

Pendleton Weapons and Gear Show Draws Thousands

by Mark Walker

Camp Pendleton, CA, Feb 2, 2012—

Lance Cpl. Gunnar Vincens was admiring the latest in lightweight knives and rifle scopes on Wednesday, while Sgt. Onix Polanco was checking out a new lightweight armored vest.



The Marines were among thousands of troops attending the two-day Marine West Military Exhibition at Camp Pendleton, where vendors showed off the latest and greatest in military equipment.

Maj. Gen. Ronald Bailey hailed the hundreds of weapon and gear exhibits inside the large tent as the stuff of war that can mean the difference between life and death.

"These are the tools we can use to our advantage day in and day out," said Bailey, commander of the base's 1st Marine Division.

The show, just a short distance from the base's Main Gate, continues Thursday and is open to the general public.

Vincens, 24, said he likes the knives produced by a company called Leatherman.

"I've always been a Leatherman fan," he said, adding he wasn't only checking out what could help him on the battlefield, but also starting

his 2012 holiday shopping.

"My dad is a former Marine and also likes these knives, so I'm getting my Christmas shopping done a little early," he said.

There's little sign of a slowdown in the defense industry as exhibitors from companies large and small were doing a brisk business with the troops.

Items that Marines and sailors find to their liking can lead to a mass purchase by the Marine Corps, making the annual exposition a destination for defense industry contractors.

One of those companies, QinetiQ, was demonstrating the latest in robotic-controlled machine guns and robots that help detect roadside bombs, the weapon responsible for the majority of troop deaths and injuries in Afghanistan.

The company also has a 10-pound "Tactical Robotic Controller" that Marines can strap on their back and operate small unarmed aerial vehicles.

The lightweight armored vest manufactured by Elite Defense is under review by Marine Corps officials.

If it pans out, Polanco said he would jump at the chance to trade in his much heavier protective gear, which troops wear when "outside the wire" or away from their bases and on patrol in Afghanistan.

"As a combat engineer, you walk around with a lot of heavy, explosive material beside the vest," the 26-year-old New York native said. "This one feels pretty good and it's something the Marine Corps should pursue."

Col. David Furness, commander of the 1st Marine Regiment, was at the show looking to see what was there to help his troops.

"I look for new ideas that you can apply and ways to leverage new technology," he said.

If all the gear on display and the free trinkets handed out by vendors wasn't enough to attract the troops, retired Marine gunnery sergeant and gruff-talking actor R. Lee Ermey was on hand to sign autographs and chat.

Coming to events such as the exposition is just one of many ways he keeps in touch with the Marine Corps, Ermey said.

"It keeps me connected to my beloved Marine Corps," he said, after a reporter was warned by his han-



dlers not to ask any "political" questions.

"They retired me in 1972 and I stood outside the gates of the (San Diego) Marine Corps Recruit Depot and realized that every friend in the world that I had was inside those gates and I knew right there that I could never walk away from my friends," Ermey said.

*Photos by: JAMIE SCOTT LYTLE
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