

Dedicated to Supporting Marines

Lt. Col. Richard D. Kohler, USMC, Director Marine Corps Food Service and Subsistence Program



Lt. Col. Kohler

Government Food Service: Tell us a little about yourself and how you became involved in the Marine Corps food service and subsistence program. What is the official date your tour began?

Lt. Col. Kohler: I joined the Marine Corps in 1985. I started off as a subsistence supply clerk and have done many jobs in the foodservice community since that time. I made it to the rank of gunnery sergeant (E-7) before being selected to warrant officer, eventually becoming chief warrant officer-3 before being selected for captain. I took over as the director from Lt. Col. Jay Rogers on the 1st of October 2012.

Government Food Service: What was your assignment before becoming director?

Kohler: I was stationed in Okinawa, Japan, for the past four years. I worked at III Marine Expeditionary Force, supporting Marines throughout the Pacific as they trained with numerous other nations including Korea, Australia, Thailand, Singapore, Philippines and many more. I was also assigned as the Marine Corps Installations Pacific food service officer in which I oversaw all the mess halls in the Pacific to include Hawaii, Okinawa, Iwakuni and Korea.

Government Food Service: Is there any area (or areas) you are interested in focusing on during your tour? Do you have any changes in mind for food service that you would like to bring about? Are these a response to or a reflection of foodservice trends happening in the military or civilian world? If so, explain.

Kohler: There are many areas I plan to improve on during my tour as the director:

Education. We are working with the Marine Corps Institute to develop distance-learning courses to provide foodservice Marines with an opportunity to improve their knowledge without having to attend our service school at Fort Lee, Va. The first course is scheduled to be published



Lance Cpl. Timothy J. Bruce, a food service specialist with Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron, puts his rendition of sweet-and-spicy salmon on the grill at the Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point Mess Hall during a Chef of the Quarter competition. (PHOTO COURTESY: CPL. ANDREA CLEOPATRA DICKERSON, USMC)

in July of this year. Additionally, we are working to update our current publications to ensure they provide the most up-to-date information for our Marines.

Expeditionary Feeding. As Marines, we pride ourselves on being the “first to fight.” This year, we will continue to field the Expeditionary Field Kitchen (EFK). The EFK is a 20-foot container that is mounted on a trailer and can be pulled by our large trucks. Designed specifically for ease of set up in order to produce hot meals for Marines in an expeditionary environment very quickly, the EFK will also provide us the capability to produce all rations currently provided from DLA and allow us to introduce “off-the-shelf” items from the local markets once the battlefield environment matures. We worked with Marine Corps Systems Command and the DoD Combat Feeding Directorate to develop this kitchen, and Marines are currently using it in many locations.

Patron Education. We want our patrons to be as educated about their eating habits as they are with their physical training. Allowing them to understand their physical training for combat readiness is as important as their food choices. The Fueled to Fight Program is a single system for product identification that enhances the Marine’s ability to make healthy choices in the mess hall.

Government Food Service: *What has it been like since becoming director in terms of working directly with Marine Corps food service and the people supporting it?*



Lance Cpl. Jacob F. Dyer mills, heavy equipment operator, Engineer Detachment, Combat Logistics Battalion 15, 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, brings a pallet of food from a Landing Craft Utility into the well deck of the USS Rushmore, during a replenishment-at-sea. (PHOTO COURTESY: CPL. TIMOTHY R. CHILDERS, USMC)

Kohler: I am consistently impressed with how dedicated they are to supporting deployed Marines and those eating in the mess halls, and feel fortunate to have a professional and dedicated staff supporting the Marine Corps Food Service Program. The foodservice staff has been extremely busy over the past year. Our efforts have included: the Food Service Program Management Office and HQMC Contracts Branch administration of the Regional Garrison Food Service Contract II to support all garrison mess halls in the continental United States (CONUS); foodservice staff participating in fielding the Expeditionary Field Kitchen; and fielding of the Enhanced-Tray Ration Heating System. The staff also participated in the Joint Integrated Field Feeding working group, Combat Feeding Research and

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— Kohler



MCAS Cherry Point, N.C. - Cpl. Fatimah R. Butler, a food service specialist with Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron, fills bread bowls with gumbo during a Chef of the Quarter competition. The inspiration for her entrée came from her mother. (PHOTO COURTESY: CPL. ANDREA CLEOPATRA DICKERSON, USMC)

Government Food Service:

Selected new mess halls opening on the east and west coast include walk-up windows and drive-up/drive-thru windows. How many mess halls have these convenient service features so far? How many are planned? Why is this being included?

