Relations Officer (PRO).

Upon arrival and meeting with Commandant Michael "Mike" Rhine, of the Marathon Devil Dogs Detachment 1216 a more accurate perspective of the status of that Detachment's members, and their community was clarified. Several important facts were ascertained:

1. Commandant Rhine had returned from his USMCR disaster relief deployment to Texas, with the 4th Amphibious Assault Battalion (4th AABn) just prior to the predicted landfall in Florida of Hurricane Irma. On 10 September, at the last minute, Commandant Rhine and local Emergency responders were ordered to evacuate to the mainland.
2. Commandant Rhine returned to the City of Marathon on 11 September to assist in assessment and recovery in his community, his Detachment, and his personal properties; which he stated was a split level private residence on the city's west coast, and another rental home on the city's east coast waterfront, which is his family business in the tourism and leisure industry.
3. While inspecting his rental home, at 11073 5th Avenue, Marathon, Florida which was severely damaged and made uninhabitable by tidal surge forces, a "Channel 6 News" van crew approached him and initiated an interview concerning his home. The widely broadcast segment featured Commandant Rhine stating, in the manner with which he is personally helping his city and many of its residents recover from the catastrophe: "The walls are up...we can rebuild!"
4. I have received and reviewed 'local Keys news broadcast reports' of 11 September which reported housing property losses in the Florida Keys, specifically Marathon, Florida and of the Commandant for the Marathon Devil Dogs Detachment 1216. This aired news segment gave the incorrect impression that Commandant Rhine's primary residence had been destroyed. This mistaken impression is absolutely understandable and without fault or blame to anyone. The truth is, his family business (rental home) was destroyed by Hurricane Irma.
5. To date Commandant Rhine has not been able to ascertain the status or welfare / needs of all his Detachment's members; however, we did determine the following:
 - a. Some of the Detachment members are not full-time residents in the Keys and other members may not yet have returned from evacuation which explains the lack of accounting for all members. It may be weeks or more before some of these members can report on loss or need for assistance.

b. Some Detachment members have lost their source of income and/or businesses. One example is Marine J. M. a professional charter fishing boat captain, and owner of two vessels reported to be severely damaged during the hurricane to the extent that neither is operable.

c. Other Marines report various degrees of property loss or damage. One example is Marine D. E. who is 100% disabled (VA) and very ill. He reported his home at 'Keys by The Sea' mobile home community, was completely destroyed (see attached photo) and he stated: "I lost everything." He is temporarily staying at a friend's residence and will not likely be able to recover from the loss incurred.

My personal impression and belief is, the appropriate building inspector will likely condemn many, if not most, of these damaged homes. Most, if not all, personal belongings and furnishings in these homes have been or will be disposed of as waste (see attached photo), as they cannot be reclaimed. Most do not have flood insurance due to the excessively high cost of same and most of the serious damage is the result of storm surge or flooding. It will be very difficult for our members to recover without financial assistance beyond what they may receive from the various storm relief programs.

Commandant Mike and his wife Patti Rhine escorted us to many locations in their community to include the American Legion Post 154 and the DAV Post 122, where we could meet other Marine Corps League members, thus enabling me to speak to 6 members of Detachment 1216, and report that of these 6, which is about 21% of the Detachment's total strength of 28, each one sustained loss such as their employment, residence, or "everything". Most remarkable to me is the fact that although these members have suffered catastrophic losses, each one of them told us of the needs of others and had to be prodded to tell us anything about their personal losses. These Marines and their families are doing everything possible to help their community. Some are working in directing the scores of volunteers, others are moving debris from homes and businesses of other residents, and most have spent at least some time in sorting and distributing donated items of food, water, hygiene products, and so forth. Collectively, they have told us that they need financial assistance together with cleansing and disinfecting items such as bleach and peroxide; but they stress to please not send any items due to confusion in distribution, storage concerns, unnecessary duplication, and other concerns. They requested that the Department of Florida assist in collecting donations and to then assist in the proper vetting and distribution of financial assistance once they can assess the status of all their members and establish a little more sense of normalcy in the community.

Commandant Rhine facilitated a personal meeting for us with County Mayor, the Hon. George Nugent. We learned that Marathon has greatly benefited by having truly 'stand out' community members like Commandant Mike and Patti Rhine together with other members of the Marine Corps League Detachment 1216, who

are there daily and non-stop with other veterans, and assorted volunteers using the DAV Post, and other like service organization sites, as points to provide much needed resources for clean-up, disinfecting, personal hygiene, shelter, bedding, etc. (FYI - City of Marathon web site: www.ci.marathon.fl.us)

Commandant Webb, a 'press release' from the Department of Florida will be produced soon; and will be shared with the League, for appropriate use. In addition, please feel free to request 'JPG' photographs from our PRO, D. Robin Barker; Phone: 772.919.2027; Email: drobinbar@aol.com. He can mail a DVD, or message via Facebook, of all photos which will provide the visual evidence for the words in this message. Due to space limitations only the 2 photos are attached.

This Florida's Key's disaster situation is atypical when compared to other like situations. Key West, the southernmost island of the Keys, is reporting in 'media' outlets that it sustained minimal impact in efforts to promote their tourism industry, which is essential to the area's economic recovery. Much of the other lower two-thirds of the Keys are in dire straits, and the people there have immediate needs while just beginning their protracted recovery efforts. Sir, it was made very clear that financial aid is the single most important way to help our members as well as all the residents of the Keys, at this critical time. Financial resources will enable those in need to purchase exactly what they must have to recover, disinfect, rebuild and remain within the Keys to work and reestablish their community's unique area of our United States.

Sir, we can all be proud of USMCR Sergeant Major Mike Rhine and all the Marine Corps League members of Marathon Devil Dogs Detachment 1216. Mike is one of our Department's 51 Detachment Commandants. As a true leader, he is leading by example while selflessly performing outstanding civic leadership acts and coordinating with so many others tirelessly. His ability to lead and motivate his fellow citizens, many of whom are in a state of shock, and counsel those in dire need is truly something to behold. He and Patti are recognized as exemplary members of their community. Further, Marine Rhine, with his leadership and managerial expertise enabled the Department of Florida to better grasp the reality of the after effects of the catastrophe, the difficulties of recovery, and the need to rebuild the community; which in turn enables me to inform our League with confidence and trust that the request for financial assistance be favorably addressed, and that same be made available to Detachment 1216 through the Department of Florida Marine Corps League. An after-action report will be available upon request to all contributors so they may have a sense of how their assistance was provided to fellow Marines and members of the Marine Corps League.

Semper Fidelis,
George



Residence of Marine D. E.



One scene of disposal of household furnishings & personal belongings