

Miramar Community Leaders Forum
May 19, 2011

The monthly meeting of the Miramar CLF was convened in the Commanding Officer's conference room onboard MCAS Miramar, 19 May 2011. The guest speaker this month was Major Ben Ackison, Deputy Officer of Counsel, MCAS Miramar.

In case you might be a little confused by Maj. Ackison's title, he is a military lawyer. Maj. Ackison recently returned from Afghanistan and he was kind enough to share some of his experiences with us.

In Afghanistan, Maj. Ackison was assigned to the International Security Assistance Force providing assistance to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Maj. Ackison is a lawyer. And we immediately wondered what in the world a lawyer was doing in Afghanistan? Maj. Ackison described his job as follows:

The Marines in Afghanistan are in Helmand Province. They are nowhere else in Afghanistan. The Helmand Province is the source of 90% of the world's opium. The Marines are there to try to shut down the drug trade.

So, what does a lawyer have to do with all of this? Maj. Ackison explained that lawyers are critical in both kinetic fights and non-kinetic fights. In general, kinetic fights involve combat and bullets and fierce fights to engage and kill the enemy. Non-kinetic fights involve kindness and working with the local people to develop schools (almost all of the population of Afghanistan is illiterate). So the Marines have a dual role of disrupting the Taliban but helping the country.

The military lawyers are there to make sure that international rules are followed. The lawyers make sure that operational commanders are fully briefed on Operational Law. That would include a complete understanding of the Law of War, the Rules of Engagement, and the Rule of Law to assist the Afghans in building their government. They also get involved in deterrence operations (counter narcotics), which must be handled correctly. In other words, Operational Law covers everything to do with war fighting. An example would be to decide "When to strike? And is it legal? The Rule of Law has everything to do with Nation Building.

Military lawyers also oversee aspects of Fiscal Law. The military is provided with money to help the local population. The lawyers' job is to ensure that the money is being spent correctly. Marine Corps commanders have between \$250K to \$500K, which is called the CERP or Commanders Emergency Relief Program. This money is used to build schools, fix bazaars, and provide cell phones to the local populace. An interesting side benefit of providing cell phones to the local citizens is that "we listen." A great deal of intelligence is gathered from the distribution of these cell phones to the locals.

Lastly, Maj. Ackison told us that the Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) are prolific all over the Helmand Province. As a result, there are over 10,000 Humvees in Afghanistan, which cannot be taken off base due to inadequate armor.

Operational statistics for MCAS Miramar are as follows: For the month of April, total fixed wing/helicopter operations for April 2011 were 7,188 which is nearly identical to April of last year where the base logged 7,134 operations. Noise complaints, however were much lower for April this year than last. This April the base received 10 noise complaints compared to 17 last year.

As always, the primary route that draws the most noise complaints is the Beach helicopter route from which the base received 7 noise complaints. Two additional complaints came from the Lakee North jet departure which overlays Rancho Bernardo. However, neither of those complaints came from Rancho Bernardo residents.

The meeting for June will be replaced by a tour for an operational F/A 18 squadron on the 13th of June.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeffrey C Frederick