

U.S. MARINES IN AFGHANISTAN, 2001-2009
**ANTHOLOGY AND ANNOTATED
BIBLIOGRAPHY**



*U.S. Marines in the
Global War on Terrorism*

U.S. Marines in Afghanistan, 2001–2009

Anthology and Annotated Bibliography

U.S. Marines in the Global War on Terrorism



Compiled by

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Quantico, Virginia
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Foreword

This volume presents a collection of 38 articles, interviews, and speeches describing many aspects of the U.S. Marine Corps' participation in Operation Enduring Freedom from 2001 to 2009. This work is intended to serve as a general overview and provisional reference to inform both Marines and the general public until the History Division completes monographs dealing with major Marine Corps operations during the campaign. The accompanying annotated bibliography provides a detailed look at selected sources that currently exist until new scholarship and archival materials become available.

Additional support for this work came from Dr. Fred H. Allison, embedded reporter Kristin Henderson, Colonel James A. Hogberg, the Center for Naval Analyses, the Combat Studies Institute, *Joint Force Quarterly*, *Leatherneck Magazine*, *Marine Corps Gazette*, Marine Corps University Press, *Marine Corps Times*, *Military Review*, *Rolling Stone*, *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, *Seapower*, the United States Institute of Peace, *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, and *The Washington Post* for permission to reprint their articles. Their cooperation made this anthology possible.



Dr. Charles P. Neimeyer
Director of Marine Corps History

Preface

From the outset, some experts doubted that the U.S. Marines Corps would play a major role in Afghanistan given the landlocked nature of the battlefield. Naval expeditionary Task Force 58 (TF-58) commanded by then-Brigadier General James N. Mattis silenced naysayers with the farthest ranging amphibious assault in Marine Corps/Navy history. In late November 2001, Mattis' force seized what became Forward Operating Base Rhino, Afghanistan, from naval shipping some 400 miles away. The historic assault not only blazed a path for follow-on forces, it also cut off fleeing al-Qaeda and Taliban elements and aided in the seizure of Kandahar.

While Corps doctrine and culture advocates Marine employment as a fully integrated Marine air-ground task force (MAGTF), deployments to Afghanistan often reflected what former Commandant General Charles C. Krulak coined as the “three-block war.” Following TF-58's deployment during the initial take down of the Taliban regime, the MAGTF made few appearances in Afghanistan until 2008. Before then, subsequent Marine units often deployed as a single battalion under the command of the U.S. Army Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) to provide security for provincial reconstruction teams. The Marine Corps also provided embedded training teams to train and mentor the fledgling Afghan National Army and Police. Aviation assets sporadically deployed to support the U.S.–led Coalition mostly to conduct a specific mission or to bridge a gap in capability, such as close air support or electronic warfare to counter the improvised explosive device threat.

From 2003 to late 2007, the national preoccupation with stabilizing Iraq focused most Marine Corps assets on stemming the insurgency, largely centered in the restive al-Anbar Province. As a result of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) taking over command of Afghan operations and Marine Corps' commitments in Iraq, relatively few Marine units operated in Afghanistan from late 2006 to 2007. Although Marines first advocated shifting resources from al-Anbar to southern Afghanistan in early 2007, the George W. Bush administration delayed the Marine proposal for fear of losing the gains made as a result of Army General David H. Petraeus' “surge strategy” in Iraq.

By late 2007, the situation in Afghanistan had deteriorated to the point that it inspired *Rolling Stone* to later publish the story “How We Lost the War We Won.” In recognition of the shifting tides in both Iraq and Afghanistan, the Bush administration began to transfer additional resources to Afghanistan in early 2008. The shift prompted senior Marines to again push for a more prominent role in the Afghan campaign, even proposing to take over the Afghan mission from the Army.

In Helmand Province, close to both the Taliban's spiritual center in Kandahar and to the Pakistani border, the Taliban created its own de facto state and defeated NATO's repeated efforts to establish control over the area. Ironically, 1950s-era United States Agency for International Development (USAID) projects that had been intended to harness the Helmand River's waters to irrigate subsistence crops, now fed vast poppy fields, funding not only the Taliban's efforts against the Coalition but also accounting for most of the world's illicit opium production.

From 2008 to mid-2010, the precarious situation in Afghanistan led successive U.S. administrations to commit more resources to counter the growing insurgency. The large-scale Marine commitment, however, all but ceased in 2006 when the last battalion returned home. By early 2008, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, deployed to Afghanistan as Task Force 2/7 to begin training, mentoring, and advising the Afghanistan National Police. Though its deployment was intended as a one-time commitment to aid the hard-pressed International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), Task Force 2/7's deployment to southern Afghanistan marked the beginning of the Marine Corp's long-term presence in the region.

ISAF's efforts to bring the insurgency in southern Afghanistan under control launched what would become the first of successively larger MAGTF deployments. In March 2008, the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (24th MEU) arrived in Helmand Province and began a series of counterinsurgency operations during Operation Azada Wosa to defeat the Taliban and stabilize the situation. The organic command-and-control assets of the MEU also prompted U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command (MarCent) to attach additional aircraft to the MEU's aviation combat element to support the ongoing operations of Task Force 2/7. Nearing the end of its deployment, 24th MEU's inherent flexibility again played a key role in the Marine buildup in southern Afghanistan. The MEU was designated to act as interim command element and bridge for the newly designated Special-Purpose MAGTF-Afghanistan (SPMAGTF-A).

The SPMAGTF-A continued building a Marine presence and began to develop the situation and construct infrastructure for follow-on forces. In May 2009, 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade (2d MEB) conducted a transfer of authority with SPMAGTF-A. The brigade, commanded by Brigadier General Lawrence D. Nicholson, vastly expanded the Marine footprint in southern Afghanistan as part of Operation Khanjar. Nicholson unleashed the capabilities of the MAGTF and violently ejected the Taliban from many of its previous safe havens along the Helmand River valley.

The Marine way of war and reliance on the MAGTF did have its detractors at ISAF headquarters in Kabul and with some in the Barack H. Obama administration itself. A number of senior State Department officials and Army officers accused the Marines of going rogue to create their own fiefdom. Army units complained they did not enjoy the wide latitude that the Marines demanded. Some deemed the Corps' efforts unorthodox when they engaged local mullahs (or religious leaders) in what was referred to as the "mullahpalooza tour." The Marines also followed up on a highly successful program used in Iraq to engage Afghan women by recruiting female Marines to serve on search teams. U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl W. Eikenberry said at the time that "the international security force in Afghanistan feels as if it comprises 42 nations instead of 41 because the Marines act so independently from other U.S. forces." As a result, references to Helmand Province as "Marineistan" were often heard.

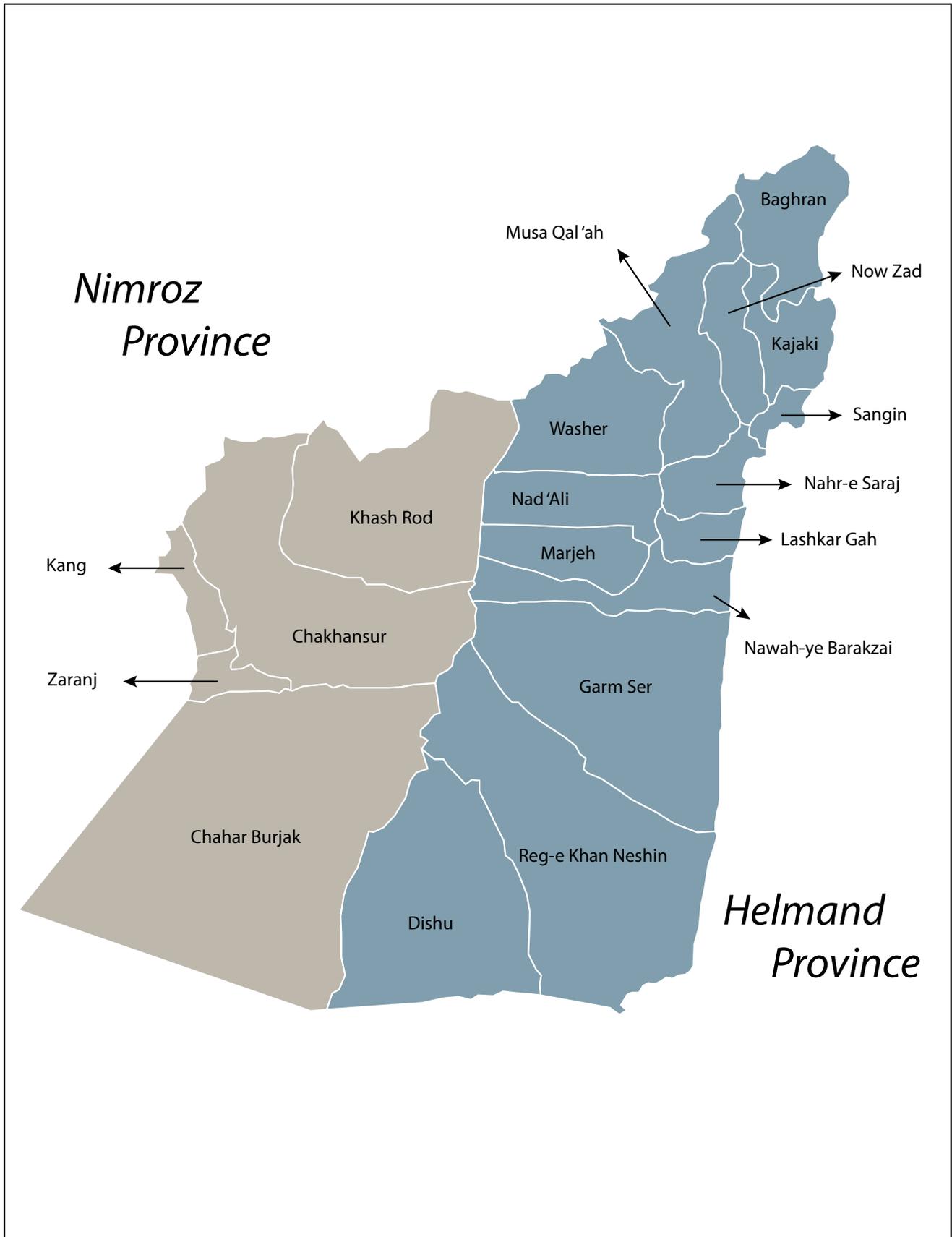
In late 2009, following extended deliberation, President Obama committed to a surge in Afghanistan to implement the counterinsurgency strategy advocated, by then U.S. commander Army General Stanley A. McChrystal, to tip the scales back in favor of the Coalition. The Marine shift from Iraq to Afghanistan, first proposed in 2007, began in earnest as Marines accounted for most of the surge. By mid-2010, I Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward), commanded by Major General Richard P. Mills, succeeded 2d MEB as the MAGTF grew to more than 19,000 Marines. Not only did the MAGTF grow, but Marines also came to command the newly created Regional Command-Southwest comprised

of Helmand and Nimroz Provinces on 14 June 2010. Marine forces continued to mount major kinetic operations to pressure the Taliban with a year-round assault, while extending security for the populace and the authority of the Afghan government. In July 2011, Marine General John R. Allen succeeded General Petraeus as commander of the entire multinational effort in Afghanistan when he took command of the ISAF.

Given the unique circumstances surrounding Marine deployments, this anthology is organized into four parts that follows Marine Corps participation in America's longest conflict through 2009. Source materials present an overview of the role of the Marine Corps in U.S./Coalition efforts to bring stability to Afghanistan. Given the spectrum of roles filled by Marines, the information generally follows the chronological timeline or is arranged by function. This work is not meant to be an authoritative history, but rather as a selected record of Marine contributions to the Afghan effort as captured by the media and other sources. It is intended to be used as a starting point for the general public and academic researchers.

Major David W. Kummer
Marine Corps History Division

Map 2: Regional Command-Southwest



Adapted from a Regional Command-Southwest map by Marine Corps History Division

Part I
America's 911 Force, 2001–2

Just weeks before the horrors of 9/11, a Honolulu newspaper chronicled Hawaii-based Marines training for upcoming deployments in an article titled “Marines: America’s 911 Force.” The U.S. Navy/Marine Corps team has not only earned a reputation as the nation’s quick reaction force but Congress codified their roles and expeditionary nature in the 1947 National Security Act. In 1952, the 82d Congress further clarified the idea when it wrote,

American history, recent as well as remote, has fully demonstrated the vital need for the existence of a strong force-in-readiness. Such a force, versatile, fast moving, and hard-hitting . . . can prevent the growth of potentially large conflagrations by prompt and vigorous action during their incipient stages. The nation’s shock troops must be the most ready when the nation is least ready . . . to provide a balanced force-in-readiness for a naval campaign and, at the same time, a ground and air striking force ready to suppress or contain international disturbances short of large-scale war.

In the still smoldering aftermath of the 2001 attack on America, President George W. Bush summoned up the righteous fury of a nation and ordered the beginning of military operations against al-Qaeda and the Taliban on 7 October 2001. Just weeks later on 18 October, a section of McDonnell Douglas F/A-18 Hornets from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 251 (VMFA-251) launched from USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71) and conducted the first U.S. Marine Corps strike mission against al-Qaeda and Taliban targets. On 25 November, elements of naval expeditionary Task Force 58 (TF-58), which consisted of the 15th and 26th Marine Expeditionary Units (MEU) and was commanded

by Brigadier General James N. Mattis, conducted an historic amphibious assault from naval shipping some 400 miles away to seize Forward Operating Base (FOB) Rhino 100 miles from Kandahar, Afghanistan.

In early December, Marines began operations to cut off enemy escape routes to the west and south of Kandahar along Highway 1. On 10 December, Marines from the 26th MEU flew to Kabul to provide security for the long-abandoned U.S. embassy. Then in mid-December, with the surrender of Kandahar to anti-Taliban forces, Marines moved in to secure Kandahar International Airport for follow-on forces and to provide detention facilities for captured enemy fighters.

In early March 2002, Marine helicopters from the 13th MEU deployed to an expeditionary airfield in Bagram, Afghanistan. The aviation task force, primarily from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 165 (HMM-165), began operating in support of Task Force Mountain. In addition to Marine fixed-wing aircraft on board naval shipping, the rotary-wing task force provided close air support (CAS) for U.S. Army soldiers and Special Forces detachments engaged with al-Qaeda and the Taliban during Operation Anaconda.

Following the fall of the Taliban regime and battles against al-Qaeda fleeing to the relative safety of nearby Pakistani tribal areas, Afghanistan became fairly quiet. The MEUs redeployed but Marine aviation continued to play a part in military operations in Afghanistan. Marine aerial refueling squadron detachments provided support for both the initial assault into Afghanistan and also Operation Anaconda in early 2002. Marine air control detachments operated in Afghanistan and surrounding nations to help coordinate the ongoing aerial campaign. Marine strike aircraft also flew missions to support Coalition ground forces. For several months beginning in



Photo courtesy of LCpl Andrew Williams

BGen Terry G. Robling, commanding general, 3d Marine Aircraft Wing, talks to Marine Attack Squadron 513 at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan.

May 2002, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 212 (VMFA-212) flew missions over Afghanistan from its base in Kuwait. Later, Marine All-Weather Fighter Attack Squadron 121 (VMFA[AW]-121) deployed to Manas, Kyrgyzstan, and flew more than 900 combat sorties in support of the Coalition. The Marine Corps continued to demonstrate its flexibility when Marine Attack Squadron 513 (VMA-513) deployed to the expeditionary air base at Bagram. The squadron's McDonnell Douglas AV-8B Harrier's offered vertical/short takeoff

and landing (V/STOL) capability that allowed it to operate close to the fight, unlike other tactical aircraft that required significant upgrades to existing runways and facilities.

Along with the 2011 publication of Colonel Nathan S. Lowrey's official monograph, *U.S. Marines in Afghanistan, 2001–2002*, the following articles provide a chronological overview of the larger events in which Marines participated and highlight the successes of U.S. Navy and Marine Corps forces.



A New York City firefighter looks up at what remains of the South Tower of the World Trade Center after its collapse during the 11 September 2001 terrorist attack.

Photo courtesy of PH2 Jim Watson, USN



Address to the Nation on Operations in Afghanistan

by President George W. Bush

The Treaty Room of the White House
Washington, DC
7 October 2001

Good afternoon. On my orders, the United States military has begun strikes against al-Qaeda terrorist training camps and military installations of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. These carefully targeted actions are designed to disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations, and to attack the military capability of the Taliban regime.

We are joined in this operation by our staunch friend, Great Britain. Other close friends, including Canada, Australia, Germany, and France, have pledged forces as the operation unfolds. More than 40 countries in the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and across Asia have granted air transit or landing rights. Many more have shared intelligence. We are supported by the collective will of the world.

More than two weeks ago, I gave Taliban leaders a series of clear and specific demands: close terrorist training camps; hand over leaders of the al-Qaeda network; and return all foreign nationals, including American citizens, unjustly detained in your country. None of these demands were met. And now the Taliban will pay a price. By destroying camps and disrupting communications, we will make it more difficult for the terror network to

train new recruits and coordinate their evil plans.

Initially, the terrorists may burrow deeper into caves and other entrenched hiding places. Our military action is also designed to clear the way for sustained, comprehensive, and relentless operations to drive them out and bring them to justice.

At the same time, the oppressed people of Afghanistan will know the generosity of America and our allies. As we strike military targets, we'll also drop food, medicine, and supplies to the starving and suffering men and women and children of Afghanistan.

The United States of America is a friend to the Afghan people, and we are the friends of almost a billion worldwide who practice the Islamic faith. The United States of America is an enemy of those who aid terrorists and of the barbaric criminals who profane a great religion by committing murder in its name.

