

NAVY'S MOBILE PREVENTIVE MEDICINE TEAM PROTECTS SAILORS AND MARINES DURING OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

The U. S. Navy relies on its Medical Department to deliver healthcare to its Sailors and Marines at home, aboard Navy ships, and anywhere around the world where the Navy or Marine Corps is deployed.

Preventive Medicine is the branch of Navy Medicine that is dedicated to the protection of its people through prevention and early intervention of public health problems that threaten the well-being of our armed forces and degrade military readiness.



**Naval Mobile Construction Battalion
Seven Seabees construct an
administrative building in Ad
Diwaniyah, Iraq.**

The Navy's *Preventive Medicine Mobile Medical Augmentation Readiness Team 5* (PM-MMART 5), is in Ad Diwaniyah, in central Iraq, as the first line of defense in protecting the health of American Marines and their Navy support staff during *Operation Iraqi Freedom*. PM-MMART 5 consists

of five Navy Medical Department officers and seven enlisted Navy Hospital Corpsmen. The officers include a Preventive Medicine Officer, an Industrial Hygiene Officer, an Environmental Health Officer, an Entomologist, and a Microbiologist. One Hospital Corpsmen is a graduate of a series of specialized training curriculums that qualify him as an *Advanced Laboratory Technician*. The other six corpsmen are graduates of an advanced Hospital Corps training school that qualifies them as *Preventive Medicine Technicians*. Specially trained and designated Hospital Corpsmen are also assigned to provide direct medical support to the Marines. Some of the corpsmen assigned to work with the Marine Corps are also qualified *Preventive Medicine Technicians*.

The 12-member PM-MMART Team is in charge of identifying and eradicating



**Navy Hospital Corpsmen of
the PM-MMART 5 work in
their mobile laboratory to
identify disease-causing
microorganisms.**

sources of communicable diseases, occupational illnesses, and other health hazards that might otherwise harm Marines and Sailors deployed in the region. These public health experts spent several months gathering information on the known and suspected public health threats that U. S. and coalition troops could encounter in Iraq. During that planning stage, the Team also organized materials and equipment needed for the assignment. The equipment includes a mobile laboratory for the rapid identification of a wide range of possible chemical, biological, and radiological warfare agents. The lab also has up to date analytical equipment for identifying disease-causing microorganisms, testing of air and water samples for contaminants, and a wide variety of chemical tests.

The Marine Corps' operational staffs and Navy medical support team decided where best to locate three regional PM-MMART Teams to support their public health requirements during *Operation Iraqi Freedom*. They selected Ad Diwaniyah in central Iraq, a second site in southern Iraq, and a third in Kuwait. The three PM-MMART Teams' advanced diagnostic and specialty consultations have



Early diagnosis of communicable diseases by Team 5 made effective treatment possible.

been vital to medical officers and operational commanders in the field of operations. According to Navy Captain Joel Lees, a surgeon with the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force in central Iraq, their presence is essential. "Team 5 has been a great asset to us!" said Doctor Lees. "They've tackled some potentially important public health issues for us, and got good advice out to the commanders and their medical staffs in time to help keep problems to a minimum."

Shortly after PM-MMART 5's arrival in Ad Diwaniyah, its laboratory confirmed the first diagnoses of three communicable diseases that are rare or unknown in the United States. Thanks to Team 5, the early diagnoses of malaria, shigella, and norovirus armed the Navy medical doctors in Iraq with the information they needed to start treatment without delay.

Commander Scott Sherman, PM-MMART 5's medical Team leader and public health physician said, "We concentrate on preventing or alleviating medical conditions that could rapidly diminish the combat

abilities of the Marines." Because the PM-MMART Team possesses a wide range of technical expertise and the specialty equipment to confirm



Among the extensive list of Team 5 responsibilities is ensuring the safety of drinking water through extensive testing and analysis of water samples.

their suspicions, the Team is able to advise doctors on an especially wide variety of medical concerns that might otherwise cause widespread illness, long-term disabilities, even death, among their troops.

infectious disease threats, identifying insects and other pests that spread disease, managing pest control operations, ensuring the safety of food and drinking water and the sanitary disposal of wastes, testing of blood samples and other body fluids for infectious agents, consulting on noncombat-related safety matters, avoiding heat casualties, and carrying out laboratory analyses of suspicious chemicals, fumes, smokes, or gases in military encampments and newly liberated areas.

The 1st Marine Expeditionary Force utilizes PM-MMART Team 5 extensively for surveillance for disease outbreaks and updating field commanders on changing

"The commanders have done a great job identifying areas of concern," according to Lieutenant Commander Lucy Walker, Industrial Hygiene Officer and PM-MMART 5's Assistant Team Leader. "We are able to come in, characterize the nature of an exposure, and provide constructive advice on how to reduce the threat. As part of our ongoing *Force Health Protection* program, we document and share our experiences with other Preventive Medicine Teams."

Chief Hospital Corpsman Robert Hunt, Team 5's Leading Chief Petty Officer, added, "The *Preventive Medicine Technicians* who are assigned to the Marine units are doing a great job out in the field. They're keeping down the rates of disease and non-battle injuries in their units. This is a tough place for public health, and these guys are vital to keeping disease and non-battle injury rates very low."



PM-MMART 5 protects Marines and Sailors deployed in Iraq by preventing exposures to health hazards.