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RELEASE 04-08
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dec. 4, 2008

Marine Corps Graduates First Military Freefall Class

QUANTICO, Va. — Last month the Marine Corps graduated its first Military Freefall class. Twenty-two Marines, primarily reconnaissance, graduated Nov. 21 from the new Multi-Mission Parachutist Course (MMPC) held in Coolidge, Ariz. Michael Thurmond, Marine Corps Systems Command's (MCSC) Freefall Training Coordinator, helped design MMPC, which trains Marines on the newer Multi-Mission Parachute System (MMPS).

According to Thurmond, the new course will allow more Marines to qualify each year for high-altitude jumps while cutting down on training time. Up to 240 Marines will be able to train in 10 four-week classes per year. Currently, only 68 Marines are able to qualify annually, and they must do so during a four-week class at the Army's Military Freefall School at Yuma Proving Ground, Ariz. Marines were then required to follow that class with the Corps' Multi-Mission Transition Course, a three-week class that introduces the MMPS used now by Marines in the field. The transition class will no longer be required with MMPC.

According to Tom O'Hara, MCSC's acting MMPS Team Leader, the Army validated the safety and standards of MMPC early this year on the first try. The Army offered suggestions as the program was developed and stands to benefit since it opens additional training slots for Soldiers, Thurmond said.

Introduced in 2005, the safety enhancements for the new parachute include a hand-deployed pilot chute that replaces the older spring-loaded parachute. According to Thurmond, the hand-deployed pilot chute is a much cleaner deployment method. Another MMPS addition is a seat for use during High-Altitude High-Opening (HAHO) jumps. These jumps can last up to an hour using the Special Application Parachute, and the seats take pressure off the legs. MMPS also includes a drogue — a small chute deployed before the main chute to slow freefall.

"In our old legacy system we'd do a 25,000-foot HAHO, and the opening shocks would literally, in some cases, knock people out because it was so violent," Thurmond said. "If you start jumping with the MMPS when you're a Corporal or Sergeant, you can still do it when you're a Master Sergeant or a Master Gunnery Sergeant just because you're not taking the beating you were before."

“Our Marines are learning on the system they’ll be using,” O’Hara said. “And that’s not only saving time and taxpayer dollars, it’s providing them better training.”

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