This military action is a part of our campaign against terrorism, another front in a war that has already been joined through diplomacy, intelligence, the freezing of financial assets, and the arrests of known terrorists by law enforcement agents in 38 countries. Given the nature and reach of our enemies, we will win this conflict by the patient accumulation of successes, by meeting a series of challenges with determination and will and purpose.

Today we focus on Afghanistan, but the battle is broader. Every nation has a choice to make. In this conflict, there is no neutral ground. If any government sponsors the outlaws and killers of innocents, they have become outlaws and murderers themselves. And they will take that lonely path at their own peril.

I'm speaking to you today from the Treaty Room of the White House, a place where American presidents have worked for peace. We're a peaceful nation. Yet, as we have learned, so suddenly and

so tragically, there can be no peace in a world of sudden terror. In the face of today's new threat, the only way to pursue peace is to pursue those who threaten it.

We did not ask for this mission, but we will fulfill it. The name of today's military operation is Enduring Freedom. We defend not only our precious freedoms, but also the freedom of people everywhere to live and raise their children free from fear.

I know many Americans feel fear today. And our government is taking strong precautions. All law enforcement and intelligence agencies are working aggressively around America, around the world, and around the clock. At my request, many governors have activated the National Guard to strengthen airport security. We have called up Reserves to reinforce our military capability and strengthen the protection of our homeland.

In the months ahead, our patience will be one of our strengths, patience with the long waits that will result from tighter security; patience and understanding that it will take time to achieve our goals; patience in all the sacrifices that may come.

Today, those sacrifices are being made by members of our Armed Forces who now defend us so far from home, and by their proud and worried families. A commander-in-chief sends America's sons and daughters into a battle in a foreign land only after the greatest care and a lot of prayer. We ask a lot of those who wear our uniform. We ask them to leave their loved ones, to travel great distances, to risk injury, even to be prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice of their lives. They are dedicated, they are honorable; they represent the best of our country. And we are grateful.

To all the men and women in our military—every sailor, every soldier, every airman, every coastguardsman, every Marine—I say this: your mission is defined; your objectives are clear; your

goal is just. You have my full confidence, and you will have every tool you need to carry out your duty.

I recently received a touching letter that says a lot about the state of America in these difficult times—a letter from a fourth-grade girl, with a father in the military: “As much as I don’t want my Dad to fight,” she wrote, “I’m willing to give him to you.”

This is a precious gift, the greatest she could give. This young girl knows what America is all about. Since September 11, an entire generation of young Americans has gained new understanding

of the value of freedom, and its cost in duty and in sacrifice.

The battle is now joined on many fronts. We will not waver; we will not tire; we will not falter; and we will not fail. Peace and freedom will prevail.

Thank you. May God continue to bless America.

Note

Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001–2008, 75–77, http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected_Speeches_George_W_Bush.pdf.

Carrier-based aircraft from VMFA-251 scored the first hits on al-Qaeda and Taliban targets for the Marine Corps in the opening days of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Photo courtesy of LtCol Mark G. Mykleby





Thunderbolts: Strike First Marine Corps Blow Against Taliban

by Fred H. Allison

Leatherneck, November 2002

Shortly after midnight on Oct. 17, 2001, 150 miles off the coast of Pakistan in the Arabian Sea, an American aircraft carrier turned into the wind to launch aircraft. A U.S. flag was hoisted up the ship's halyard. It stirred, and then it began to pop and snap in the stiff breeze. Sailors and Marines stopped their prelaunch work on the flight deck to watch the flag go up. Others gathered on catwalks and observation points. All eyes, some moist with emotion, watched the flag that once had flown over the tallest buildings in New York—the twin towers of the World Trade Center. The flag had been recovered from the wreck and rubble left from Sept. 11 and delivered to the carrier USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71) as she passed the Azores on the way to the Arabian Sea.

Four planes, two F-14 Tomcats and two F/A-18 Hornets, stood ready to launch. Catapults tensed, the jets' engines spooled up, their noses dipped, full afterburner and long tails of yellow and white fire blazed; quick salutes and a thunderous second later they were thrust into the blackness. For a few seconds, the fighters were visible; they turned north—toward al-Qaeda country.

So occurred the first mission launched from *Theodore Roosevelt* during Operation Enduring



Photo courtesy of U.S. Navy

An F/A-18 Hornet from the VMFA-251 “Thunderbolts” launches from the flight deck of USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71). The Thunderbolts were part of Carrier Air Wing One (CVW-1) deployed with the nuclear powered aircraft carrier in support of Operation Enduring Freedom from the Arabian Sea.

Freedom (OEF). The F-14s were Navy fighters from Fighter Squadron (VF) 102; the F/A-18s were Marines from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 251. This mission, flown by squadron commanding officer Lieutenant Colonel Ray C. Damm and wingman Captain Simon M. Doran, represented the first Marine Corps strike against terrorism in OEF.

Based out of Marine Corps Air Station, Beaufort, SC, VMFA-251, the Thunderbolts (T-bolts for short) had begun workups with *Theodore Roosevelt's* (TR's) Carrier Air Wing One (CVW-1) the previous February. On Sept. 11, 2001, everyone was counting down the few remaining days before deploying on a six-month cruise. There were eight left. The television was on in the squadron Ready Room when the airliners slammed into the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Marines gathered

around to watch the events of that disastrously momentous day unfold. The upcoming cruise now had entirely different implications.

That evening, LtCol Damm gathered his squadron together for an all-hands meeting in the hangar. He was reassuring at first, trying to put the day's events into perspective, then as his talk concluded, those events welled-up inside him, and he exhorted his men, “If this isn't enough to get you focused on your job and motivated to do everything right . . . if today's events don't make you angry, then nothing will!”

There was no doubt they were motivated and not just to do their jobs correctly. There was something else that the Marines in VMFA-251 all hoped: that they could participate in America's retribution against the forces of terrorism.

And they did. The Thunderbolts not only

delivered the Marine Corps' first blows against terrorism, but they did it in superb fashion. They set a new flight-time record for a Marine F/A-18 squadron, flying 1,285 hours in November 2001. During the course of combat operations against the Taliban in OEF, they flew 3,596 combat hours in 754 sorties, during which 445,000 pounds of bombs were dropped on agents of terrorism in Afghanistan.

TR herself set a new record for the number of consecutive days at sea for an aircraft carrier—159. Despite the demanding and intense operational tempo, there were no mishaps in VMFA-251, nor indeed among any of *TR*'s air units, a rare occurrence during any six-month cruise, much less one in which combat operations predominated. It was indeed a history-making cruise.

Operations in OEF were demanding, especially in the early days when the battle against the Taliban hung in the balance. Upon arriving on station in the Arabian Sea, *TR*, being the “junior” carrier (USS *Carl Vinson* [CVN 70] had preceded her), went to the “night page.” That meant that she would launch her combat missions at night.

The ship's [skipper], Capt Richard O'Hanlon, USN, made the bold decision to put the entire ship on a night schedule, in a sense turning night into day and day into night. The entire ship's crew started its day at 1800, worked through the night and slept during the day—except for the night crew, who worked through the day. This, as a result, turned out to be a big factor in alleviating flight-crew fatigue.

For the Marines maintaining the aircraft, loading the ordnance, and otherwise performing the squadron's business, morale remained high during the long and stressful periods of combat operations. They worked 12-hour shifts at a minimum. Often their days stretched to 15 to 16 hours. They did not quit until fully combat-capable aircraft were

available for the next day's missions. For them, there was a distinct purpose in the work.

As Gunnery Sergeant Robert L. Peak III, the quality-assurance chief, asserted, they were “doing the nation's business,” and although not actually flying the missions, they identified with each sortie launched. Maintenance controller Staff Sergeant Willie J. Timms Jr. noted: “When you stand there on the cat, and that guy's in full afterburner, so heavy, just loaded down with all this ordnance, and he's at full afterburner, your heart swells because you know payback is coming.”

The squadron never missed an opportunity to “pay back” al-Qaeda. Every assigned combat sortie was flown. No missions were dropped because of aircraft nonavailability or for any other reason.

During the peak combat period, from October through December 2001, days off were few and far between. One stretch lasted more than 30 days without a break. Combat flight operations were conducted on Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's, and the Marine Corps birthday. The birthday was duly commemorated. A squadron formation was held that “evening” (actually midafternoon) in the hangar deck after flight operations secured, followed by a special dinner and a cake-cutting ceremony.

This birthday was more special than others to some of the pilots, like the squadron executive officer, LtCol Thomas S. “T. C.” Clark, and Capt Frederick L. Lewis, who flew missions that day. They dropped 2,000-pound joint direct attack munitions on Taliban targets and still got back in time for the celebration. As the XO [executive officer] put it, “What better way to celebrate? I got to bomb terrorists and eat Marine Corps birthday cake all in one day.”

For the Marines maintaining the aircraft and loading ordnance, OEF was like previous wars in which Marines endured long hours and sweat to

ensure squadron pilots had aircraft to fly against the enemy. For the pilots it was unique. It linked the primitive with the precise. Small U.S. and Coalition units melded into Afghan opposition (anti-Taliban) forces to direct air strikes against the Taliban. Horses and camels were often the mode of transport for friendly forces. Indeed, during one air strike, the forward air controller (FAC) told LtCol Damm's flight: "Any vehicle you see, blow it up, because the good guys are all on horses."

The rules of engagement kept the F/A-18s at high altitudes. However, sophisticated targeting devices linked with laser- and global positioning system-guided bombs ensured that pilots could put a 500-pound bomb in the backseat of a sport utility vehicle stuffed with Taliban stooges running down a dirt highway at night in Afghanistan from more than 20,000 feet, and they did frequently.

Despite its uniqueness, OEF put a premium on skills Marine F/A-18 pilots hold in spades—ground attack and close air support. The pilots remained flexible. Few of the targets they struck were prebriefed. Instead, they were directed to targets after they got in-country then ground forward air controllers or airborne controllers (FAC-As) directed the air strikes.

Sometimes the pilots themselves directed the air strikes. Major Brantley A. "Junk" Bond's flight, working with a ground FAC, found some juicy targets—Taliban tanks and armored personnel carriers (APCs). The FAC could not see everything the pilots overhead could, so he passed control of the strike to Bond. Bond was glad to get it. He planted a 500-pound bomb about 20 meters in front of one tank, so close that it caused the round in the tank's main gun to fire. The explosion flushed numerous other tanks and APCs out of their hiding places.

With many targets now available, other aircraft were called in and directed by Bond onto

the terrorists, whose tanks and vehicles scrambled to escape. It was an orchestra of frenzied destruction as fighter after fighter checked in with Bond, who used his forward-looking infrared system to direct laser energy onto a doomed tank or APC. The laser, in turn, guided a GBU [smart] bomb on its appointed mission of dispatching terrorists into the waiting arms of Allah. Before it was over, about 15 armored vehicles had been destroyed.

For Marines in aviation units, there is no greater sense of accomplishment than utilizing the aircraft they fly and maintain on behalf of their ground brethren. The T-bolts gained this satisfaction during their cruise aboard *TR*. The early strikes, before the Marines went ashore, could be characterized as "beach preparatory" strikes. A large percentage of the early missions flown were on terrorist targets around Kandahar, a town later assaulted by Marines of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable [SOC]).

When it was learned that the Marines were going into Camp Rhino, the T-bolt pilots wanted to be there to support them. As Maj Bond noted, "The ante got pushed up. There was no doubt in anybody's mind that they [the pilots] would do whatever it took them to do to support those guys if they needed it or wanted it." This held true for the troops maintaining the aircraft. SSgt Edwin T. Clemons, noncommissioned officer in charge of the squadron electric shop, asserted that when they heard the Marines were going in, the Marines in his shop were well aware of the importance of having capable jets. "We wanted to make sure that when a forward air controller said he needed an aircraft, we had one there for them."

LtCol Damm went to the CVW-1 commanding officer, Capt Steve Voetsch, USN, and requested that VMFA-251 be on the first mission in support of the assault. His request was granted.

Some of the T-bolt pilots personally knew

FACs with the battalion landing teams, having served with them previously at The Basic School or in aviation units. Having pilots act as FACs is a uniquely Marine Corps aspect of its air-ground team. It facilitates good air support.

Two T-bolt pilots, Capt Simon “Simple” Doran and Capt Michael R. “Joey” Coletta, were reacquainted by radio with an old friend, Capt Michael “Neck” Bryan, who served as a FAC with 15th MEU (SOC), as they collaborated on the destruction of a Taliban convoy headed for the Marines’ blocking positions set up between Camp Rhino and Kandahar.

After there was nothing left of the threat except mangled metal, smoke, and bits of flesh, it was, “Hey, Neck, this is Joey. I thought I recognized your voice!”

“Hello, Joey and Simple, great to have you guys around!”

The common background with ground officers and extensive training with Marine ground units made operations in support of ground Marines comfortable. It was like “Here’s the team; let’s go for the big win,” noted Capt Peter J. “Psi” Guerant, or as another T-bolt put it, “like putting on a comfortable pair of sweats.” Fortunately, the ground Marines faced little opposition from the terrorists, and most of CVW-1’s missions in support of the

Marines were as an extra set of eyes scanning the desert from high above.

The 2001–2 cruise of *Theodore Roosevelt* was a history-making cruise. The Marine fighter squadron aboard made a significant contribution to the success of that cruise. It was a demanding deployment, but one that the Marines in VMFA-251 will never forget or regret making. It was good to be “part of the Big Stick” as one of the T-bolts stated.

LtCol Damm put Operation Enduring Freedom into personal perspective: “This was the cruise I always wanted to be on.”

The Marines in VMFA-251 felt fortunate and honored to have been in the right place at the right time to deliver the first blows by the Marine Corps in the war on terrorism, blows that were followed by many others. There is no doubt that the T-bolts made the most of this unique opportunity.

Note

Leatherneck, November 2002, 28–31. Reprinted by permission. Copyright *Leatherneck* Magazine.

About the Author

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A bullet-riddled tower supports guards over the desert landing strip code-named "Rhino" on 2 December 2001. The strip is a forward operating base strategically located inside Afghanistan.

Photo courtesy of PH1 Greg Messier, USN





Afghanistan Diary

Corps Considerations: Lessons Learned in Phase One

by Arthur P. Brill Jr.

Seapower, April 2002

The insertion of Marines into Afghanistan's Rigestan Desert [between Helmand and Kandahar Provinces] last November from ships 441 miles away represents the new wave of amphibious warfare. The beach is no longer the objective. Instead, Marines, supported by devastating air power, will hit the enemy "where they ain't." Today, a force of self-sustaining U.S. Marines can land almost anywhere in the world from the sea and stay indefinitely.

The critics were in full bloom prior to U.S. forces going 11,000 miles to battle the al-Qaeda terrorist network and its Taliban hosts. There were strong misgivings about Afghanistan's forbidding geography, the approach of winter, the unstable warring factions in Afghanistan, and the defeats suffered there in the past by both Great Britain and the Soviet Union.

"Afghanistan was one of our most severe access challenges," said LtGen Emil R. Bedard, deputy commandant for plans, policy, and operations at Marine headquarters (HQMC). "This was from the sea and beyond."

Landlocked Afghanistan represented an imposing obstacle to the Navy/Marine Corps team. With the nearest Taliban target 400 miles from the North Arabian Sea, few experts expected Marine boots to touch Afghan turf. The air-lift task facing the Navy and Marine Corps was roughly equivalent to carrying troops from Boston, MA, and landing and resupplying them in Washington, DC.

“The land battle starts out at sea and goes inland 400 miles if we have to,” Gen James L. Jones told *Sea Power* in 1996, prior to becoming Marine commandant.

MEUs: “Being There”

Marine expeditionary units (MEUs) have practiced long-range inserts from Navy ships for years, using the Corps’ “legacy” CH-53E Sea Stallion helicopters. Primarily a raiding force, a MEU can perform 20 to 30 special missions, many of them long range. Since the Gulf War, MEUs have executed numerous rescue, humanitarian, and peace-keeping operations.

In a daring hush-hush mission in 1991, Marines launched from 500 miles at sea to evacuate threatened U.S. embassy personnel in Mogadishu, Somalia. In 1995, Marines conducted a classic TRAP (tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel) mission to rescue Air Force Capt Scott F. O’Grady, who had been shot down in Bosnia, 90 miles from the U.S. amphibious ships operating in the Adriatic Sea. Navy and Marine officials later said the O’Grady rescue was possible only because “we were there”—i.e., forward-deployed and already in theater.

The same reasoning already applied to Afghanistan—“If one wants to tango, it helps to be in the dance hall.” Thanks to already being forward-deployed aboard Navy ships, two MEUs, approximately 4,400 combat-ready Marines, were poised

off Pakistan when [Army] Gen Tommy R. Franks, commander of the U.S. Central Command, sent them into action.

“The Marine Corps was committed because we were there,” said BrigGen Robert C. Dickerson Jr., director of logistics, plans, and policies, and head of the Strategic Mobility Division at HQMC. Navy amphibious ships today are able to take Marines to “any clime and place”—along with the MEU’s vast stocks of equipment, vehicles, food, water, petroleum, ammunition, medical supplies, and spare parts.

Agility and Flexibility

Experts believe the demand for amphibious ships will increase in the years ahead. Assuming that other sovereign nations, even “friendly” nations, “will give you basing rights in the future is a bad assumption,” said Col Ronald J. Johnson, a current operations officer at HQMC.

