



PVT. JOHNATHAN PROBST

Corporal Justin Gandino-Saadein monitors a KC-130J as it taxis across Cherry Point's tarmac to a runway.

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MCAS CHERRY POINT

The Marines of Cherry Point's Air Traffic Control center exceed expectations every day, going above and beyond the call of duty to ensure that aircraft in the skies around Cherry Point and on Cherry Point's tarmac are safe.

The Marines of ATC must know regulation manuals, which can be more than 1,000 pages from cover to cover, said Sgt. Brandon B. Strasler, an air traffic approach controller here.

"They're tasked with a lot and they perform far above expectations," said Gunnery Sergeant Joseph R. Roppo, air traffic control power chief.

To qualify to become an air traffic controller, a Marine must first go through four months of rigorous schooling in Pensacola, Fla., enduring a harsh battery of tests that come at them once a week, said Strasler. If a Marine fails one of these tests, they are dropped back one week in training to repeat that week, Strasler continued.

If Marines fail more than one test, they are disqualified from being air traffic controllers and get reclassified into another military occupational specialty, said Strasler.

Once new controllers arrive at Cherry Point, they are paired up with an instructor for on the job training. These instructors work with Marines one on one to sharpen the Marines' skills to the point of self-sufficiency.

When an instructor feels that the Marine they are paired up with is ready to work on their own, the instructor notifies that Marine's superiors and the Marine starts working independently. The instructor only monitors communications between the Marine and the aircraft that they are controlling, so that if the Marine makes a mistake, the instructor can break in and correct the mistake, said Strasler.

After working under the supervision of their instructor, the Marine's instructor notifies the Marine's superiors that the Marine is ready to work independently.

The amount of time spent under supervision depends on the Marine's progress and their instructor's confidence in their abilities, Strasler said.

As the Marines of ATC ascend their way through the progression to independence, their progress is not completely dependent on their instructors' confidence in their abilities though. The Marines must also prove their knowledge by acquiring qualifications in all areas that they will be working in, said Strasler.

The Marines of Cherry Point's ATC generally advance quickly under the system in place and perform their duties with a level of maturity far above that of their age, said Roppo.

"We have Marines right out of high school controlling multi-million dollar aircraft," Roppo concluded.



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The Marines and civilians of ATC diligently monitor their work stations, safeguarding aircraft and aircrews in their travels around the area.