Kohler: Understanding the Marine Corps' mission, cultural changes and organizational need for performance, we have ensured newly renovated and constructed mess halls have met restaurant quality standards. We strive to make them comparable in appearance and functionality to well-known restaurant chains. Walk-up and drive-thru windows offer equivalent experiences young Marines would expect while visiting off-base food establishments.

Government Food Service:

Describe plans in place to construct, refurbish and/or consolidate mess halls. Describe some of the projects either underway or coming up, and the goals. Also, is utilization by Marines being studied and are there any steps to achieve higher rates?

Engineering Board, Joint Subsistence Policy Board and Research and Development Associates Conference.

Government Food Service: *How are the Regional Garrison Food Service Contracts going? Are they resulting in any changes or innovations that Marines can see, such as options on main line or fast-food areas?*

Kohler: The Marine Corps Regional Garrison Food Service Contracts (RGFSC) II Program Management Office maintains a mutually beneficial, successful and long-term partnership with Sodexo. In conjunction with the Marine Corps, Sodexo's innovative approaches continue to improve mess hall attendance.

Kohler: We have one project that, if approved, will consolidate two aging mess halls, but there are no further planned consolidations. We continually look at mess hall utilization rates and look for ways to improve mess hall patronage. In CONUS, our contractor looks for ways to provide them with desired menu choices while balancing the nutritional requirements. For installations outside of CONUS, we hold yearly menu planning boards and revisit menus that do not meet customer expectations or just need to be changed for the sake of variety. In both cases, the Marine Corps Food Service Program is fluid in making appropriate changes to the menus in order to ensure we are meeting the expectations of our customers.

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Government Food Service: Please discuss any new initiatives or concepts for Marine Corps Food Service operations for 2012 and beyond. For example, are the working group meetings involving representatives from the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Army, U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps Systems Command continuing or have any common or standard systems been developed?

Kohler: We work jointly on a number of fronts. Right now we are working with the other services to update the Armed Forces Recipe Service (Recipe Cards). The folks at the Combat Feeding Directorate in Natick are doing a great job in supporting this enduring initiative and each service is providing representation to ensure we have a joint service consensus as we move forward.

Government Food Service: Responses a year ago indicated there is planning with Manpower and Reserve Affairs to implement an automated meal card process with an enterprise solution in order to prevent fraud and eliminate the older Meal Card (DD Form 714) process in mess halls. Please update us on this.

Kohler: Automating the Meal Card is important to us. It provides a host of possibilities that are otherwise unattainable. We continue to work with Manpower and Reserve Affairs to develop, implement and finalize an automated system.

Government Food Service: Nutrition education programs are popular in the military. In fiscal 2012-13, the Marine Corps implemented the "Fueled to Fight" nutrition program, which included an upgrade to the Marine Corps Food Management Information System. Please explain the programs' facets and changes for Marines.

Kohler: The Fueled to Fight Program is moving forward, but is not fully implemented at this time. Portions of the program are being utilized and Marines are receiving the training. I anticipate having it fully implemented this summer. This is a very important program to me as the director. I want Marines to be educated on their meal choices



Lance Cpl. Timothy J. Bruce, a food service specialist with Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron, Cherry Point, N.C., plates sweet-and-spicy salmon, grilled asparagus and mashed potatoes during a Chef of the Quarter competition. (PHOTO COURTESY: CPL. ANDREA CLEOPATRA DICKERSON, USMC)

and to ensure they understand that they need to put as much time into making educated decisions as they do to ensure they are physically fit.

Government Food Service: *Is the military's growing emphasis on nutrition and dietary guidelines causing the Marine Corps to make any changes to its 21-day Master Menu? Are there any plans to standardize the menu, such that the same meal is served throughout the Marines or that flexibility permits the same main ingredient to be used but prepared differently?*

Kohler: Diversity in the Marine Corps menu requirements is as important as ever. We continue to work with our contractor to bring a wider variety and healthier line of products to choose from where individual patrons can customize food and meal choices according to dietary needs and preferences.

Government Food Service: *The Army put evaluations for the Connelly awards on hold. Are the W.P.T. Hill evaluations still proceeding? If so, will they be presented at IFSEA in Dallas or some alternative?*

Kohler: Fiscal constraints will have an impact on the awards program going forward, but we remain committed to the intent of the program. USMC attendance at the awards ceremony for this year will be minimized or curtailed entirely due to sequestration and budget reductions. A final decision on the issue is pending. We are currently working with the National Restaurant Association for an alternative to still recognize our top performing mess halls, field mess and individual Marines in a different way should the decision be made to not attend the ceremony this year.