Regional U.S. CINCs (commanders in chief) value the forward-deployed MEUs, but it is rare when two MEUs are able to link up in a combat theater, as they did last fall. The 15th MEU sailed from California on a Gulf deployment before 11 September. It arrived off Pakistan in October with its 2,200 Marines aboard the three ships of the USS *Peleliu* [LHA 5] Amphibious Ready Group (ARG). The 26th MEU, sailing from North Carolina on a Mediterranean deployment days after the terrorist attack, was diverted through the Suez Canal and joined the 15th MEU in November.

Although motivating, the 11 September attack had zero impact on the planning and training of the Marines who fought in Afghanistan. The ARG ships were manned and stocked before the terrorists struck. Fortunately, Marines train the way they expect to fight. “People think we should operate differently since 11 September. We don’t see it that way,” said Bedard. “We have to be a very

agile, flexible expeditionary force to react to any kind of contingency.”

Marines operated in many areas and significantly influenced the action in Afghanistan during Phase One of the war against international terrorism. Following are some of the highlights:

U.S. Air War Begins

7 October 2001: The United States struck Afghanistan only 27 days after the attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center buildings. Two Marine F/A-18C Hornets from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 251 (VMFA-251), deployed aboard the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS *Theodore Roosevelt* [CVN 71], were part of a four-plane attack that launched the ship’s participation in the air war.¹

Another Marine Hornet squadron, VMFA-314, deployed aboard the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS *John C. Stennis* [CVN 74], also participated in the around-the-clock attacks. Franks said that 50 percent of the 20,000 U.S. sorties over Afghanistan were carrier based.

Marines Move Into Pakistan

Also on 7 October, the 15th MEU secretly inserted 350 Marines and several helicopters to provide internal security for an airfield near Jacobabad in south central Pakistan. Initially, Pakistani soldiers, who guarded the outer perimeter, quelled the civilian demonstrations against the U.S. presence. Although the protests subsided, the U.S. presence in Pakistan was still sensitive, forcing U.S. pilots to fly at night.

[The] Jacobabad airfield served as the staging area for search-and-rescue missions in southern Afghanistan, and as a temporary base for the six workhorse Marine KC-130 Hercules refueling aircraft that supported the MEUs. Marines conducted a TRAP mission from Jacobabad to pull

out an Army Special Operations Forces MH-60 helicopter and crew that had crashed not far from the Afghanistan/Pakistan border.

Marine Corps Harriers

The Marine Corps receives more and more of its punch and mobility from Marine air. All components of the Marine aviation community contributed to the successful outcome. The performance of the AV-8B Harriers is representative [of that]. During a visit to the combat area in late October, Jones asked why the Marine Harriers weren’t flying combat missions. They were quickly added to the daily air tasking order. Each MEU launched up to two four-plane Harrier strikes a day. The pilots flew 300 to 500 miles one-way on “airborne alert close air support” missions that lasted from four to six hours or more. Circling at 30,000 feet in a “sanctuary” from enemy missiles, they conserved fuel until called on to bomb trench lines, buildings, and even convoys (of enemy Toyota SUVs). The Harriers fired mostly “dumb” or laser-guided 500-pound bombs.

“The pilots flew an exceptional [number] of hours,” said LtCol John Scott Walsh, a Harrier expert at HQMC. Last December, the MEUs’ two six-plane Harrier detachments flew a total of 1,100 hours. On a six-month deployment, each detachment normally flies 700 hours. The Harriers operated primarily off the ARG flagships, but starting in late December were flying a number of missions from Kandahar [International] Airport.

Because of engine problems, there were no Harriers operating with the forward-deployed MEUs a year earlier. Last December, though, the Corps had four MEUs at sea with their Harriers aboard the ARG ships. The engines ran well, and the Harrier readiness rates were high. “We are happy with the Harrier performance and with what’s coming up,” said Walsh. “Deploying Harriers



Photo courtesy of U.S. Navy

Marines from the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) extend a winch from a light armored vehicle to pull another vehicle out of soft sand during a patrol east of Kandahar City on 10 December 2001.

now are equipped with the Litening II targeting pod, which gives them an advanced capability. In 2003, they will be receiving the JDAM [Joint Direct Attack Munition].”

A Marine Corps First

ViceAdm Charles W. Moore Jr., then Fifth Fleet commander and commander of naval forces for the U.S. Central Command, formed an expeditionary task force for the two ARGs/MEUs operating in his theater. He named BrigGen James N. Mattis the commander of Task Force 58. In that post, according to a USMC spokesman, Mattis became the first Marine to head two Navy ARGs. Mattis’s

assignment reflects the long awaited Navy/Marine “supported supporting” doctrine that went into effect last year. When Marines sail on Navy ships, they support the Navy commander. The roles are reversed, though, when the Marines plan and conduct missions ashore. Mattis and his staff moved aboard the [USS] *Peleliu* [LHA 5] last October and immediately started to plan the intricate landing of Marines in Afghanistan.

The Marines Have Landed

On 25 November 2001, Marines flew 441 miles at night to secure a desert airstrip and to establish Forward Operating Base (FOB) Rhino,

where Marines were in good position to influence events in Kandahar, then under Taliban control. “Nothing of this scale had been done before. We had no overland routes for resupply,” said Johnson. “Marines have talked about ship-to-objective maneuver the last few years. This is it.”

Prior to the desert landing, the 15th MEU had pre-staged a reinforced rifle company in Jacobabad. The MEU’s heavy equipment, including light armored vehicles (LAVs) and Humvees, were offloaded and staged at Pasni, a port in southern Pakistan. Senior officials say that Pakistan’s support to the Navy and Marines cannot be overstated.

It took more than three hours for the six CH-53s, carrying a reinforced rifle company, to reach Rhino. They flew directly from the *Peleliu* and were refueled enroute by Marine KC-130s. The AH-1W Super Cobra² and UH-1N Huey helicopters accompanying them were refueled at Shamsi, also in Pakistan. Thirty minutes after Rhino was secured, four KC-130s landed on the dirt strip with the rifle company from Jacobabad, along with five interim fast-attack vehicles.

Although the well-planned maneuver was carried out flawlessly on that clear night, it was a risky operation. “We held our breath,” Johnson recalls. “As you know, things can happen.” To help minimize the possibility of some of those “things” actually happening, Navy SEAL (Sea, Air, Land) teams of special operations forces paved the way for the Marine landings at Kandahar by conducting covert reconnaissance missions several days in advance.

The Rhino Buildup

Once FOB Rhino was secured, a continual buildup of personnel and supplies took place, with the KC-130s and Air Force C-17s doing the heavy lifting. Rhino was the target of the highly publicized Ranger parachute mission in early October 2001.

The Rangers departed soon after searching the area, though. When Franks later decided to put more pressure on the Taliban, he sent in the Marines.

The Marine Corps shapes its forces prior to each mission. Although leaving their tanks, amphibious tractors, and artillery tubes aboard ship (the artillery personnel were used as infantry), the Marines soon had a formidable force ashore with a high “tooth-to-tail” ratio. The small number of support personnel at Rhino, including women, also grabbed rifles when needed and helped man whatever positions needed reinforcement. Except for headquarters people, Marines lived in their foxholes. When visitors saw how the Marines lived, the Taliban and al-Qaeda detainees (being held at Rhino and Kandahar) received less sympathy.

On the third day of Rhino operations, a USAF C-17, carrying 125 Navy Seabees and their heavy equipment, made the first combat landing ever on Rhino’s dirt airstrip. “The Seabees had a critical mission in caring for the airfield surface,” said Dickerson.

The brown hills, the weather, and the barren terrain all were similar to those at the Marine training base in Twentynine Palms, CA, where warm days and chilly nights are the norm. The Rhino Marines will long remember the chocolate-colored desert dust that quickly climbed to a height of 50 feet when an aircraft would land, and then gradually settle on every building, vehicle, and human being in the area. The Corps is concerned about the long-term effect of the dust on Marine aircraft.

Beans, Bullets, and Band-Aids—Rhino was a “bare base” situation, meaning the Marines were forced to bring in (by air) everything they needed. With his sea base 441 miles away, Mattis wanted a heavy medical capability, including an extra shock trauma team. He built up a seven-day stockpile ashore that was constantly replenished (and later was repositioned to the Kandahar

[International] Airport). Prior to the start of [Operation] Desert Storm the Corps had built up a similar but immensely larger six-month stockpile, which the troops called the “iron mountain.” When the 120-hour ground campaign was over, the supplies were returned to CONUS [the continental United States].

The ability of Marines to sustain themselves ashore is a major bonus when a regional CINC needs combat-ready forces. Marines not only arrive in the combat theater with their own aircraft, they also can be sustained by their amphibious ships for at least 15 days.

“Marines could have stayed in Afghanistan indefinitely. We were tied in to many distribution pipelines,” said Dickerson. “When Marines redeploy on the ships, we reconstitute their initial sustainment so they can perform another mission.”

Unlike the Army, which has assigned much of its combat support structure to its Reserve components (or put it under contract), the Marines made a conscious decision to keep their combat support in the active forces. The active-duty Marine Corps, in fact, “owns” 33 percent of the Defense Department’s active ground combat service support units.

The Marine Corps did not have to mobilize to go to Afghanistan, nor use its maritime prepositioning force (MPF). Each of its three MPF squadrons carries enough supplies and equipment to sustain 15,000 Marines for 30 days. “We support MEUs 10,000 miles away from their home ports. It’s how we do business,” said Dickerson. “If we see a critical need, we push it out there. If the MEU needs something, they reach back.”

Task Force Sledgehammer

In early December, the Marines at Rhino were ordered to seal off Route 1 [Highway 1], a beltway-type

road that circles [the interior of] Afghanistan, to the west and south of Kandahar. At that time, one vehicle per minute was using the road. To carry out the mission, Task Force Sledgehammer, which consisted of 22 LAVs and heavily armored Humvees from the two MEUs, was formed.

Protected by Marine air, the task force moved about 90 miles from Rhino. The Marines established a well-guarded patrol base and at night sent out interdiction patrols in various directions. The media called them “hunter-killer” teams. After one engagement, when Marines destroyed 7 enemy vehicles and killed 40 personnel, traffic virtually stopped on Route 1 [Highway 1].

Kandahar Airfield Secured

On 20 December, Mattis was ordered to secure the Kandahar [International] Airport, 10 miles southwest of that city. After coordinating his mission with the governor of Kandahar, he moved Task Force Sledgehammer to a position in close proximity to the anti-Taliban forces outside the city. Covered by friendly air, the Marines made a night mechanized movement through Kandahar and secured the airfield.

Up to that point, the 15th MEU had done most of the Corps’ work ashore. Once the Marines were in Kandahar, the 26th MEU started arriving via KC-130s and took over the airstrip. The 15th MEU then closed Rhino and returned to its ships prepared to take on another mission. At peak strength, the Marines had about 2,200 people ashore.

Shortly before Christmas, 80 infantry Marines from the 26th MEU flew into Kabul to secure the U.S. embassy there. The embassy reopened shortly thereafter and is now guarded by 88 Marines from the Corps’ new antiterrorist (AT) brigade—the AT brigade’s first engagement since its formation last fall.

USMC and SOCOM

Last fall, Jones signed an agreement developed to bring the Marines and Special Operations Command (SOCOM) closer in their planning, doctrine, and field operations. “We will train, share ideas, and do things together,” said Bedard.

The real-world relationship between SOCOM and the Marines began in Afghanistan. Before being relieved by the Army and redeploying to their ARG ships in February, the 26th MEU at Kandahar worked closely with U.S. special operations personnel in a support role. While a 25-Marine reaction force and a CH-53 stood by, 50 Marines accompanied special forces to the rugged Zhawar Kili cave complex in a planned 12-hour operation that actually took several days. The primary mission of the Marines was to provide security. “We will do more work in concert with the special operations community,” Johnson predicted.

Bottom Line Summary

The operations in Afghanistan are guaranteed a special place in Marine Corps history as the Corps’ first major combat mission of the twenty-first century. The performance of the two MEUs opened more than a few eyes, and—after promising new ships and weapons systems enter the Corps’ hardware inventory later this decade—future Marines will be even better equipped and more mobile. Experts say that, if it had been available, the MV22 tiltrotor Osprey could have accomplished twice

the mission in Afghanistan in half the time. “We could have used the Osprey, or something like it,” Franks said.

In retrospect, it seems that the Marines had been planning and training for years as if they knew Afghanistan was coming. “This is a piece of cake,” said LtGen Gary S. McKissock, deputy commandant for installations and logistics, shortly after the Marines landed. “We do this all the time.”

Notes

Seapower, April 2002, 75–79. Reprinted with permission from *Seapower*, the official publication of the Navy League of the United States.

1. This occurred on 18 October and was the first U.S. Marine Corps aerial strike in OEF.
2. The official name of the AH-1W is Sea Cobra, but is popularly known as the Super Cobra, which will be used throughout this document.

About the Author

In addition to writing for *Seapower* and *Leatherneck*, retired Marine Lieutenant Colonel Arthur P. Brill Jr. writes on national security issues for defense publications. Colonel Brill commanded an infantry company in Vietnam and retired from active duty as the Corps’ press spokesman. He was also the media spokesman in key positions for the Carter and Reagan administrations.



Marines from the 26th MEU(SOC) take up defensive positions at the Kandahar International Airport on 10 January 2002 after shots were fired near the northern perimeter as an illumination grenade is seen in the background. The gunfire erupted shortly after a Boeing C-17 Globemaster transport plane containing 20 al-Qaeda and Taliban detainees took off from the U.S. military base in southern Afghanistan. The Marines responded to the small-arms fire with M16 rifles and machine guns while two Marine Cobra helicopters canvassed the area.

Photo courtesy of Sgt Thomas M. Corcoran



Le Petit Beourge du Decotiis

(1st Platoon Defense at Kandahar)

by Second Lieutenant Art G. Decotiis

Marine Corps Gazette, July 2002

Initially shorthanded, 1st Platoon established and manned their sector of the defensive perimeter. Due to a series of bumped flights and delays, 1st Platoon arrived in two waves over a span of three days. First Platoon brought up the tail end of Kilo Company's flow into Kandahar International Airport. The first Marines to arrive from the platoon were tasked with manning the newly established detainee camp, therefore leaving the platoon shorthanded as we occupied our defensive sector in a small adobe-structured village. My company commander ordained me the village mayor.

Upon the arrival of the rest of the platoon, we conducted a leader's reconnaissance with the company commander. First Platoon was the final element of the company to occupy the defense. We were tied in on the right flank of the company sector in a small village on the southwest edge of the runway. A 200-meter gap separated the far right flank of the village and the runway. We were to be tied in with a light armored vehicle that was located another 200 meters away on the opposite

side of the runway. The span between the two positions was marred with plane wreckage and dead space. Our frontage looked much the same.

While conducting the leader's reconnaissance of the village, several weapons and munitions caches were discovered. We requested that a Marine explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) team, along with combat engineers, physically inspect the entire village for live ordnance and mines. Due to the severity of the mine situation, it was extremely difficult to establish our new defense in a traditional manner. Upon a brief evaluation of the sector, we identified those positions we would occupy, and EOD went to work making sure they were useable. Once the initial positions were deemed safe, we began the occupation by strong-pointing the village, primarily on either flank, along with an observation post (OP) on the roof that would be manned by our Javelin (FGM-148 maneuverable, fire-and-forget [antitank missile]) gunners.

As stated earlier, the platoon was severely undermanned due to our obligations at the detainee camp. We initially occupied the village with only 13 Marines, including the headquarters element. Since our first day in, the defense was rapidly coming to a close, we decided to postpone the initial fortification of the new positions until morning. The adobe structures would provide adequate cover and concealment for the night. Two four-man posts were established at the flanks of the village. They would maintain 50 percent security throughout the night. Since the positions, or "posts" as we referred to them, were for the most part indoors and separated, communications between the posts and the platoon command post (CP) was a primary concern. The platoon CP was nearly collocated with Post 1 and a field phone was wired to the OP and Post 3 on the far left flank. Before nightfall, a hasty signal plan was established, and exact grid coordinates were disseminated to the

company fire support team (FiST). The platoon sergeant, SSgt Joel Morgan, was sure to make liaison with the light armored reconnaissance [vehicle] to our right and pass on our exact location to the adjacent unit.

After a fairly quiet night, we began fortifying the established positions at first light. We initially concentrated on fortifying the flank positions. The OP was lightly fortified and camouflaged. The few Marines we had on deck worked hard in preparing the positions with what little resources they had available to them. Overhead cover was manufactured out of old doors where needed. Window screens were used to fill exterior openings in order to prevent grenades from entering, and old Soviet parachutes were used to camouflage exposed sandbags. I was consistently impressed by the Marines' ingenuity in fortifying the positions.

Once the primary positions were completed, we began preparing for the rest of the platoon's arrival. We established several new positions and began planning how each would be manned once the others arrived. At daybreak, when the company relaxed its posture to 25 percent, all hands not standing watch would assist in fortifying the new positions. The platoon guide, Sgt Shane Reed, created a schematic that included a complete fire plan sketch, a detailed drawing of the village, all established and proposed positions, and a detailed, by name breakdown of who would man each post. As the Army began its slow takeover of the detainee camp, 1st Platoon Marines were able to occupy the village incrementally over the course of a week. As a fire team would be pushed to the perimeter, they would simply move into the already established four-man posts.

