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Sgt. Jonathan T. Spaulding keeps a watchful eye on his radar screen to ensure an inbound KC-130J lands safely. Spaulding graduated from the Transportation Safety Institute's Terminal Instrumental Procedures Course, known as TERPS, Aug. 27.

Point trains extra eyes in the sky

14 MCABE Marines successfully complete TERPS course

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STAFF CORRESPONDENT

There are times when even the most skilled pilot can't land a plane on eyesight alone. During periods of limited visibility, unseen terrain obstacles at low altitudes can deal a treacherous fate to an aircraft and pilot approaching the runway for landing.

Pilots learn to rely on "sight" provided by instruments and air traffic controllers to complete the mission to land safely.

Several Cherry Point air traffic controllers were among 14 from Marine Corps Air Bases East to successfully complete the terminal instrumental procedures course here known as TERPS.

Joe Florio of the Transportation Safety Institute was the chief instructor of the three-week course designed to teach elite air traffic controllers how to establish detailed flight procedures regarding the minimum speed, altitude and angle of approach an aircraft must maintain for a safe landing.

"TERPS is a highly specialized skill necessary in the planning of airfields and associated procedures," said Master Sgt. Roberta L. Henry, air traffic control staff non-commissioned officer in charge of Marine Corps

Air Bases East. "TERPS had previously been taught at Keesler Air Force Base, (Biloxi, Miss.,) in the form of an eight-week course at a great cost to the Marine Corps in terms of finances and personnel."

According to Henry, the TERPS course taught at Cherry Point enables MCABE to train more Marines in less time without paying the travel expense of sending them to Keesler for eight weeks.

"Master Sgt. [Mark D.] Eadie was responsible for bringing this course to MCABE at significant savings to the Marine Corps," said Henry. "The MCABE course allows a larger class size and a more condensed curriculum. Here, the course is three weeks long instead of eight, which enables us to train more in less time."

Eadie explained why the 15-day course filled with seven-hour classes wasn't for everyone in the ATC field.

"This is an intense course," said Eadie. "ATC Marines are generally required to be intelligent individuals. But, not all ATC Marines can successfully grasp the concepts taught here. We send the best controllers here to make them more valuable."

Marines capable of developing terminal flight procedures are especially valuable when deployed in combat situations.

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"TERPS procedures are useful at expeditionary airfields and forward operating bases where ATC Marines must develop procedures from scratch without automated equipment," said Eadie. "It's important we create more Marines with that capability because this training is used every day to some capacity at our expeditionary air stations."

Though the Cherry Point procedures

course announces no honor graduate, Eadie ensured that all Marines who successfully completed the training should be proud.

"In TERPS, a 99 percent is no better than a 70 percent because there is no real margin of error," said Eadie. "As air traffic controllers, it's not enough to be right 99 percent of the time. That 1 percent of error can result in a catastrophe."