Government Food Service: *Marine Corps Food Service is committed to sharpening skills and occupational specialty. Much training and curriculum updating was planned for 2012. Can you highlight some results of these talks and any plans for 2013?*

Kohler: During 2012, the Expeditionary Field Kitchen (EFK) was validated and put into production. The EFK was implemented into curriculum at Marine Corps Food Service School in fiscal 2013 and, as of January 2013, attendees at six basic and one NCO foodservice classes have received training on this new gear. Additionally, during 2012 through internal review of the existing curriculum, it was determined that more practical application tests were needed at the basic level. The end state of this change is that a better-trained and more proficient Marine is being shipped out to the operating forces. During 2012,

Marine Corps Integrated Maintenance Management System was phased out in favor of Global Combat Support System – Marine Corps (GCSS-MC) rolled out. We have adjusted portions of the program of instruction to capture the new program to ensure our students are taught the most current systems in use out in the operating forces.

Government Food Service: *Culinary training is consolidated into the Joint Culinary Center of Excellence. How is this going and has it led to any changes in processes or movement toward commonality with other services?*

Kohler: The Marine Corps is satisfied with its current training at Fort Lee, Va. Observing the Army, Navy and Air Force foodservice programs has enhanced our perspective and familiarity with those programs. The Marine Corps' goal at the foodservice school continues to be to train Marines so that they are prepared for anything they will face on the ever-changing battlefield.

Government Food Service: *The Marine Corps is also committed to being environmentally conscious. What steps have been taken and what lies ahead for 2013?*

Kohler: Continued efforts have been implemented at installations with the procurement of additional compost machines that reduce the weight and volume of food scraps generated in the mess halls. The contract for a total oil management system aboard Camp Lejeune is ongoing, and additional actions are being taken to prepare other facilities to support this type of closed-loop system. Through our contracting partners, our CONUS mess halls have been employing innovative best practices for sustainability. All mess halls are eliminating the use of Styrofoam. The MCAS Cherry Point mess hall is undergoing a major renovation/repair project that will include the use of solar technology for energy savings.

Government Food Service: *It appears field feeding is going through a transition. Give an overview of changes to equipment, feeding and food, and why.*

Kohler: On par with actions taken to support garrison mess hall operations, field feeding has taken on the challenge to support the needs of Marines by investing in new technologies and equipment capable of preparing the highest-quality meals in the most austere environments. One way to achieve this is the Enhanced Tray Ration Heating System (ETRHS), which will increase a unit's capability to prepare a wider variety of rations and provide the means to serve up to a

company-sized unit (twice daily) in forward, remote areas. This capability is packed, stored and transported in a Small Field Refrigeration System, allowing the unit to double as a field refrigerator and the system's embarkation container. Another field-feeding system that is being fielded is the Expeditionary Field Kitchen (EFK). The trailer-mounted EFK is intended to support the entire family of combat rations on a highly mobile and expeditionary equipment platform. This system allows foodservice personnel the ability to rapidly set up or tear down the kitchen in support of high-tempo operations, and promises to be the forward-feeding solution of the future. The Marine Corps began fielding this kitchen in 2012 and will continue to field through 2013.

Government Food Service: *The Joint Interservice Field Feeding (JIFF) working group brought together the services using ground-based, field-feeding systems to work toward designing common systems. Does this group continue to meet and how is this progressing?*

Kohler: The Marine Corps participated in the Joint Interservice Field Feeding working group with representatives from the Combat Feeding Directorate; Office of the Product Manager, Force Sustainment Systems; U.S. Marine Corps Systems Command; HQs, U.S. Marine Corps; U.S. Navy Supply; U.S. Army Combined Arms Support Command; U.S. Army Joint Culinary Center



Marines and sailors aboard the USS Rushmore conduct a replenishment at sea, receiving 10 pallets of food from the USS Peleliu by Landing Craft Utility. (PHOTO COURTESY: CPL. TIMOTHY R. CHILDERS, USMC)

of Excellence; U.S. Air Force Services Agency; and HQs, U.S. Army Quartermaster School to discuss areas of potential commonality for field-feeding equipment and systems. The overall purpose is to bring the three services that use ground-based, field-feeding systems together in a structured manner to work toward designing and engineering common systems that each service can use in its own respective operational situations. The group is specifically looking at developing standard interfaces, appliance configurations, design constraints, definitions of commerciality, and common maintenance standards and concepts with the ultimate goal of all services fielding joint field-feeding solutions with a high degree of interservice commonality.

—GFS