Once approximately half the platoon had made it to the perimeter, the priority of work was turned to creating supplementary and alternate positions. Small, fortified positions were established along



Photo courtesy of U.S. Navy

At the U.S. Marine Corps Base in Kandahar, Afghanistan, LCpl Chris Cassa from India Company, 26th MEU(SOC), positions his weapon as he gears up for the evening watch, defending and maintaining security of the base perimeter.

the roofline of the village. Reinforcement and reaction drills were conducted and refined. A rear security post was established due to our concern over unseen tunnels or entry points to the rear of our village, while also keeping an eye out for any stray detainees. This post consisted of rovers along with a gate guard and proved valuable in maintaining positive control over our sector by deterring unwanted sightseers and souvenir hunters that frequented the village at an alarming rate.

Once the positions were up to par, squad leaders mandated at least two hours worth of position improvement each day. Team leaders ensured that each Marine's firing position came complete with its own fire plan sketch and a list of target reference points (TRPs). These TRPs were made standard throughout each post and proved very effective when reporting activity forward of our position. Any potential activity would be reported directly to the CP and to the Javelin gunners on the roof so

that they could provide better visual identification with their command launch unit (CLU) sight. Cpls Nathan Gilham and Brad Ostergard, along with the CLU, were invaluable assets to the platoon in their ability to more clearly identify vehicles and activity in our sector. They were very helpful in diffusing many potential friendly fire incidents, especially considering the heavy volume of uncoordinated friendly activity forward of the lines.

Combat engineers began setting in concertina [wire], trip flares, and obstacles to our frontage, covering any likely avenues of approach. This was a slow process considering the mine and unexploded ordnance threat. The revetments [embankments], 400 meters to our direct front, impaired our field of view greatly while posing good concealment for potential infiltrators. The engineers made use of what little wire that was available in an attempt to force any potential attacker into our field of view. The company FiST leader and artillery forward observer visually identified for us where exactly on-call targets were located and plotted new targets that corresponded with the chokepoints created by the engineers. Scorpion sensors were also placed in front of our position.

When the entire platoon was finally present, we were able to implement a sleep rotation. Post 2 was stood down and adopted as the rest/react position. Each four-man team was rotated through Post 2 until all Marines were afforded at least one full night's rest. Other posts were stood down whenever the platoon was required to give up Marines for various missions or working parties. The primary flank posts were manned throughout our stay in the village as well as the javelin position.

Lessons Learned

Many of the lessons learned were a product of trial and error. Whatever problems we encountered throughout the night were quickly remedied the

following morning. For example, we were forced to designate universal TRPs throughout the platoon after a night of confusing SALUTE (size, activity, location, unit, time, equipment) reports and movement sightings. These TRPs enabled our javelin gunners to quickly decipher where to focus their CLU, thereby producing faster and more accurate situation reports to be passed on to higher authority. Small unit leaders were able to more effectively laterally communicate with one another, thus maintaining strict fire discipline.

Another problem we encountered involved somewhat incomplete coordination between supporting units. The battalion sensor control and management platoon technicians notified me that two sensors were placed forward of our position, but I was not given detailed information as to the exact locations and capabilities. One night we received a call notifying us that one of the sensors had been tripped in front of our position. We had a general idea of where they were located, but there was no way of knowing which sensor was tripped, hence we were not sure where to focus our attention. Upon receiving the exact grid locations of each [sensor], we discovered that the three potential enemy personnel that tripped the sensor were uncomfortably close to our position. Amidst the flood of information and coordination requirements, I neglected to pursue more detailed information regarding the sensors. From this I learned that, if time permits, all aspects of coordination between units must be as thorough as possible in order to make maximum use of the assets we have available.

I feel the most important lesson learned was that common sense decisions, based on the situation at hand, produced the best results. School-taught techniques and procedures are indeed helpful in laying the foundation, but strict adherence to rigid interpretation of a field manual is not always the most

tactically sound approach. Although easier said than done, we must be willing to try new and possibly unorthodox tactics, techniques, and procedures. Furthermore, the platoon's small unit leaders—squad leaders and team leaders—can be trusted to make tactical and organizational decisions within their scope of control and base these decisions on what works best for their particular unit while still carrying out the commander's intent. When the time was available, I could always count on 1st Platoon Marines to come up with more efficient and innovative ways to accomplish the mission.

Note

Marine Corps Gazette, July 2002, 36–38. Reprinted by permission. Copyright *Marine Corps Gazette*.

About the Author

Then–Second Lieutenant Art Decotiis was 1st Platoon Commander, Company K, 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, during the U.S. Marine seizure and defense of Kandahar International Airport.



In mid-January 2002, U.S. Navy Seabees assigned to Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 133 build a short-term holding facility for al-Qaeda and Taliban detainees in Kandahar.

Photo courtesy of PH1 Ted Banks, USN



A Deployment To Remember: The Navy's Seabees in Afghanistan

by Lieutenant Commander Leonard W. W. Cooke, USN

Seapower, October 2002

On 5 September 2001, the advance party of Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (NMCB) 133 left the battalion's homeport in Gulfport, Mississippi, to begin a seven-month deployment to its main body site in Guam and a dozen or so "detachment" sites around the world. What had originally been planned as a "typical" Seabee deployment, though, changed suddenly and tragically less than a week later—specifically, on 11 September 2001.

Nonetheless, during the first several weeks of the deployment, NMCB-133 worked on the peacetime construction projects previously scheduled. Planning efforts for potential missions in support of the war on terrorism also started though, and received high priority attention from the battalion's leadership and the Third Naval Construction Brigade in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii—which is responsible for the planning and coordination of all Seabee efforts in the Pacific and Central Command areas of responsibility.

In mid-November, one of those potential missions began to take solid shape, and the approximately 450 members of the battalion in Guam

(including about 75 reservists called to active duty from the battalion's reserve augment unit in the New York/New England area) started preparations to launch a mission in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Task Force 58 (TF-58) had been directed to establish a forward operating base in Afghanistan to build up U.S. combat power in the area and, later, conduct combat operations against the Taliban regime and al-Qaeda forces. The Seabees of NMCB-133 were directed to proceed to the area to serve as the contingency engineers for TF-58.

The mission was simply stated, but vague when it came to the hard data needed for detailed planning: repair and maintain a dirt runway at Forward Operating Base Rhino, then move to Kandahar to perform rapid runway repair at the Coalition-bombed international airport and perform other contingency construction as required. Responding to the TF-58 tasking, NMCB-133 prepared to proceed in two stages. The first stage would put 200,000 pounds of equipment, tools, and material[s] and 27 personnel on the ground at Rhino. The second stage would put more gear and another 120 personnel at Kandahar—after it was taken by TF-58.

Although 200,000 pounds sounds like a lot of equipment, it is not nearly enough to make Seabees feel comfortable about being responsible for more than 6,000 feet of dirt runway at a site that is being punished nightly by combat-loaded [Boeing] C-17 [Globemaster III] and [Lockheed] C-130 [Hercules] transport aircraft. A single piece of heavy equipment, such as a grader, can weigh 30,000 pounds or more.

All routine construction on Guam stopped as the entire battalion pitched in to make the 150-person air detachment and all of its gear ready for its mission. All of the Navy's NMCBs have standing 89-person air detachments capable of launching

anywhere in the world in 48 hours, but this mission would require a detailed task-tailoring of that group. Numerous hard decisions had to be made to determine which people would go.

Because only 200,000 pounds of equipment—including spare parts and fuel—would be brought in during the first stage of operations, it would have to be in the best shape possible. Additional mission-specific training was conducted. Intelligence was gathered and analyzed. In short, although only 150 personnel would actually be deployed to Afghanistan, the efforts of the entire battalion were critical to the mission.

The Third Naval Construction Brigade called on 27 November. Two [Lockheed] C-5 Galaxy transports would arrive at Andersen Air Force Base at the north end of Guam that evening to take the first group of NMCB-133 personnel to an undisclosed area in theater, where they would transload onto C-17s for the flight to Rhino. The sense of urgency that had pervaded Camp Covington, the Seabee camp on Guam, ratcheted up another notch. The other members of the battalion who played such a critical role in getting the first group ready to go lined the road leaving the Seabee camp and gave an emotional send-off to the first 27 Seabees going into action in Operation Enduring Freedom.

The flight into Rhino itself was an intense one. According to the U.S. Air Force personnel on the flight, this was not just the first time a C-17 would be landing at Rhino. It was the first time a C-17 was going to be used on any expeditionary airfield, anywhere in the world, in a true combat environment. The plane landed after nightfall; for security reasons, all fixed-wing operations at Rhino were carried out at night. Twenty-one of the 27 Seabees assigned were on that first sortie and were still moving their gear off the runway when the second sortie and the rest of the Seabee

gear and personnel for the first stage of operations landed. The dust storm caused by the second C-17 gave the first indication of just how difficult it was going to be to maintain the runway.

By the end of the first night, all 27 Seabees and their gear were in the compound. At first light, the heavy equipment rolled onto the runway and began repairing the damage caused by three nights of sorties on a dry lakebed that had not had any previous maintenance. It became apparent the next night, when the nose gear of a C-130 Hercules became stuck in a pile of accumulated dust and dirt, how critical the NMCB mission would be to eventual U.S. Coalition combat success. The Seabees used a small bulldozer to clear a path, after which more Seabees and other personnel worked on their hands and knees under the C-130 to free its wheels. If they had not been able to do so—or if, for any other reason, the runway could not be kept open—the U.S. forces at Rhino, 400 miles from the nearest water, would be cut off from their logistics lifeline.

The Seabees worked 24 hours a day, repaired the runway nonstop during daylight hours and bringing their heavy equipment onto the runway between sorties at night to keep the runway operational. They provided their own security for the airfield work crews. Several times, security alerts signaled a potential threat to the TF-58 forces.

When the crews were not on the runway or on security duty, they made whatever improvements they could to the compound—building four-hole burnout heads, for example, to improve the sanitation conditions. They also built better fighting positions for the Marines of the 15th MEU (Marine Expeditionary Unit) on the perimeter, improved the reliability of the base's generators and electrical distribution system, developed dust-control measures for the air combat element helicopters, and did whatever else was asked of them.

The main focus of their attention though—always—was the runway. Senior Chief Petty Officer John [P.] Lemmond developed a runway stabilization process in which earth with a light moist clay content (taken from about four feet below the surface) was laid in six-inch lifts, watered, and rolled to improve the durability of the landing, braking, and turning areas on the runway. That method of maintaining the runway allowed operations to continue at Rhino for nearly six weeks, well past the originally projected time the dirt runway would be used.

The move to Kandahar came in the middle of December, when TF-58 and the Coalition partners began carrying the fight to the enemy. Restrictions on the strategic lift available, combined with the need for speed in the operation, meant that the full remainder of the air detachment gear and personnel left behind in Guam would not be able to move into theater en masse. Instead, graders, loaders, and bulldozers prestaged in Bahrain were flown up into the area, and personnel from NMCB-133 in both Guam and Bahrain were moved forward. At the peak of activity, a group of about 50 Seabees were performing runway maintenance and other missions simultaneously at both Rhino and Kandahar.

Initially, a small reconnaissance team of Seabees accompanied the advance elements of the 26th MEU into Kandahar to assess the condition of the runway there. As the focus of effort began to shift from Rhino to Kandahar, additional personnel and equipment were moved in as needed. The crater damage caused by Coalition bombing was severe but not devastating. With expeditious field repairs, it was determined the Seabees could open the runway for C-130 and C-17 flights within 48 hours. After that initial requirement was met—with temporary, compacted-earth expeditious repairs—the Seabees systematically started



Photo courtesy of U.S. Navy

Navy Seabees LCdr Leonard W. W. Cooke (center left) and Lt Joel Sensenig (center right) of NMCB-133 survey metal matting used to construct a helicopter pad with Marines of the 15th MEU at a strategically located Marine operating base outside Kandahar on 2 December 2001.

repairing all craters in the runways, taxiways, and aprons to make the airfield capable of handling the aircraft load necessary to maintain operations.

Two more tasks were given to the Seabees in late December. The first was to build a short-term holding facility (STHF) to house Taliban and al-Qaeda detainees. The second was to upgrade the runway temporary repairs to permanent repairs so that other types of aircraft, including the [Lockheed] C-141 [Starlifter], needed to transport the detainees from Afghanistan to the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, would be able to use the airfield at Kandahar. Once again, restrictions on the strategic airlift available forced the Seabees to make do with forces already in-theater,

supplemented by just a few more individuals with the special skills needed to carry out this important mission.

These two tasks brought another problem to the forefront. The lack of Class IV construction material[s] needed for the concrete repairs to the runway—and of the lumber, fencing, and other materials necessary to construct the STHF—posed a significant impediment to success.

A series of small solutions were used to overcome the problem. Naval Central Command engineers in Bahrain made local purchases of key materials for C-130 transport to Kandahar, a local contracting agent from Central Command made cash purchases for what little material was available in

town, the TF-58 logistics personnel moved more material into the theater, and the Seabees themselves devised a number of creative solutions to overcome some of the material shortfalls.

Chief Petty Officer [Anthony] Williams, for example, directed a high-priority scavenging operation to find anything that might help. Guard towers were built on top of vehicles and container storage boxes to give them extra height, trees were felled that could be used as raw lumber, engineering stakes were used in lieu of reinforcing steel for the repairs to the concrete runway, and old Soviet, Czech, and Chinese equipment was resurrected from the airport's junkyards to expand the equipment inventory available to the Seabees.

As at Rhino, the Seabees also performed a variety of other contingency engineering tasks to improve the overall effectiveness of TF-58 and Coalition personnel. They redeveloped several well sites to ensure a larger supply of water, leveled obstructions to improve fields of fire, built fuel and ammo berms, shored up and/or realigned fighting positions, and completed huge amounts of site preparation to accommodate the rapid buildup of U.S. and Coalition forces.

NMCB-133's mission ended when the Seabees had completed the STHF, made the permanent repairs to the Kandahar runway, closed Rhino, and performed a wide variety of other contingency engineering tasks. When TF-58 turned the Kandahar base over to elements of the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division, the Seabees left Afghanistan.

Throughout the operation, the "can do" spirit of the Seabees never faltered. Their ability to integrate

with the Marines of TF-58, to adapt to constantly changing working as well as combat conditions and requirements, to almost literally "make something out of nothing," to keep a constant focus on the mission before them, and to always remember why they were there were the keys to their success. In addition to the original mission in Guam, the members of NMCB-133 also were building the detainee facility in Cuba and carrying out other construction tasking at more than 15 sites around the globe—all in the course of one memorable seven-month deployment.

In April 2002, NMCB-133 wrapped up its deployment and returned to Gulfport with a deep sense of satisfaction for a job well done. All of those involved knew why they had done what they had done, and how important the battalion's mission had been to the freedom and way of life the United States represents. If anyone were to ask if they would do it again, there would be no hesitation and no doubt about their answer: Seabees "can do," and would.

Note

Seapower, October 2002, 55–57. Reprinted with permission from *Seapower*, the official publication of the Navy League of the United States.

About the Author

Lieutenant Commander Leonard W. W. "Len" Cooke, USN, was the officer in charge of Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 133 Air Detachment, which deployed to Afghanistan in late 2001 in support of Task Force 58.



A Marine from the 26th MEU stands guard at Post 1 as depicted by Marine Corps combat artist SSgt Michael D. Fay in early 2002.

Courtesy of National Museum of the Marine Corps, Art Collection



The Embassy: Kabul

*by Lieutenant Colonel Brian D. Perry Sr.,
USA*

Marine Corps Gazette, December 2002

The metallic click of a round being slammed into the chamber of the security man's M16 forced me back to reality. I had been lost in thought. How long? I was not sure. The view from the speeding armored Jeep was hypnotizing. The thick, dirty windows dulled the sun's reflection off the snow-caps, but it could not dim the excitement I felt. The scene hurrying by captivated me—the view beautiful, the mines next to the road, deadly. We made our advance on Kabul. The lead vehicle set the pace. I could just make out the sun-baked mud buildings along the road ahead. We prepared our weapons for battle. We were quickly approaching the city.

I was looking forward to seeing the *chargé d'affaires*. She was a retired foreign service officer called back to duty. I knew of her. We all did. She took on some of the most difficult assignments of any foreign service officer, man or woman. Her assignment before retiring was as the U.S. consul in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. It was a dark and forlorn place for women, a place where she was never expected to make a mark but instead rose up to become an icon to American and Saudi women for her temperament and spirit. She went further by earning the begrudging respect of the city's male dominated society. She knew no fear and never faltered. While there, she was promoted to

colonel in the Army Reserve—a place at the top of the military ladder.

The driver of our vehicle increased his alertness. He sat taller in his seat. Hands gripped the steering wheel tight. One hand relaxed and moved to his side. I watched him slip the 9mm weapon from its holster. “Better to have it next to me, ready,” he said. He tucked the gun against his leg. His hand went quickly back to the steering wheel. “We have the pistols ready in case someone approaches the vehicles at close range,” he said matter-of-factly. I could see that the “long guns” were of no use in the close quarters of the armored Cherokee. I, too, repositioned my weapon and held it ready.

Men, women, and children crowded the first “roundabout.” Speeding yellow taxis demanded the right of way with shrill horns. Lumbering trucks bullied their way into the circle. Donkeys pulling creaking, old wooded carts bringing Afghan families to market added to the seemingly endless bottleneck. Children’s faces exhibited awe over the sights. Women in bright blue burkas were covered from head to toe. An old man’s dry and cracked face was mostly hidden behind long gray whiskers, his inattentive maneuvers adding to the disarray of the traffic pattern. Other carts were loaded with wood from skinny trees for burning for heat. The peppery smell of the city completed the picture unfolding around me. The air conditioner vents permitted the assortment of Middle Eastern aromas mixed with vehicle emissions to penetrate our compartment.

