

## HMH-361 Marines play Santa, deliver care packages to brothers at FOBs

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AL ASAD, Iraq(Jan. 17, 2008) -- For deployed Marines, mail call is the happiest time of the day; it brings a piece of home and some perishables that are not easily available. In some parts of Iraq, it is a little harder to get mail, but one squadron has tried their best to alleviate that problem.

The Marines of Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 361 have started HMH Santa, a program where they deliver care packages to Marines and service members in various Forward Operating Bases throughout the Al Anbar Province.

"We just wanted to share with other Marines that may or may not receive stuff," said Sgt. Maj. Joe Morales, the HMH-361 sergeant major. "Especially those who are in remote areas where they may not get mail regularly."

The idea was started when 1st Lt. Chris Garnier, a pilot with HMH-361 and S-5 officer, was thinking of a way to increase morale.

"It is part of my responsibility to increase the morale of the squadron," explained Garnier. "We have done like everyone else and asked AnyMarine.com to send us stuff. The problem with being in Al Asad is that we have gotten more stuff than we actually need."

Although the Marines enjoy all the mail that they receive in care packages, they felt they needed to do something with the excess.

"We get a lot of extra boxes and stuff and we don't want to be rude and throw it away," Garnier said. "Since we control our own delivery ability, we ask our Marines to put aside the AnyMarine boxes so we can go drop those off at the FOB when we do a normal general support mission."

The squadron started the project right after Thanksgiving, and the Marines have participated by providing various care packages to go out every couple of weeks.

"They are unopened boxes, we don't know what's in them," said Garnier. "We could be selfish and open all the boxes for ourselves, probably figure out a way to use them all, but it's better this way. We just figured that we would do that as a sacrifice on our part and give mail and any needed stuff to these Marines. It's just another way for us to increase the morale of the Marines that are around us."

Despite their good efforts, the HMH-361 Marines do not do it for a thank you, but just to know that their fellow brothers get what they need.

"There is not a POC, we just drop off the boxes," said Garnier. "All they know is that it's from us. We are not getting a response or "'Thank You,' we don't really care for that. It was just a mindset of 'Let's just spread the wealth.'"

Spreading the wealth is something that the squadron and its leaders feel good about and plan to continue.

"This is Marines taking care of Marines. If we can share, I don't see why we shouldn't," said Morales. "This is not only for Marines either, there are some FOBs that have Sailors, Soldiers and Airmen there as well. We also plan on continuing this throughout the deployment."

Without even batting an eyelid, the Marines have taken part in the project demonstrating high character and their care for their fellow brothers.

"I think they feel really good about it, they actually come to me or e-mail me all the time and say good idea or

good job,” Garnier said. “It says a lot about their character, I think it says a lot about the Marine Corps in general. We look at each as brothers and we want to make sure that we are helping out each other.”

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