



SgtsMaj, MGySgts, CMDCMs, Marines and Sailors, Saturday, 23 January at 1100 will mark the end of the Marines in Iraq as an organization. II MEF (fwd) will conduct a Transfer of Authority Ceremony with the First Armored Division without a Relief in Place from any incoming unit. USF-W (formally MNF-W) will merge with USD-C (formally MND-Baghdad) and will cease to exist.

After 6 years, over 850 Marines and Sailors killed in combat and another 8800 wounded, we have completed our mission. At our peak we had almost 26,000 Marines and Sailors on deck, close to 200 aircraft, over 380,000 pieces of ground equipment, and were averaging close to 2000 significant events a month. We have added a whole new generation of Heroes, and names like Al Nasiriyah, Fallujah and Ramadi will be added to our History books.

Words can't begin to explain the magnitude of effort and sacrifice our Marines and Sailors have gone through to help the Iraqi people. Each year since the initial invasion, Marines and Sailors from all over the Corps have been a part of the revolving I MEF (fwd) and II MEF (Fwd) Commands. Each year has been different with its own sets of unique challenges, and each successive year the incoming organization has built upon the successes of the outgoing organization.

This year was no different; we didn't have anywhere near the level of fighting that previous MEFs have done. However, we did conduct many operations, maintained security, continue to professionalize the Iraqi Security Forces, develop good governance and economics, assisted with the continued establishment of the Rule of Law, and oversaw the peaceful transition of the provincial government. We also had one unique mission that we can call our own. That was to finally bring the Marine Corps home. Over the past year, we have simultaneously conducted the responsible drawdown of 24,000 Personnel, over 34 COPs and FOBs, including Baharia, Rawah, and TQ, and sent six years worth of equipment out of theater.

For those of you who served with me this year, thank you. It was long and difficult at times with our own set of challenges, but we did it.

It has been an honor to serve with you.

For those of you who have left your boot prints over here at least once during the last six years, thanks to you too. You set the stage for us to finish the job. It has been costly, it has been challenging, it has taken a while with quite a few dark days. But in the end, it was worth it.

All Marines and Sailors, including those who remained stateside, have contributed to the overall success of the Marines and Sailors in Iraq, and all of us have known someone who didn't make it back alive or has permanent injuries. It is up to us to ensure that those who follow never forget their sacrifice or what we did here.

Collectively we have added another illustrious chapter to the successful story of our Marine Corps. One that all of us can be proud of.

Semper Fidelis,
K. Carpenter
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