We kept moving, at times, more slowly. Stopping, even for a moment, would make us easy targets. I watched pedestrians carry their Russian-made machine guns, apparently unmindful that the war was over. To them there would never be peace here. Our vehicle armor would stop a rifle bullet. But the security people knew that the threat was real. It could come from a suicide bomber who

was dedicated to a terrible cause or just wanting to collect the price on our heads—on every American’s head. A hand grenade or rocket-propelled grenade would cut the vehicle open like a tin can.

The first vehicle pushed its way through the crowded avenue. He was driving too fast. There was danger in getting into an accident or a worst-case scenario—running over and killing an Afghan national. I had the most terrible thought—striking and killing a child jumping out for a closer look at the American saviors. “Slow down,” I yelled into the radio. There was no response. Our vehicle slowed, but the lead one did not.

A donkey cart burdened with firewood strayed into our lane. Our vehicle quickly moved to the center lane. We could not make it around him; both sides were crowded with pedestrians. We lost sight of the lead Jeep. I looked in the side view mirror. Three vehicles spread out behind us determined to get around us, or block us in. I could not be sure. We came to a tire-squealing stop. The cart blocked our forward view. The security men in the rear seat brought their M16s up. Their hands were steady on the door handle, ready to make their move. People stared at us. No one smiled. We were sitting ducks. Time seemed to stand still. There was no place to go. I could hear my own breathing. Was this a trap?

The minutes clicked on. It seemed like an eternity before the cart’s driver employed a long switch to turn the donkey toward the road’s edge. The cart lumbered along to the right.

As quickly as we were hemmed in and ready to fight, our way now was clear. We relaxed and put our weapons down out of view. We exited the circle a quarter of the way around. One more roundabout to contend with before reaching the embassy. There would be no stopping this time. We were prepared to blast our way through.

Now the roadway was mostly clear of foot traffic.



Photo courtesy of U.S. Navy

Marines of Task Force India, 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade Antiterrorism (4th MEB AT), relax on an Air Force C-130 Hercules on 5 July 2002. The 4th MEB Marines are en-route to the American embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Finally we could make out the lead Jeep. We sped up and forced our vehicle between it and a tailgating taxi. We heard the taxi's high-pitched yelp. Its driver flashed its headlights in irritation and then rocketed past us. We slowed when we neared our destination. The radio cracked with directions to bypass the embassy and then double back. Take a good look around for anything suspicious.

The massive steel doors of the embassy gates were secured shut. Concertina wire circled above. There would be no entry here. A few yards away, a makeshift vehicle entrance opened into the field adjacent to the embassy proper. From there, we would snake our way through to the embassy under constant observation by the watchful eyes (and crew-served weapons) of the U.S. Marine

security force. We pulled into the driveway. An Afghan man stood at the entranceway. His ill-fitting suit was that of a Third World businessman. He wanted to look like a Westerner. His job was to act as a liaison between the locals who sought entry and to wave through those with official business. He worked for the Americans. He was charged with maintaining the compound when the Americans departed. One night, a mob attacked. They killed the few animals he kept and brutally beat him before jailing him. He had been imprisoned by the Taliban as a traitor. Now he was free. America was his adopted country. He took it to heart when he was told that the embassy grounds were American soil. His smile and wave were to welcome us home. He signaled to another similarly

clad man, his brother, to pull the tire puncture strip out of the driveway, allowing our vehicles to pass.

A pretty 20-something woman looked out of place in her European-style dress. Tightly against her breast, she clutched a clipboard. She was his daughter. She kept track of the cars entering the compound. She grew up listening to stories of the kind Americans, of loyalty and pride. She wanted so much to understand that which her father took for granted. She gave us a shy smile, then turned away.

We reported our arrival to the first Marine we came to. He eyed our military identification cards closely. We surrendered them, and in their place we were provided plastic visitor badges. The agent we were transporting sat quietly in the back seat. They were expecting him. Our two-vehicle caravan worked its way to the embassy grounds. We halted at the main entrance. The Great Seal of the United States presided over the building's facade. A grouping of sandbags held a bright red Marine guidon in the proper leaning position. It identified the unit of the embassy guards, a proud bunch. We left one man with the vehicles, while the rest of us moved up the steps to the lobby.

We ignored the "clear your weapon" barrel. A sign boldly informed us that loaded weapons were not allowed into the building. The barrel was partially filled with sand. Everyone was supposed to point their weapons into it while clearing the breach. It was passed with a sneer by our security personnel. They mumbled about never unloading their weapons. I hesitated for a moment but did not clear my weapon either.

We moved into the building. Broken glass littered the marble floor. Bullet holes and jagged-edged windowpanes exposed the lobby to the bitter weather. The position behind the bullet-proof guard post was left unattended. The heavy plastic protective window had been smashed. The culprit's tool, a rusting metal bar, remained where

the fiendish Taliban thug had left it against a wall only a few feet away.

Our attention was drawn to a neatly folded American flag on display. It last flew on 30 January 1989. A note in longhand on lined paper read:

Marines, take care of it. For those of us that were here, it means a lot. For those of you who enter Kabul, it could mean a lot to you. Semper Fi. We Kabul Marines endured as I'm sure you will. Think of us as needed.

For a moment, we surveyed the activity. Muscular Marines in full battle gear, weapons at the ready, lugged over full trash bags toward the rear of the building. Dirt was swept into small piles. The floor was gray and filthy.

"Hello," a grandmotherly voice, out of place here, echoed from one of the hallways. A diminutive lady, dressed in a light-colored blouse and long dark skirt moved confidently through the burly men to where we stood—the chargé d'affaires. We introduced ourselves. The agent only nodded. She told him that he would have to bunk in his office at the embassy. There was no place for him in the bunker. He did not seem to mind. She offered us a tour of the embassy. She was proud of the work being done here. She spoke with exhilaration. This was where she belonged, she confided.

When U.S. officials returned to the 14-acre compound after the fall of Kabul, they found many of the rooms untouched since the day the last Marine departed. The outbuildings were damaged on 26 September when a mob climbed the walls and set two cars on fire. The caretaker tried to stop them. She called him a hero. I could hear the emotion in her voice as she told of the thousands of Afghan protesters who turned a Taliban march to the abandoned American embassy in Kabul into a frenzied attack. She told us that

they were chanting Osama bin Laden's name and waving white flags of Islam as they torched the compound, burned American flags, and hacked at the mothballed chancery building with an ax. Her voice cracked as she described the group of turbaned, black-clad Taliban men who wrenched the Great Seal of the United States off the main embassy building with steel cables and hammers, while others danced ecstatically and shouted "Long live Osama" and "Death to America."

She was quiet for a moment. Then she went on. She described the scene when the doors were reopened as "like going back in time." Coated in 12 years of dust, a half-smoked cigar still lay in the ashtray on the ambassador's desk and a half drunk bottle of California red wine stood on a table nearby. "We need to get the building ready for the official reopening," she informed us. "Only a month away, only a month away. . . . Her words trailed off. They revealed her thoughts. There was so much to do. She also had to worry about force protection—for her it meant keeping the American flag flying proudly.

She was the senior State Department person in Afghanistan. A modest woman who lived among battle-hardened Marines in the filth and stench of the abandoned old building. She was accustomed to hardship. Her soft complexion and grandmotherly warm smile could not hide her determination to see this mission through. She was a volunteer. Already retired from the foreign service, she asked, then begged, to take over the

monumental task of representing the U.S. government in a war zone. Why her? Because she would represent the American people's resolve. She continued speaking, but I no longer listened as intently. I watched her. With a graceful wave of her hand, she replaced an errant tuft of brown hair loosed from her sensible headband. She was tough, yet feminine. "Well, gentlemen," she spoke to the small crowd now encircling her, "Things to do. If you will excuse me?" The men parted, shifting self-consciously on their feet, to let her by. Her warm smile and her sure step made us all feel proud.

Once outside we stood for a silent moment and saluted the American flag fully unfurled in the cold Afghan wind. No one spoke the words, but we realized a common bond between us. Active duty, reserve, and civilians were one now. What we were fighting for became crystal clear. We were proud to be Americans. Our time had come.

Note

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About the Author

Lieutenant Colonel Brian D. Perry Sr., USA, was J-4, Joint Task Force Bowie in Afghanistan. His article describes his journey through Kabul to the U.S. embassy, which had been closed for the previous 12 years.



Aviation Ordnance Chief GySgt Marc A. Senecal of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 165 (Rein) watches Bell AH-1W Super Cobra helicopters prepare to launch from the flight deck of the USS *Bonhomme Richard* (LHD 6) in support of Operation Anaconda on 4 March 2002.

Photo courtesy of Nathan J. Ferbert



Leatherneck Air on Target During Operation Anaconda

by First Lieutenant Jeff Landis

Leatherneck, June 2002

When the most intense battle in the war on terror erupted in Afghanistan, Marines were called into action [on] 3 March [2002] to do what they do best: provide a quick and deadly response. This time they did it with Marine air.

Marine helicopter pilots, aircrewmen, and support personnel from the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) [13th MEU (SOC)] provided the muscle and quick reaction force required to launch air assaults on enemy troops and gun positions in Khowst and eastern Afghanistan's Shah-e-kot Valley near Gardez, 4–26 March, thus providing support for Coalition forces fighting on the ground. Leatherneck helicopters launched more than 400 combat sorties.

In less than 24 hours after receiving the call, the 13th MEU (SOC) and Amphibious Squadron 3 aboard ships of the USS *Bonhomme Richard* (LHD 6) Amphibious Ready Group left the coast of Oman and sailed full steam through the Indian Ocean to the Northern Arabian Sea. From there, they launched missions requiring their aircraft to fly 800 miles inland the following morning.

The U.S. Central Command directed 13th MEU (SOC) to provide five [Bell] AH-1W Super Cobra¹ and three [Sikorsky] CH-53E Super Stallion



Photo courtesy of U.S. Navy

Ordnance technicians from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 165 (Rein) load missiles onto an AH-1W Super Cobra helicopter on 4 March 2002. A little more than an hour later, the Super Cobra and its two pilots launched from the flight deck of the USS *Bonhomme Richard* to support Operation Anaconda.

helicopters and [Lockheed] KC-130 Hercules cargo/refueler aircraft to support the Coalition Forces Land Component Command-Forward for Operation Anaconda. Additionally, the MEU provided daily [McDonnell Douglas] AV-8B Harrier combat sorties in support of the Coalition Forces Air Component Commander.

Under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Gregg A. Sturdevant, commanding officer of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 165 (Rein), the 80-plus member detachment of Task Force 165 [TF-165] performed close air support, airborne reconnaissance, logistics support, and a myriad of other tasks for Coalition Joint Task Force [CJTF]-Mountain, headed by the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division, with elements from the 101st Airborne Division and special operations forces.

Marine Super Cobras conducted daily combat sorties to flush out al-Qaeda and Taliban forces in the mountainous regions of eastern Afghanistan. Three Marine CH-53Es, originally scheduled to provide logistics and refueling capabilities to Cobras on the long flight from the amphibious assault ship USS *Bonhomme Richard* to Bagram,

Afghanistan, brought a new dimension in support of combat operations.

Super Stallion CH-53Es proved to be the most flexible assets on station. Super Stallion pilots flew 191 combat sorties and 257 hours, providing tactical refueling to every type of rotary-wing asset in Afghanistan. They flew combat support missions hauling supplies, ordnance and water, inserted U.S. and Coalition special operations forces, moved utility and all-terrain vehicles, and operated tactical forward arming and refueling points.

"We knew we would have some involvement in this operation because of the sheer distance inland," said CH-53E pilot Captain R. Brian "Chimpy" Fanning. "I think we brought more to the fight than people realized. We performed a variety of missions . . . on short notice. All this was a credit to the maintenance crews who worked miracles day and night even in the freezing cold to keep the aircraft maintained and combat-ready. They are the unsung heroes of this operation."

According to Captain Leaf H. "Grenade" Wade, assistant air officer for 13th MEU (SOC) and liaison officer for the TF-165 detachment:

“Our planning cycle is very short, and we could react to a number of different missions on short notice. . . . Sometimes the tasks would change four or five times in a day, and I think the flexibility in being able to plan and adapt and make it work on a short timeline was a huge success.”

The Super Cobra and Harrier pilots also dictated combat success. Cobra pilots flew an average of 40 combat missions each, 217 total sorties, and 380 hours. They fired a total of 28 tube-launched, optically-tracked, wire-command data link [Raytheon BGM-71] (TOW) guided missiles; 42 [Lockheed Martin AGM-114] Hellfire missiles; 450 2.75-inch rockets; and 9,300 rounds of 20mm high-explosive, incendiary rounds on al-Qaeda cave complexes and mortar positions. Harrier pilots flew 148 sorties and 331 hours total, including some in January, and dropped 32 GBU-12 500-pound bombs and two MK-82 bombs.

“We flew the first Harrier sortie off the ship, and it felt a lot different than training when we removed all of our squadron patches and name tapes, and grabbed a pistol and rounds to take with us,” said Captain Joshua L. “Spud” Luck.

“When I felt the 500-pound bombs drop off my wing one at a time and I watched them impact the target area, it was almost surreal. From 18,000 feet, it’s pretty impersonal.

“However, the personal side of it was seeing what happened on September 11, and having an impact on preventing anything like that from happening in the future. I am proud to be a part of this,” Luck said.

According to military reports, much of the heaviest fighting during Operation Anaconda took place in the mountains 10,000 feet or more above sea level. The Cobra pilots provided aerial reconnaissance and put steel on targets while combing the mountains.

“I volunteered for this, and I was hoping I

would get into the fight somehow,” said Captain Christopher W. “Harm” Roe. “We happened to get the first mission out and attacked a mortar position with TOW missiles. We also located a hide-site and made a few passes with 20mm guns and fired flechette rockets.

“Part of it for me was revenge. I watched the buildings collapse live [and] in person,” said Roe, who was home in New York on leave during 9/11. “I think it was easy [in air missions] to take the human dimension out of it, because they were firing at us trying to take us out of the air. It was either us or them.”

“We worked well with [keeping] our eyes on target,” said Captain Bruce W. “Jo Jo” Laughlin. “With an obscured target, you have to work together to stay focused. . . . It was a life-altering experience for me as a Marine and a pilot.”

With all of the integrated aviation assets, including KC-130 Hercules aircraft providing daily logistics runs for fuel and supplies as well as aerial refueling, the flexibility of the 13th MEU (SOC) proved valuable to the battles in Afghanistan. On 26 March, the detachment’s support to CJTF-Mountain was ended, and the flexible, capable and expeditionary force rejoined 13th MEU (SOC) ready for exercises or more combat operations in the Central Command theater of operations.

Notes

Leatherneck, June 2002, 20–21. Reprinted with permission. Copyright *Leatherneck Magazine*.

1. The official name of the AH-1W is Sea Cobra, but is popularly known as the Super Cobra, which will be used throughout this document.

About the Author

First Lieutenant Jeff Landis was the public affairs officer attached to the 13th MEU(SOC).

McDonnell Douglas AV-8B Harriers from the Flying Nightmares—Marine Attack Squadron 513—line the expeditionary airfield at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan.

Photo courtesy of Maj Michael V. Franzak





Bagram Nightmares

by Fred H. Allison

U.S. Marine Corps History Division

Bagram Air Base today [2009] is one of the world's busiest in support of the Coalition's war against the Taliban. In the early days of what was then called the War on Terrorism, eight years ago, Bagram was the northern front, an outpost in a dangerous and hostile land. It is isolated and austere, wind-swept and foreboding. Situated on a plateau, its elevation is almost 5,000 feet above sea level. Shot-up and gutted Russian MiGs were reminders that it had once been a Soviet air base. Shortly after 9/11, in the earliest days of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), the Northern Alliance and Taliban battled for its control, literally on the base. Mortars and rockets ravaged its buildings, runway, taxiways, and ramps. Once liberated by Coalition forces, gutsy Lockheed C-130 Hercules pilots began flying in and out, hauling troops and supplies. The decimated airport conditions, however, would not allow tactical jets to operate safely from Bagram.

Strike jets, therefore, had to fly a long way to get over the Afghanistan battlefields and provide air support for Coalition troops. Except for the Kyrgyz Republic to the north, no nation on Afghanistan's perimeter hosted American aircraft. Early in the operation, U.S. Air Force bombers staged from Navy Support Facility Diego Garcia (2,500 miles) or [Whiteman Air Force Base,] Missouri (7,250 miles), to provide air support. At the same time, Navy/Marine Corps aircraft, which flew the preponderance of OEF missions, flew from

carriers 700 miles away in the Arabian Sea or from bases in Krygyzistan, which were also hundreds of miles distant. With the possibility of war in Iraq looming, even these limited aviation assets might not be available in the future. Air Force General T. Michael Moseley, combined forces air component commander (CFACC) for OEF, asked the Marine Corps in mid-2002 if Harriers could fly from Bagram.

The McDonnell Douglas AV-8B Harrier's vertical/short takeoff and landing capability meant that it did not require a sophisticated airfield on which to operate. Bagram was basically an Army helicopter base. Its runway had no arresting gear and, unlike other tactical jets, the Harrier required none. A squadron of strike jets based in-country could provide near the same air coverage as a much larger force of aircraft based hundreds of miles away. If Harriers could fly from Bagram they, like the Air Force's Fairchild Republic A-10 Thunderbolt IIs, which by mid-2002 were flying from Bagram, would be "inside the fight." They could provide a quick response to calls for air support and better integrate with the troops they were supporting, which were also headquartered at Bagram.¹ An important aspect of Moseley's request for Harriers was that they were equipped with AN/AAQ-28(V) Litening targeting pods. This system, developed by the Rafael Corporation of Israel and manufactured with Northrop Grumman, represented a generational step forward in precision weapons delivery and—of great significance for Afghanistan—could gather intelligence data. Air National Guard F-16s had first fielded them in 1999, and employed them in combat in Operation Southern Watch in 2000.² The Litening pod's capability and utility was recognized by Marines, and by 2001 Marine Harrier squadrons were training with them in Yuma, Arizona.

