

# Marine Corps Makes Mess Halls Popular

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

**Government Food Service:** Tell us a little about how the last year has unfolded.

**Lt. Col. Kohler:** Last year was very successful for the food service and subsistence program. We were able to close old mess halls and open new state-of-the-art facilities. We still have some unfinished business with the implementation of the Point-of-Sale (POS) program; however, the IT Hardware procurement documents have been generated and are waiting for final approval. Funding shortfalls for replacement equipment and a reduction of personnel within food service has been an ongoing challenge. We fed over 32.5 million meals in garrison last year, and this number has remained constant even with force reductions. In the field, we fed almost 9 million meals. Total program costs exceeded \$355 million for fiscal 2014.

**Government Food Service:** Improving education for foodservice Marines is an ongoing goal. Talk about the opportunities available and what is planned.

**Kohler:** We continue to fill seats in all of our foodservice courses at the Joint Culinary Center of Excellence in Ft. Lee, Va. Additionally, the Marine Corps has remained committed to providing opportunities at the Culinary Institute of America for Pro-Chef Level I and through co-sponsorship with the NRA foodservice courses at Greystone, Napa Valley, Calif.

**Government Food Service:** The Fueled to Fight Program educates Marines to make healthy choices in the mess hall and to understand that physical training is as important to combat readiness as food choices. How is it progressing?

**Kohler:** It's progressing very well. We're combining the Fueled to Fight (FTF) program with the Point-of-Sale program deployment and an updated release of the Marine Corps Food



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Management Information System (MCMIS). The technology will allow our customers to receive a printed receipt for every menu item on their plate with nutritional/total caloric values for each item selected. Along with color-coding, this detailed information will allow customers to make smart menu selections based on their individual dietary and training goals. Additionally, the Marine Corps recently hired a new, full-time dietitian, Ms. Sharlene Holladay, MS, RD, LD.

FTF program "next steps" include the ongoing development of applicable nutrition-education materials and curricula for foodservice personnel, recruits and all mess hall patrons by the Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC) dietitian.

**Government Food Service:** Fueled to Fight included an upgrade to the Marine Corps Food Management Information System. What is the latest with this?

**Kohler:** The Point-of-Sale program will work within the Marine Corps Food Management System. Data collected from the front of the house will automatically be sent to the back of the house, providing the foodservice personnel raw data to see what products are more acceptable than others. The POS also will



Sergeant Eduardo Ayala, a food service specialist with 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, prepares miniature pizzas at the Harvest Falcon Dining Facility aboard Camp Dwyer, Helmand province, Afghanistan. (PHOTO COURTESY: CPL. CODY HAAS, USMC)

check entitlement to subsist at cost/no cost by interfacing with the Marine Corps pay system database.

**Government Food Service:** DoD rolled out the Healthy Base Initiative in August 2013. Can you discuss anything that's been learned regarding Marine Corps food service and nutrition at its locations, if anything, so far?

**Kohler:** On the appropriated foodservice side, the Marine Corps mess halls were next highest rated after DeCA in offering healthy choices. We received positive comments in many areas, but continue to push for more improvements. We serve many healthy options, and will continue to expand those options based on customer preference. We continue to support the effort of Natick and the other services to jointly review all Armed Forces Recipe Service Cards and make required improvements to include using healthier ingredients where practical.

**Government Food Service:** How well are Marine Corps mess halls utilized and are there any plans to reduce or expand the number of dining facilities?

**Kohler:** The patronage in our mess halls continues to grow. New mess halls, broader choices and listening to customer feedback have been the keys to ensuring they are provided with the best-tasting, most well-balanced meal available on the installation.

**Government Food Service:** DLA Troop Support is also considering awarding contracts to foodservice management companies to operate military dining facilities. Discuss what interest, if any, that Marine Corps Food Service has in this plan.

**Kohler:** The Marine Corps is always looking at options to save money and expand on resources already available throughout DoD; however, we adopted this methodology over 10 years ago when we awarded two contracts to operate the CONUS mess halls. The Marine Corps is fully committed to the Regional Garrison Food Service Contracts that are in effect through fiscal 2018.

**Government Food Service:** How are plans progressing to implement an automated meal card process and eliminate the older DD Form 714 process in mess halls? Last year, approval was pending to release software.

**Kohler:** Once hardware is purchased, we can proceed with the implementation. This also ties into earlier comments regarding the POS system and ability to determine meal entitlements.

**Government Food Service:** What are plans for the Marine Corps W.P.T. Hill awards in 2015? When will

they be announced and what are plans for the awards presentation?

**Kohler:** We are planning to conduct the inspections in February and March. The award winners will be announced by the end of March, and we will begin preparation for traveling to Chicago for the award presentation. The presentation will be at the evening event in which all services participate. It looks to be a very exciting event because this will be the first year that all services present their service-specific awards in a single venue.

**Government Food Service:** Marine Corps Food Service is committed to sharpening skills and occupational specialty. Discuss any training planned for 2015 and anything learned through programs in 2014.

**Kohler:** Unfortunately our Food Management Teams' travels have been somewhat restricted due to funding shortfalls. We will leverage our regional contracts to enhance hands-on training in garrison mess halls.

With the reduction of foodservice personnel, our senior program leadership (officers and enlisted) are going to conduct a structure review and provide recommendations to increase efficiencies.

**Government Food Service:** Is there any update on training since consolidation into the Joint Culinary Center of Excellence?

**Kohler:** Currently, Army and Marine Corps classes conduct joint training for Phase I curriculum, which focuses on sanitation and food safety. The Navy joins us for a "tri-service" Phase II block, which consists of cooking techniques and small quantity baking. After Phase II is complete, each service moves into service-unique blocks. For the Marine Corps, this consists of approximately two weeks in small garrison operations, which focuses on basic mess hall operations. Then the Marines move to a three-week field foodservice package where they learn the basics about field equipment, operational rations and cooking techniques in operational environments. In total, the consolidated training consists of 10 days of training out of a 42-day instruction program.

We are always looking for ways to improve interoperability and cross-service training on equipment and concepts.

**Government Food Service:** Field feeding is undergoing a transition. Give us an update on the latest equipment in use and being rolled out.

**Kohler:** The Marine Corps is in full swing on Expeditionary Field Kitchen (EFK) use and the us-

age of the Tray Ration Heating System and the Enhanced Tray Ration Heating System. The EFK alone gives the commander the ability to serve an array of menus within the entire family of combat rations. Future development and production of the "M" ration will give Marines a more robust menu that is designed specifically for our Marines in the field. As we began working with Natick on revising the menus for the UGR "B" ration, we wanted to demonstrate a significant change in the ration. We proposed that the ration be renamed to "M" (Marine) ration, because we are the only service that uses this ration. Additionally, by replacing the "B" with an "M", we are able to remove the perception that the "B" is inferior to the "A" ration.



Cpl. John Lucido (right), from 1st Marine Headquarters Expeditionary Group field mess, is scored on his preparation and cleanliness. PHOTO COURTESY: CPL. MICHELLE BRINN, CAMP PENDLETON PUBLIC AFFAIRS)

**Government Food Service:** *The Joint Interservice Field Feeding (JIFF) working group brings the services together toward a common ground-based system. Does this group continue to meet and how is it progressing?*

**Kohler:** The JIFF works well in defining service-specific or multiple service joint requirements. We

are looking at the significant advances made with the JIFF burner and are evaluating its capabilities. The Marine Corps generally requires lighter, more mobile and flexible feeding platforms; however, we continue to seek equipment to support multiple services where possible. It must fit doctrinally into how we deploy our forces.

—GFS