



## Marines Honor Students at Special Flag Ceremony

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By Susan Read

In a ceremony filled with quiet dignity, members of the Marine Aviation Detachment (MAD), China Lake, Calif. joined Ms. Rebekah Howard's fifth grade class at Las Flores Elementary School, Ridgecrest, Calif. on March 23 to post a very special flag in the classroom. The flag was a gift to the students from the U.S. Marine Corps' Third Reconnaissance Battalion in Iraq, represented by Colonel Kevin Gross, MAD Commanding Officer, Staff Sergeant Timothy Babcock, Sergeant Armando Reyes and Corporal Joe Stewart.

The flag's journey from Camp Fallujah to Las Flores School began with the class sponsorship of the battalion during the 2006 holiday season. Student Jordyn Rivers is the niece of the battalion's Operations Officer, Major Shawn Swanson, and she established the link that would include letters and gift packages from the students safe at home to the Marines serving in harm's way.

On February 4, 2007 the battalion flew the colors over Al Fallujah, documented with a certificate signed by the



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battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel William H. Seely III.

Jordyn's parents, Colleen and Dennis Rivers, assisted the students in designing their ceremony, which included patriotic music and a reading by Jordyn of the poem "Old Glory". Sierra Sands Unified School District Assistant Superintendent Shirley Kennedy joined parents and official visitors to observe the students form a line around the room and reverently pass the folded flag from one to another. Ms. Howard then handed the flag to Sergeant Reyes and Coporal Stewart to post and lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

Colonel Gross read a letter from Major Swanson, who told the students "I am truly honored that you have chosen to fly the flag that we presented to you in your classroom, and that you are doing that with so much respect and honor. Standing in front of our flag in the service of our country has been a true honor for us, and we have learned the value of the things that mean the most to us, like our freedom and security, family, friends and loved ones, and our fellow Americans."

"During a time when most think of themselves and what they want for Christmas, your class was focused outward on who you could support and how you would devote your time to the task. We were touched that a class of students thought enough of our Marines to send us some holiday cheer that we wanted to do something in return. The gift of an American flag to honor great Americans was an obvious choice."

"There are many ways for Americans to serve our great nation," Swanson concluded. "Your choice in service to others is admirable and should be continued. Good luck to all of you as you continue to work hard in school, serve your communities and prepare to be the future leaders of America. Semper Fi and God bless."

Ms. Howard thanked the Marines, the students and their families for making the occasion so special. "You were generous with cards, pictures and letters to the battalion," she told her pupils, "and I am so proud of you."

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PHOTO CUTLINE: Marine Aviation Detachment, China Lake and Ms. Rebekah Howard's fifth grade class hold special flag raising ceremony at Las Flores Elementary School, Ridgecrest, Calif.