In the summer of 2002, the Marines directed

Lieutenant Colonel James A. "Grouper" Dixon, the commanding officer of a Yuma, Arizona-based Harrier squadron, Marine Attack Squadron (VMA) 513—the Flying Nightmares—to conduct a site survey of Bagram Air Base to determine its suitability for AV-8B operations. When Dixon and his party arrived at Bagram in the middle of night, it was pitch dark, "the darkest place" he had ever been. The next day, they began the survey. Dixon focused on the runway and ramp surfaces. They were terrible. Overall, the runway was crumbling with holes in the paving, some more than two feet across and six inches deep. Initial construction by the Soviet Union was substandard. The wooden expansion joints had rotted away and the concrete slabs were buckled and crumbling, creating a genuine threat to an aircraft engine that might easily ingest a chunk of debris. Known as foreign object damage (FOD), this can cripple an aircraft as surely as an enemy bullet. While the runway was being repaired, in the near term it meant that even less runway would be available. Indeed, half of the runway's width was closed for repairs while the other half remained in its decimated state.

There were other concerns. Night operations would be required but, because of the enemy threat, the base would be blacked out. Harrier pilots were adept at night combat flying and practiced it regularly, but they expected to return to a base or ship that had lights to aid landing. Mines were numerous, many visible just off the concrete. Logistics was another issue. Forward-based Harriers were meant to operate as part of a Marine air-ground task force. A Bagram-based Harrier squadron would be the only one for hundreds of miles, isolated and far from any Marine-specific logistics support. Bagram's high elevation and thinner air would degrade the Harriers' performance and reduce ordnance loads. This was particularly significant because the AV-8Bs did not normally carry a big

load. The mountains and weather around Bagram created gusty and unpredictable wind conditions that was a further hazard to Harriers operating at slow speed around the airfield.

Upon return to the United States, Dixon consulted with aircraft engine experts on the FOD problem. He was told that the Harrier's engine would not suck up a "Rice Krispie if it is not disturbed." An advantage the Harrier has is that the nose gear is behind its engine intake, so it would not throw up rocks to be ingested. The FOD danger came from debris kicked up by another aircraft's exhaust. Amended taxi and takeoff procedures and "tail pipe awareness" would minimize the FOD hazard to engines. But the concrete debris still represented a significant threat to Harrier tires and general aircraft safety.

Although a vertical landing could not be used, the Harrier's vectored thrust capability would allow for short take offs and landings with a decent load of ordnance. This tactic would also minimize the enemy ground fire threat since they would not be hovering while landing and taking off.

So, while the Harriers could operate from Bagram, it was not going to be easy; the high elevation, gusty conditions, increased FOD hazards, enemy threats, and minimal lighting conditions ensured that. Dixon's squadron was young, few of his pilots or noncommissioned officers had been to war. Nevertheless, he believed they were up to the challenge. He reported his findings to higher command.

In August 2002, he got the word that VMA-513(-) would deploy to Afghanistan in October. They had about six weeks to prepare. Night airfield operations were practiced at a blacked-out Laguna Army Airfield west of Yuma. They hung external fuel tanks on their jets to simulate the diminished performance expected at Bagram's high elevation. A squadron mechanic adapted a helicopter infrared

lens light cover for use on the Harriers' landing light. It allowed the light to be used and seen by the pilots wearing night-vision goggles (NVGs), and unseen by others without NVGs. It increased visibility from 500 to 3,500 feet.

Tactical training was not so problematic. The squadron had trained extensively in offensive air support, which would be the predominate mission in Afghanistan. It is the mother's milk of tactical flying for Harrier pilots. An important difference though was that, in Afghanistan, their air strikes would be controlled by U.S. Air Force joint tactical air controllers (JTACs) instead of Marine forward air controllers (FACs). The Nightmare pilots practiced close air support missions with JTACs at the Goldwater Range at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Tucson, Arizona. The JTACs were enlisted men, while Marine FACs were officers and aviators. Trust and reliability was built into the Marine pilot/FAC relationship, their shared backgrounds and military cultures streamlined communication in the challenging task of putting ordnance on targets very close to the good guys. The predeployment training served to instill confidence in the JTACs.

Living and Working in Bagram

Although the base at Bagram was inhabited by a sizeable Army and Coalition force, the Marines were required to build their own camp and workspaces. So, as the squadron pilots trained to fly and fight out of the base, an advance party, commanded by First Lieutenant Ryan P. Flanagan, composed of Marines Wing Support Squadrons (MWSS) 373, -374, and -474 and Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 13 (MALS-13) flew a month early into Bagram to build the camp. These Marines had a scant two weeks to prepare. Nevertheless, there was no shortage of volunteers, "everybody wanted to go."

The advance party—40 Marines with about five Lockheed C-5 Galaxy loads worth of gear—arrived at Bagram in the middle of the night. The belly of the transport was blacked out as the Air Force transport banked hard into its spiraling, tactical landing approach. The Marines were in full combat gear with their personal weapons “locked and loaded.” After landing, they stepped out into Bagram’s windy, raw cold blackness. Building a base camp, or “tent city,” fit easily within the capability of the wing support squadrons, which had the ability to build substantial expeditionary airfields if required. Nevertheless, the Bagram experience was daunting.

The next morning, the Marines saw their campsite—little but frames of tents stuck in “shin deep moon dust” and mines. The unexploded ordnance had to be removed before camp construction. At the end of a month of 16-hour days, they had erected 30 strongback tents, each a home for eight Marines, laid gravel, built showers and a laundry, wired the camp for electricity and communications, constructed bunkers and installed gates. With no internal plumbing or sewage, water had to be hauled in and, after use, the gray water was hauled out. Later they built a chapel, recreational facilities, a sand pit for martial arts training, a weight room/gym, bouldering wall, and volleyball and basketball courts. When a donated fiberglass above-ground swimming pool arrived, they installed that as well.³

Once the squadron moved in, the camp was dubbed *Teufel Hunden*—Devil Dog. In its center sat a 9/11 memorial of miniature twin towers that listed the names of fallen Marines in Afghanistan on a concrete pentagonal base with an outline of the state of Pennsylvania carved in the cement. A flagpole was set in the middle, where the American flag was raised and lowered daily.

The Marines rarely had interaction with Afghan

civilians, although some worked on base, hauling off the gray water and doing light construction work. Afghans traveled for hours to sell their wares, including antique firearms, jewelry, tapestries, and furs, at a Friday bazaar. Throughout their deployment, the VMA-513 Marines continued a time-honored tradition of promoting goodwill with the locals, especially the children. They visited Afghan children in the hospital; some were malnourished, others were victims of mines sown during the Soviet occupation. At Christmas, the Marines conducted a “Toys for Tots” campaign for Afghan children in surrounding villages. The donated toys—enough to fill two five-ton trucks—came from the United States.

With only six jets to support a demanding flight schedule and a long tether for replacement parts and other maintenance support, squadron success hinged on aircraft maintenance. The MWSS and MALS-13 Marines made Bagram Harrier-friendly. They built a high-power turn-up ramp for engine maintenance and operated a motorized sweeper that had been transported from the United States to clean the base’s rugged surfaces. These precautions combined with the pilots’ caution in taxiing, take-off, and landing procedures neutralized the FOD hazard. This was evident in that not one engine was lost to FOD during their year-long Afghanistan deployment.⁴ This was an impressive record in light of the regularity of FODs at much cleaner continental U.S. bases.

Logistics to support the Harrier squadron in Afghanistan had been a major concern. To facilitate expeditionary aircraft maintenance, VMA-513 brought a Marine Corps–developed Remote Expeditionary Support Package (RESP)—a mini-maintenance department pack-up van loaded for rapid deployment—that provided a robust maintenance capability and a large degree of self-sufficiency despite the austere setting. The squadron



Photo by LCpl Andrew Z. Williams

Marines with VMA-513 play basketball on their time off at Bagram Air Base.

received some support from Army units on base and, although the parts supply line extended back to their base at Yuma, parts arrived in a timely manner, most within five days, and were delivered primarily by commercial carriers and Air Force transports. Their high aircraft availability rate was supported by the decision to bring only one variant of AV-8B, the night attack model, instead of including the radar version. This simplified parts supply and enhanced commonality especially for cannibalizing parts if the situation demanded.⁵

Marine mechanics endured the wind, dust, cold, heat, and darkness of Bagram. Security requirements demanded that they work “lights out” at

night. To accomplish this, they wore night-vision goggles and used covert lighting unless they were in the clamshell hangar erected by the Air Force. The maintenance crews worked long hours, 12-hour shifts, with a day off a distinct rarity. They did not mind since there was little else to do. Colonel Dixon attested to the Marines’ role in the success of the Bagram deployment through their “internal fortitude . . . working 12 on and 12 off, hot weather, cold weather, rain, sleet, snow or shine. These Marines can give, and give, and give, and don’t ask for much in return.” Marine mechanics produced a mission-capable aircraft availability rate of 83 percent for the year’s deployment.



Photo by LCpl Andrew Z. Williams

An AV-8B Harrier jet from VMA-513 sits on the ramp at Bagram Air Base.

No sortie was lost as a result of factors over which they had control.

Initially, the deployment was to be only six months. About the time they should have been heading home, the war in Iraq started. They had been given notice two months earlier, around Christmas, that they would be extended for another six months. Up until then, they had been counting down the days. Dixon dreaded breaking the news to the squadron. Jokingly he said, “I made everybody turn in their weapons” before announcing the change. “A year in Bagram was quite an experience.”

Bagram sat in the middle of hostile territory, yet there was little actual fighting, although rockets or

small-arms fire occasionally arced in. Complacency and boredom threatened morale. Some Marines half joking called it “Operation Forgotten Freedom.” The Air Force rotated their Bagram A-10 squadrons in and out on a regular basis; about seven different A-10 units came and went while the Flying Nightmares were there. Indeed many Marines who went to Iraq and fought in Operation Iraqi Freedom I were home before VMA-513.

The outside threat kept them trapped on base. Unlike being on an aircraft carrier, as one pilot remarked, “this carrier never pulls into port.” After the squadron’s deployment was extended, Colonel Dixon implemented a rotational rest and recuperation program. All Marines had the opportunity

to take a 10-day leave from Bagram. To pass the time when not working, which they did incessantly, the Marines focused on physical training. They became used to running with their M16s. A Bagram marathon was held and documented in *Runner's World* magazine. The Internet, email, and movies were also available. Most important for morale, VMA-513 received visits from Commandant General Michael W. Hagee and Lieutenant General Earl B. Hailston, commanding general of Marine Forces Pacific. Each stressed the significance of this deployment.

Flying and Fighting in Bagram

Making a globe-spanning flight from their base at Yuma, the squadron arrived on 15 October and began flying missions within 48 hours. It deployed with only six aircraft as the limited ramp conditions at Bagram did not allow for a full squadron. Over the next 12 months, the 13 Nightmare pilots flew almost 3,800 combat hours in 1,250 sorties—almost twice as much as what a 16-plane Harrier squadron normally flew in a year.

Deployed in the middle of a combat arena, all the flight time was “red ink”—combat time—since the enemy was just outside the perimeter.⁶ On an early combat mission, as Colonel Dixon taxied for take-off in pre-dawn darkness, he watched machine gun tracers spew into the sky off the end of the runway as local warlords settled differences. Almost half of their missions were at night. When darkness settled, there was little light-pollution from large cities as would be the case in the United States. From the ground, it was eerie to watch operations around the field. One could hear Harriers taxiing, landing, or taking off but not see them. From a pilot's perspective, approaching the field to land at night, they saw the town all lit up and in the “dark abyss” next to it sat the runway, “somewhere.”

The flying was extremely demanding. Radar to provide guidance into the field was limited and, due to the enemy threat that required tactical runway approaches, no slow, straight-ins. Afghanistan had little infrastructure to support aviation, such as navigation stations, radar facilities, maps, weather forecasting, air traffic control, or other airfields where a pilot could land in an emergency or when bad weather shut down home base. Once the war began in Iraq, the Air Force AWACS (airborne warning and control system) aircraft was not available for command and control. The Iraq War also took most of the airborne tankers. This shortened missions, lightened ordnance loads, and took away the safety hedge of having more airborne fuel available if unexpected conditions arose. Pilots flew constantly, evaluating the situation and weighing it against their few options.

Afghanistan served as a preview of how the war on terror would be fought. It was a war where searching for an elusive and shadowy enemy was a central tactic and “intelligence was the primary U.S. weapon.”⁷ For this fight, the Harrier proved to be of great value, mainly because Marine pilots train extensively in close air support and are genetically wired to support troops on the ground. They also had the technology to provide superb real-time intelligence information to the ground warriors: “a moving map display linked to global positioning linked to the Litening pod.” The Litening pod allowed for a magnified, precise, and detailed examination of the terrain. Communicating this information to the ground troops significantly enhanced their situational awareness. As an example, a Nightmare pilot was able to spot a man digging alongside a road at a range of 5.5 miles through the Litening pod. The pilot was able to warn the convoy of the suspicious activity.⁸

Employing ordnance was the exception. The squadron dropped 17 bombs, fired 2 rockets, and

expended almost 2,000 rounds of 25mm ammunition. In most cases, presence was all that was required. The Harrier is a relatively loud aircraft and its noise is intimidating. One of the special operations troops stated that “Afghans, when they hear an airplane overhead that scares the s—t out of them, they won’t pull stuff when they know airplanes are overhead.” Another soldier who lived and fought out of an isolated fire base to the north in the Hindu Kush mountains declared, “The only nights that they slept well were the nights they heard the Harriers flying overhead.”

Based close to the fight at Bagram and flying a fast jet, the Flying Nightmares responded quickly to air support requests. They were able to cover two vulnerability periods every 24 hours, each lasting at least 90 minutes or up to 5 hours if tankers were available. They flew in two-plane sections and employed hunter-killer tactics. The lead aircraft, the hunter, carried the Litening pod, which the pilot used to locate and designate targets. Precise weapon delivery was critical because, in counterinsurgency, collateral damage has to be minimized to protect civilians. The Litening pod helped locate the target and, because of its infrared marker—finger of death—which could be seen by pilots and the JTACS using night-vision devices, positive target identification could be obtained. One U.S. Army special operations officer based at Jalabad stated:

[The Nightmares] did everything we asked them to do and more. They would take the time to really look for the bad guys. They would also tell us about bad guys beyond the range where we were looking. They talked us through things, we really felt that the Harriers knew what they were doing. I feel that [they] appreciate what we’re up against on the ground.

Two Flying Nightmare pilots, Major Michael V. Franzak and Captain Michael D. Trapp, received

the Distinguished Flying Cross for providing game-changing close air support to Coalition troops in dire circumstances. Army General Dan K. McNeill, commander of all Coalition forces in Afghanistan at the time, received “constant” favorable reports on VMA-513’s performance.

In sum, the deployment of VMA-513 to Bagram proved a success and exhibited the Harrier’s abilities and the flexibility inherent in Marine aviation. It deployed rapidly to an expeditionary environment, at extreme distance from Marine Corps logistics depots. The Flying Nightmares then maintained a high operational tempo in an austere setting for an entire year. They provided valuable reconnaissance, intelligence, and fire support for Coalition ground forces. In so doing, they validated the capability and utility of the Litening targeting pod. The deployment also breathed new life into the controversial Harrier itself; indeed, the success of VMA-513’s Bagram deployment took the wind out of the sails of a late 2003 *Los Angeles Times* story that attacked the Harrier’s safety record. The Marine Corps general at the helm of Marine aviation, Major General James F. Amos, regarded the Nightmare’s Bagram deployment as singularly important for “saving the AV-8B.” The Flying Nightmares’ 2002–3 Bagram deployment pioneered the way for subsequent deployments of Harriers to Afghanistan by the Marine Corps and the Royal Air Force.

The U.S. Marine Corps is proud of its expeditionary nature—to be fast, austere, innovative, and lethal in any clime and place. The Flying Nightmares modeled these attributes in their Bagram deployment.

Notes

An edited version of the article was posted at <http://www.sldinfo.com/our-history-and-lessons-learned-corner-new-bagram-nightmares-part-one/>.

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1. The A-10 was able to fly from Bagram as it was a rugged jet, its engines were mounted high so the threat of its engine ingesting a chunk of debris from the blasted and crumbling runway was reduced. It also was able to operate from shortened runways because it landed and took off at slower speeds.
2. David P. Anderson, ANG History Office, email to author, 3 August 2009, author files, History Division, Quantico, Virginia.
3. VMA-513 PowerPoint brief, 2003, Reference Section, History Division, Quantico, Virginia.
4. There was one engine damaged by internal FOD, a piece of the aircraft itself was ingested.

5. Cannibalizing refers to the practice of taking a part from one aircraft and using it on another.
6. Combat flights are entered in a pilot's log book in red ink.
7. Don Chipman, "Air Power and the Battle for Mazar-e Sharif," *Air Power History*, Spring 2006, 44.
8. Dixon intvw.

About the Author

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Part II
Rebuilding a Nation, 2003–7

The beginning of 2003 saw 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade Anti-Terrorism (4th MEB [AT]) provide the sourcing for Task Force Kabul/Marine Security Force Kabul. The MEB supplied one company from its AT battalion (3d Battalion, 8th Marines) on a rotating basis until 2005 for the U.S. embassy. In late 2003, the U.S. Marines also began to deploy infantry battalions to Afghanistan, the first of which was 2d Battalion, 8th Marines. These units deployed singly to augment Combined Joint Task Force-180 (CJTF-180) and its successor CJTF-76. Missions initially involved maintaining local security around Bagram airfield within a 10-kilometer radius. In addition, the battalion served as the local quick reaction force and conducted numerous cordon-and-knock operations in surrounding provinces. From 2005 to mid-2006, Marine Corps infantry battalions also served as the core of Task Force Koa, which operated in the vicinity of Jalalabad. In addition, they also aided the local provincial reconstruction team.

Battalion operations picked up significantly in 2005. The 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, conducted a series of operations in eastern Afghanistan, especially the Korengal Valley in Kunar Province. The series of four-phased operations consisted of planning and shaping, insertion, cordon and knock/search, targeted civil-military operations/information operations, and sustained stability operations to promote the legitimacy of the Afghan government, spoil anti-Coalition activities, and promote reconciliation with the government.

During the summer and fall of 2005, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, continued to conduct operations to improve security and stabilize the local government in Kunar Province. Most notable of these was Operation Red Wings to capture insurgent cell leader Ahmad Shah. Without its supporting arms, battalions relied on joint force integration to

conduct operations. However, during Red Wings, friction integrating Special Forces and the battalion led the special operations task force to take over planning and command and control of the opening phases. Tragically, shortly after its insertion, a U.S. Navy SEAL fireteam was ambushed by Ahmad Shah's fighters. Three of the 4 SEALs were killed, and a rescue helicopter with 16 aboard was shot down trying to rescue the team.

Aviation units deployed in similar fashion to that of the infantry battalion model. Individual squadrons or detachments deployed independent of the Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF), but did take some supporting detachments for maintenance and airfield support. Generally, they were requested to fill specific missions or capability gaps, such as close air support from an expeditionary airfield or to counter improvised explosive devices. Reserve units from the 4th Marine Aircraft Wing (4th MAW) also featured heavily throughout much of the period.

Marine Corps support for the Afghan effort also saw the introduction of embedded training teams (ETT). These generally consisted of 16 Marines who provided training and advisory assistance to Afghan National Police (ANP) and Afghan National Army (ANA) units. Over time, the Marine ETT detachments rose from three deployed in 2005 to seven by early 2008. The ETT typically consisted of one corps-level and six battalion-level teams to train and mentor the ANA.

Following the opening stages of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), the Marine Corps generally did not deploy as a MAGTF. However, in 2004, the unstable situation in central Afghanistan and anticipated spring offensive by the Taliban and other anti-Coalition militias prompted deployment of the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit (22d MEU) to Oruzgan Province. Once ashore,



Official Department of Defense photo, courtesy of MC1 Chad J. McNeeley, USN Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Navy Adm Michael G. Mullen arrives in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, on 6 October 2007 to visit U.S. forces assigned to Provincial Reconstruction Team 236.

it became CJTF-180's main effort for Operation Mountain Storm. The MEU's organic command-and-control and logistical apparatus enabled it to take on additional joint attachments, including an Army battalion and Special Forces operational detachment A-teams. In a series of linked operations, the extended campaign not only demonstrated the robust capabilities and flexibility of the MAGTF, but it also preempted enemy actions and helped set the conditions for successful Afghani voter registration and national-level elections.

The following selections cover the atypical deployments that generally represented the period when most U.S. assets were deployed to Iraq

following the campaign to topple the Afghan Taliban regime. As the effort to rebuild a war-torn Afghanistan began, however, the Taliban and various other actors reorganized to challenge the Coalition effort. By 2006, the strain of two simultaneous conflicts prompted the Marine Corps to dramatically reduce its presence in Afghanistan. By 2007, however, a resurgent Taliban and the successful counterinsurgency strategy implemented in Iraq prompted senior Marines to push for a shift from Iraq back to Afghanistan. The George W. Bush administration ultimately rejected the proposal in early December 2007 to protect the fragile gains made in Iraq.



Marines with Company E, 2d Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, host an economic and development shura.

Photo courtesy of Sgt Scott A. Whittington



Fighting

“The Other War”:

Counterinsurgency

Strategy in Afghanistan,

2003–5

*by Lieutenant General David W. Barno,
USA (Ret)*

Military Review, September–October 2007

Afghanistan in mid-2003 was at a point of transition—a strategic fork in the road. Major combat operations had ended in 2001, devolving into a long-term pursuit of Taliban and al-Qaeda remnants, and humanitarian support was beginning to enlarge the nascent reconstruction effort; but Taliban-related activity was increasing in the south and east of the country, while heavily armed militias continued to dominate many areas. Politically, however, optimism across the nation was almost tangible. Plans were underway for a nationwide *loya jirga* (grand council) to draft a new constitution, an effort to begin the democratic process that would move beyond the 2002 jirga, which had appointed Hamid Karzai the leader of a transitional government. Additionally, presidential and parliamentary elections were being planned for 2004.

The Bonn process had organized the overwhelming international sympathy toward Afghanistan with lead nations designated to oversee security sector reform.¹ International support for stabilizing Afghanistan was strong, focused upon the UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), which was led by the renowned and influential Algerian diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi. A 5,500-person International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) had transitioned into a NATO-led mission, but remained confined to security duties in Kabul. On balance, however, the nationwide writ of the provisional government in Kabul was tenuous at best, and increasing security concerns threatened to undermine both international support and the nascent political process.

Unfortunately, the U.S.-led military Coalition was not well postured to counter the rising threat. Coordination between the military and interagency partners was hampered by a U.S. embassy and military headquarters separated by over 40 kilometers. Unity of effort suffered; the military command-and-control situation was in flux; our tactical approach was enemy-focused and risked alienating the Afghan people; and the substantial draw of operations in Iraq had put severe limits on the availability of key military capabilities for Afghanistan. To make matters more difficult, the American military leadership was rotating, and the first U.S. ambassador since 1979 had departed with no replacement. Clearly, without a significant change in course, Afghanistan was at risk.

This article outlines the changes subsequently made to U.S. strategy in Afghanistan. It depicts the approach, begun in October 2003, to create a successful counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign in “the other war” that resulted in over two years of relative stability and progress. It also provides a brief assessment of the situation in Afghanistan now, as we move toward the end of 2007.

The Military Situation—Summer 2003

In mid-2003, the U.S.-led Coalition embodied over 12,000 troops representing 19 nations. It was led by Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) 180, formed in June 2002 as the forward headquarters in Afghanistan and based at the old Soviet airbase at Bagram, a 20-minute helicopter flight north from Kabul.

The United States had downsized the original CJTF in the spring of 2003, replacing a powerful and well-resourced three-star-led headquarters (XVIII Airborne Corps) and a subordinate division headquarters (Task Force 82) with a single division-level headquarters (10th Mountain Division).² As a result, operational tasks once performed by the corps headquarters and tactical tasks performed by the division headquarters were now assigned to one headquarters struggling to oversee both levels of war for a very large theater of operations.

In Kabul, an Office of Military Cooperation (OMC) had been formed in mid-2002 to take on the mission of building the Afghan National Army (ANA) and de facto a number of political-military tasks as well.³ The focus of the U.S. military effort in the aftermath of the December 2001 fall of the Taliban had been two-fold: to hunt down the remnants of al-Qaeda and the Taliban across the rugged landscape of southern and eastern Afghanistan and to build the ANA. “Nation-building” was explicitly *not* part of the formula.⁴

Despite the presence of a large U.S.-led, combined and joint civil-military operations task force (CJCMOTF) then based in Kabul, the military focus on reconstruction was limited. Four provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) had been created—two American teams at Gardez and Konduz, a British effort at Mazar-e Sharif, and a New Zealand mission in Bamian. All four were in relatively quiet areas. There was no PRT presence

in the more volatile south and only one in the east (at Gardez), although an expansion of four more PRTs had been planned for the spring of 2004.

Overall, the military span of control in Afghanistan was vast: one division-size joint task force headquarters (with a series of temporary commanders in the summer of 2003) supported over 10,000 soldiers of a multinational force conducting security and reconstruction efforts across a nation the size of Texas with a population of 31 million. (Afghanistan is nearly 50 percent larger than Iraq and has 4 million more people).⁵

Of even greater concern, only one ground maneuver brigade had tactical responsibility for this immense battlespace. To complicate matters, special forces, civil-military operations, aviation, and logistics commands operated throughout the battlespace, but reported individually to the CJTF-180 headquarters in Bagram—not to the ground brigade commander.⁶

The primary approach on the ground was enemy-centric. Conventional units operated out of sizeable bases, such as Bagram or Kandahar, or [out of] smaller forward operating bases, such as Shkin or Orgun-e. They gathered intelligence, planned operations, and sortied on “raids,” which could be small, prolonged patrols of some days’ duration or battalion-size operations lasting several weeks (e.g., Operation Mountain Lion). Underlying these actions was the concept that intelligence drives operations; as a result, tactical operations inevitably remained focused on the enemy.

This “raid strategy” combined with the small number of troops had the effect of largely separating Coalition forces from the Afghan people. The tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) units used often worsened this separation. “Tossing” whole villages in a cordon-and-search operation based on an intelligence tip, regardless of its

accuracy, could quickly alienate a neutral or even friendly populace.

At the time, the U.S. military had not published COIN doctrine since Vietnam, and units had relatively little training in COIN before their arrival in country. There was much “learning by doing” and even disagreement as to whether the fight in Afghanistan was a COIN fight at all. In fact, unit commanders were forbidden from using the word “counterinsurgency” in describing their operations—they were executing a “counterterrorist” mission in keeping with U.S. strategic guidance and an operational focus on the enemy.⁷

In view of this situation, the commander of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) recognized the need for a different headquarters configuration. In October 2003, he ordered a new three-star Coalition headquarters to stand up in Kabul and focus on political-military efforts, permitting the two-star JTF headquarters at Bagram to focus more fully on tactical operations.⁸ This initiative represented a distinct break from the previous belief that the overall military headquarters should be somewhat removed from the capital, in part to avoid entanglement in the political complexities of a city of three million Afghans. Kabul was interlaced with all manner of international embassies, special envoys, NATO ISAF units, UNAMA, and a plethora of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), all working to bring a better future to Afghanistan—but in a free-wheeling, confusing, and sometimes counterproductive mix. “Kabul will consume you,” warned one senior U.S. commander who had served in Bagram.⁹

A Counterinsurgency Strategy

Although the story of how we created a three-star operational headquarters with no existing core staff (and from a start point of six members!) in an ongoing operational environment holds important

lessons of its own, the centerpiece of this article is the evolution of a COIN strategy for Afghanistan.¹⁰ The latter story began shortly after my arrival in country, when Lakhdar Brahimi asked us to develop an approach to address the deteriorating security situation in the south and east of the country. The UN had responsibility for devising and implementing a plan to hold Afghan presidential and parliamentary elections in 2004, and it was becoming clear that the organization would be unable to extend its reach into significant parts of the Pashtun southern half of Afghanistan if the security situation continued to remain dangerous there. Moreover, a strong Taliban offensive was expected in the spring of 2004, which would further threaten the elections and thus undermine the “roadmap” set forth by the international community in the Bonn process.

After 10 days of intense staff work led by my talented director of planning, a British colonel whose 22-man J-5 (future plans) shop now comprised over two-thirds of our entire staff, we were able to propose a new approach to security and stability to take into 2004.¹¹ Initially called “Security Strategy South and East,” this effort quickly grew into a comprehensive COIN approach for Afghanistan. Ultimately, it evolved into a detailed campaign plan cowritten with the U.S. embassy and broadly shared by the Afghans and international community. Titled “Counterinsurgency Strategy for Afghanistan,” the plan was crafted in the absence of U.S. military doctrine, but reflected a solid knowledge of classic COIN approaches. The bookshelves in my Kabul offices at the embassy and military compound were well stocked with my own COIN readings, and several senior British officers on my staff supplied important operational insights from their Northern Ireland tours.¹²

To outline our strategy in simple terms, we created “The Five Pillars” diagram (figure 1). This

graphic became a powerful tool for explaining the basics of our strategy to civilians, and within the command it circulated down to the very lowest tactical levels. In addition to providing an extraordinarily effective means of communicating complex ideas, it helped us implement the strategy’s fundamentals.¹³

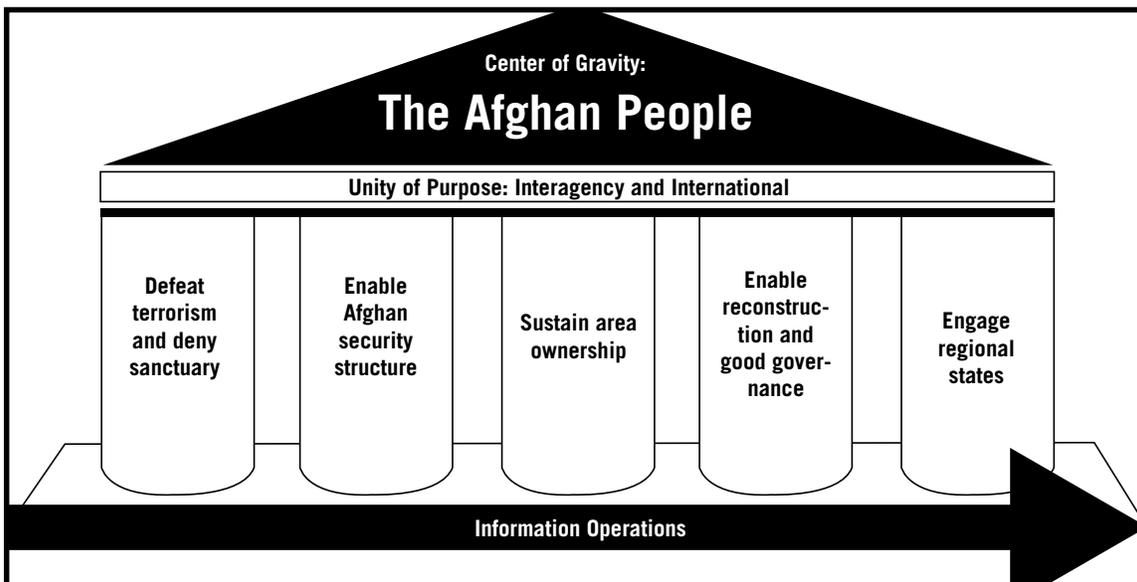
Overarching Principle 1: The People as Center of Gravity

The core principle animating the new strategy was our identification of the Afghan people as the center of gravity for COIN (roof of the five pillars).¹⁴ This constituted a sea change in practice from earlier approaches, which had held that the *enemy* was the center of gravity and should be the focus of our military effort (a determination driven, in part, by the U.S. strategic outlook in 2003, which viewed nation-building as an inappropriate military task).

In making this change, we were motivated by both classic counterinsurgency practice as well as thoughtful consideration of Afghan military history. In late 2003, international forces comprised nearly 20,000 armed foreigners living in the midst of 31 million (often armed) Afghans who, throughout their history, had shown immense enmity to foreign forces. Two successive British expeditions in the nineteenth century and the massive Soviet invasion in the late twentieth century had provoked virulent responses from the people of Afghanistan—each ending in the bloody demise of the foreign military presence. In fact, the “light footprint” approach taken by U.S. force planners was, in many respects, derived from a strong desire not to replicate the Soviet attempt at omnipresence.¹⁵

In our emerging strategy, I viewed the tolerance of the Afghan people for this new international military effort as a “bag of capital,” one that was finite and had to be spent slowly and frugally.

Figure 1. Counterinsurgency strategy, 2003–5



Afghan civilian casualties, detainee abuse, lack of respect shown to tribal elders, even inadvertent offenses to the conservative Afghan culture—all would have the effect of spending the contents of this bag of capital, tolerance for foreigners, more quickly.

With “respect for Afghans” as our watchword, we decided that convincing the Afghan people to commit to their future by supporting elections for a new government would be the near-term centerpiece of Coalition efforts. Thus, our military “main effort” in 2004 would be explicitly to “set the conditions for a successful Afghan presidential election”—certainly an unconventional military focus.

One of the changes in our military approach evinced by this focus on the population was a near-ironclad prohibition against using airpower to strike targets not directly engaged in close combat with Coalition troops. Air strikes based solely on technical intelligence were almost entirely eliminated owing both to their conspicuous lack of success and the unintended casualties they

characteristically caused among Afghan civilians. In my estimation, this new judicious reserve in the application of Coalition firepower helped sustain the people’s fragile tolerance of an extended international military presence. In essence, we traded some tactical effect for much more important strategic consequences.

**Overarching Principle 2:
Unity of Purpose**

A second principle of our strategy was interagency and international unity of purpose. Militarily, this was paralleled by a deliberate and measured reorganization to achieve unity of command in Coalition operations. As noted above, our military organizational structures had evolved unevenly as forces echeloned into Afghanistan in disparate increments following the Taliban’s fall in late 2001. During the execution of that early operational phase, most U.S. troops were based outside of Afghanistan, and those in-country had only begun to establish what would become long-term operating bases. During 2002, Bagram and Kandahar

became the primary base locations for large units, logistical infrastructure, and Coalition airpower. As more units were added to the mix and as the Coalition presence continued long beyond initial expectations, a patchwork line of command authorities had evolved—an unsurprising situation given the need to cover a huge country with a small sliver of forces.

Our moves over the next months focused on establishing two ground brigade-level headquarters, one assigned the hazardous south and the other the volatile east.¹⁶ (The northern half of the country remained largely free from any enemy threat, and thus became an economy-of-force area.) The brigades' headquarters in the south and east became centers for regional command and control of forces in the vast southern half of the country. Each brigade was assigned an area of operations spanning its entire region. All organizations operating in this battlespace worked directly for, or in support of, the brigade commander. This was a striking and powerful organizational change.

Establishing unity of purpose in the nonmilitary sphere was much more difficult. Arguably, the greatest flaw in our twenty-first century approach to COIN is our inability to marshal and fuse efforts from all the elements of national power into a unified whole. This failure has resulted in an approach akin to punching an adversary with five outstretched fingers rather than one powerful closed fist.

Oftentimes, this rift has had its origin in relations between the U.S. chief of mission (i.e., our ambassador) and the military commander—each reporting to different chains of command in the midst of a nation embroiled in a counterinsurgency war. Afghanistan in 2003 was no exception—a situation made even more difficult by personnel turnover. After the U.S. ambassador departed in July without a replacement, the deputy chief of

mission served as the acting chief for four months, and the presidential special envoy for Iraq and Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, shuttled in and out. Ultimately named as the new U.S. ambassador, Khalilzad arrived for full-time duties on Thanksgiving Day 2003—but retained his special envoy status and thus had direct and regular access to the president as well as to the Department of State (DOS).¹⁷ As the U.S. and Coalition military commander, I reported to the commander of U.S. Central Command, General John P. Abizaid, and through him to the secretary of defense and the president. Our system dictates that our top diplomat and main military commander receive orders from and report to different people, coming together only at the president. Moreover, the cultural differences that separate the departments of State and Defense—and their people—are well known.

Fortunately, chemistry counts, and personalities matter. Ambassador Khalilzad and I both recognized that our personal relationship would set the tone for embassy and military teams across Afghanistan. We established a strong personal bond in Kabul that became a keystone in what would be a seamless approach to the interagency challenges we faced in Afghanistan.¹⁸ (In retrospect, I have viewed this approach as much akin to a “supporting-supported” relationship between the military and the embassy for many tasks involving other than the military elements of power). My guidance to our staff was that as the most powerful organization in the country, we would take a direct interest in *everything*—not just the traditional warfighting piece. As I told an exasperated and overworked staff officer in October 2003: “We own it all!”¹⁹ Our tactics outside the military arena would largely be characterized as “leading from the rear” but were nonetheless very effective. To demonstrate personal commitment to

this unified embassy-military approach, I moved into a half-trailer on the embassy compound and established an office there next to the ambassador's. I began each day attending country-team and core security-group meetings with our new ambassador. The message to our staffs was unambiguous: there would be no "white space" between the military and interagency effort in Kabul and, by extension, throughout Afghanistan.

The close personal relationship the ambassador and I established paid us both immense dividends. Through daily meetings of key players in the embassy, we developed a common view of the fight that further cemented the unity of our integrated effort. This shared view significantly shaped our unified interagency approach. It also had a major impact on the direction of our military efforts.²⁰

Building teamwork and consensus among the diverse international players in Kabul was more problematic. The simple challenge was getting all the players on the same playing field, playing the same sport, and moving toward the same set of goal posts. (Having everyone in the same jersey was not expected!) We spent significant personal time and military staff effort building close relations with the Afghans, UNAMA, foreign embassies, the media, and even the NGO community. A key element in developing our COIN campaign plan was "shopping it around" in draft form—first to the members of the U.S. embassy, then to the broader set of international and Afghan players who would be essential in supporting its goals. This unconventional approach sent a message of inclusion to all those committed to Afghanistan's future. At the same time, it significantly refined and improved our planning.

We also seconded five military staff officers to the ambassador packaged as an unusual new group, the embassy interagency planning group,

or EPIG. Led by a brilliant Army military intelligence colonel, this small core of talented planners—the "piglets"—applied structured military staff planning to the diverse requirements Ambassador Khalilzad faced in shaping the interagency response in Afghanistan.²¹ With the ambassador's guidance, the EPIG drafted the embassy's mission performance plan, and it developed and tracked metrics for him on all aspects of interagency and military performance. Eventually, we also seconded military officers from our headquarters to many of the embassy's key sections to augment a small, young country team. This served two important purposes: it lent structured planning and organizing support to overworked embassy offices, and it kept our military team well connected to the embassy's efforts across the spectrum. This move, too, contributed to building a unified team with close personal ties, trust, and confidence.

Five Pillars

Our COIN plan for Afghanistan had five pillars:

- Defeat terrorism and deny sanctuary.
- Enable the Afghan security structure.
- Sustain area ownership.
- Enable reconstruction and good governance.
- Engage regional states.

Linking these pillars together was information operations (IO)—winning the war of ideas.

The keys to delivering on our COIN strategy were to implement and integrate the actions called for by these pillars, and to have every platoon, squad, and team in Afghanistan clearly understand their intent. We had departed notably from previous, more constrained approaches by naming the Afghan people as our operational center of gravity and by focusing on unity of purpose across

diverse stakeholders. The five pillars reflected our reassessment of how to apply even long-standing military capabilities in new directions.

Defeat Terrorism and Deny Sanctuary

As we switched our focus from the enemy to the people, we did not neglect the operational tenet of maintaining pressure on the enemy. Selected special operations forces (SOF) continued their full-time hunt for al-Qaeda's senior leaders. The blood debt of 9/11 was nowhere more keenly felt every day than in Afghanistan. No soldier, sailor, airman, or Marine serving there ever needed an explanation for his or her presence—they “got it.” Dedicated units worked the al-Qaeda fight on a 24-hour basis and continued to do so into 2004 and 2005.

In some ways, however, attacking enemy cells became a supporting effort; our primary objective was maintaining popular support. Thus, respect for the Afghan peoples' customs, religion, tribal ways, and growing feelings of sovereignty became an inherent aspect of all military operations. As well, the “three-block war” construct became the norm for our conventional forces.²² Any given tactical mission would likely include some mixture of kinetics (e.g., fighting insurgents), peacekeeping (e.g., negotiating between rival clans), and humanitarian relief (e.g., digging wells or assessing local needs). The 2001–3 notion of enemy-centric counterterrorist operations now became nested in a wholly different context, that of “war amongst the people,” in the words of British General Sir Rupert Smith.²³

Our forces in the field once again demonstrated their remarkable ability to adjust to changing situations with only general guidance—and deliver results. When I asked a superb battalion commander how, in the absence of doctrine, he was able to shift his leaders toward a largely new COIN approach in the middle of their combat

tour, he laughed and said: “Easy, sir—Books-A-Million.com!”²⁴ Reading classic counterinsurgency texts in the field became a substitute for official doctrine. The realization grew that “First, do no harm” must be a central consideration, and that Afghan security forces must play a visible role in Coalition military operations. Even local elders were enlisted, for we knew that intelligence could often be manipulated to settle old scores and discredit our efforts.

Our growing recognition of the need to respect the population eventually led us to develop the “Fifteen Points,” a coordinated set of guidelines (see box) that we proposed to President Karzai in response to his growing concerns about the impact of coalition military operations. Together, we publicized these efforts in order to assure the Afghans that we recognized and respected the sovereignty of their country. This had the intended effect. It extended the freedom of action granted to Coalition forces for perhaps years, allowing us to spend the “bag of capital”—Afghan tolerance—that much more slowly.²⁵

Enable the Afghan Security Structure

Under this pillar, we extended and accelerated the training of the Afghan National Army [ANA] and ultimately turned our scrutiny to the police as well. The development of the ANA and the Afghan Ministry of Defense (MOD) were significant success stories in the two years after the fall of the Taliban. Despite intense tribal rivalries, the ANA and MOD were recreated with an ethnically balanced, merit-based leader selection process that, by late 2003, had established both as models among the most reformed bodies of the Afghan government.

The ANA training effort produced ethnically balanced, well-trained formations down to platoon level. The strikingly positive reaction these units evoked when they entered villages alongside their

THE FIFTEEN POINTS

1. No searches of national government property are conducted without COMCFC-AFG [Commander, Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan] approval.
2. Units must coordinate to have a government official present during the search of the property of another government official.
3. All units must coordinate for local police or other government officials when conducting searches unless there is a compelling and time sensitive reason. Approval authority for this is the regional commander.
4. All material[s]/documents taken in a search will be returned, unless the person is detained, in which case the property becomes evidence.
5. Soldiers participating in searches will be briefed on local customs.
6. When possible, soldiers will ask locals to open locked doors versus forcing entry.
7. Units must avoid cuffing/binding hands unless necessary for security.
8. During low risk operations, a local person will be asked to enter a structure first to explain what is happening.
9. Require regional commander approval for conducting night searches.
10. Units will infuse reconstruction funds into areas where people were detained and subsequently released.
11. Inform people that the International Committee of the Red Cross has information on detainees.
12. Establish a joint Afghan-led board in the Ministry of Interior to provide information on detainees and coordinate releases.
13. Work with national government to identify ineffective or corrupt local officials.
14. Monthly joint review to identify which units are receiving the most complaints.
15. Assign an Afghan liaison to each of our units.

embedded U.S. trainers stood in stark contrast to the reactions elicited by the repressive tribal militias then still common in Afghanistan. In fact, villagers often assumed that ANA units were foreign forces until their members began to speak in local dialects. Their professionalism, discipline, and combat effectiveness stood out; they became sources of national pride. The Office of Military Cooperation-Afghanistan (OMC-A), initially led by Major General (now Lieutenant General) Karl [W.] Eikenberry, [USA], produced a remarkable training and combat organizational structure from a base of near-zero in less than a year's time. From 2003 to 2005, no ANA formations were defeated

or broke in combat engagements. Moreover, ANA units showed notable discipline during intense civil disturbance operations—operations for which they had not been specifically trained.²⁶

The police forces in Afghanistan during this period were more problematic. Initially under-resourced and hampered by a training model that focused on the individual policeman (unlike the ANA, which adopted a “train as units” model), the police program faltered until interagency realignments in mid-2005 permitted OMC-A to assume joint oversight (with DOS) of the police. Lobbied for by both the military and the embassy from Kabul, this significant change allowed the

Coalition to put lessons learned in ANA training to good effect in police training. It also enabled the Coalition to realize economies of scale by combining the two forces' training oversight. With the police widely acknowledged to be the "first line of defense" in a COIN campaign, it remains unfortunate that the fusion of police and ANA training oversight came so late.

Sustain Area Ownership

In my view, this pillar codified the most important, although least visible, change on the ground. *Area ownership* is an extension of unity of command. Under the previous "raid strategy," units owned no battlespace save the ground they were on during a two- or three-week operation. Long term, battlespace was "owned" only at the CJTF-180 level in Bagram; no subordinate unit had long-term responsibility for the outcomes in any specified area. With area ownership, we dedicated key contested areas of Afghanistan (i.e., the south and east) to each maneuver brigade and battalion. This seemingly simple concept had profound implications. Now, rather than pass through an area intent on simply routing out an enemy based on intelligence derived in a faraway operating base, units operated in their own distinct territory for up to 12 months.

Our approach consciously mirrored New York City's very successful policy in the 1990s of holding police captains responsible for reducing crime in their precincts. Like New York's captains, our commanders now "owned" their areas and were responsible for results. Area ownership meant that, for the first time in the war, unit commanders had a defined area, clear sets of challenges, and direct responsibility for long-term outcomes.

Of course, they also had the authority to effect those outcomes, along with Commanders Emergency Response Program funding to address pressing civil needs with a minimum of bureaucracy.

Commanders could become experts in their areas, build personal relations with tribal elders and key government officials, convince the population that they were there to stay—and then see the results.²⁷

The areas were unavoidably large—one battalion had an area the size of Vermont, another the size of Rhode Island—but those areas were *theirs!* Again, this is classic counterinsurgency, although it was new in Afghanistan.

Enable Reconstruction and Good Governance

Extending the reach of the central government was fundamental to helping Afghanistan become a nation that embraced the rule of law and entrusted its elected government with a monopoly on violence. As Said [Tayeb] Jawad, Afghan ambassador to the United States, often notes, "Afghanistan is a strong nation, but a weak state." Afghanistan, over its long history, has stayed together as a country despite many opportunities for powerful interests to fracture the nation into separate tribal parts. At the same time, the power of the nation's legitimate institutions grows weaker with every kilometer of distance from Kabul. Effective local government remains elusive, and traditional tribal and clan cultures hold powerful sway even today throughout much of the countryside—and will likely do so for generations. The primary military instrument designed to address this challenge was the provincial reconstruction team [PRT].

Conceived in 2002 by a British officer, PRTs were 80- to 100-person organizations normally posted to provincial capitals. Led by a colonel or lieutenant colonel, they typically comprised a security force, medical and logistics components, a civil affairs team, a command and control element, and senior representatives from the Afghan Ministry of Interior, U.S. DOS [Department of State], USAID [United States Agency for

International Development], and in certain areas, the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The mission of the PRTs included security and reconstruction, in fine balance. A PRT's very presence in an area served as a catalyst for both, and it signified the international and Afghan commitment to bettering the lives of the people through improved government support. A multinational PRT executive steering committee in Kabul, cochaired by the Afghan Minister of Interior and U.S./Coalition commander, coordinated the PRT effort.²⁸

PRTs became a powerful offensive weapon in our strategic arsenal as we crafted our plans for 2004 in Afghanistan. The four existing PRTs, as mentioned earlier, were deployed in largely quiet areas (Gardez, Konduz, Mazar-e Sharif, Bamian) with the next four being developed at a very deliberate pace. We soon accelerated the latter by largely disassembling the combined and joint civil-military operations task force headquarters in Bagram and sending its well-resourced pool of civil affairs experts to form new PRTs in the field. The immediate goal became eight new PRTs in the south and east of Afghanistan, so that when the snows melted in the spring of 2004, we would have newly deployed PRTs confronting the Taliban across the most contested areas.

This bold move sent an incontrovertible message about the progress of the security and reconstruction effort into the most dangerous areas of Afghanistan. It was a calculated risk. PRTs had little ability to defend themselves, but the enemy well understood that 20 minutes after a distress call, any PRT in southern Afghanistan could have combat aircraft with bombs overhead and a rapid reaction force ready to arrive soon thereafter. The 2001 offensive that toppled the Taliban had produced a healthy respect for American airpower that allowed us, among other things, to conduct small patrols far from our bases in relative security.

PRTs similarly benefitted from air support, and leveraged it regularly.

Engage Regional States

This task fell largely into my inbox, but senior leaders at our tactical headquarters in Bagram ably supported me.²⁹ Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan's (CFC-A) combined joint operations area for U.S. CENTCOM included all of Afghanistan, all of Pakistan less Jammu and Kashmir, and the southern portions of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Our forces conducted combat operations only in Afghanistan, but my charter gave me authority to travel and interact regularly with the senior security leaders of the other three countries—with particular emphasis on Pakistan.

This Pakistani component of engagement was necessary to address border-security issues between Afghanistan and Pakistan (the Taliban operated in both) and to assist the Pakistanis in their own efforts to disrupt and defeat so-called “miscreants” in their tribal areas adjacent to Afghanistan. Quarterly tripartite conferences chaired at my level (and supported by the U.S. embassies in Kabul and Islamabad) brought together Afghanistan's and Pakistan's senior security leaders to address security issues of mutual concern. CJTF-180 (and later CJTF-76) also hosted monthly tactical border-security meetings along the ill-defined Pakistan-Afghanistan border to reduce local tensions; exchange radios, communications frequencies, and procedures; and build cross-border relations at the local level. Frequent trips to Islamabad rounded out our effort and kept me closely engaged with senior Pakistani military leaders.

All this engagement paid significant dividends when the inevitable exchange of fire across the border occurred between U.S. or Afghan and Pakistani forces. The close military ties that grew from building relationships also helped encourage

Pakistani action against the enemy on Pakistan's side of the border. In mid-2004, the Pakistani Army conducted major operations in the Federally Administered Tribal Area for the first time in Pakistan's history. The effort inflicted hundreds of casualties on the enemy and noticeably disrupted Taliban and al-Qaeda operations on both sides of the border.³⁰

Crosscutting Vector: Information Operations (IO)

Winning the war of ideas and communicating effectively in a wholly foreign culture was among the most vexing tasks in our COIN strategy. We recognized early on that winning the war of ideas might decide the outcome of the conflict. How would the Afghan people perceive our efforts? Would they retain hope for their future? In the end, would they have more faith in the prospects of their own elected government and their embryonic political process, or would they turn back in despair to the certainty of total control represented by the Taliban?

On balance, it became apparent to me that international forces would always remain at a permanent disadvantage in perceptions, and that the IO effort had to be first and foremost an Afghan one. Our challenge was to do everything we could to be truthful, to get the facts out, to let success speak for itself, and to create the unshakeable story of good outcomes—all uncompromised by “spin.” Results ultimately speak for themselves. Without demonstrably positive results, information operations can be perceived as spewing empty words that corrode credibility and legitimacy.

Evaluating Results of COIN, 2003–5

In retrospect, the late 2003 shift in strategy from an enemy-centric counterterrorist strategy to a more comprehensive, population-centered COIN

approach marked a turning point in the U.S. mission. While dedicated forces continued unabated the hunt for al-Qaeda leaders and remnants, the overall direction of the U.S.-Coalition effort shifted toward a more classic COIN approach (albeit with a very light footprint) that would have been familiar to Louis Lyautey, Sir Gerald Templer, or Creighton Abrams.

Results over the 2003–5 period were positive and dramatic. Meeting in a national *loya jirga*, Afghans drew up and approved the most moderate constitution then extant in the Islamic world. Throughout the spring and summer of 2004, 10.5 million Afghans—twice as many as had been expected to do so—registered to vote in the first-ever Afghan presidential elections. In the face of significant insurgent threats, intimidation, and violence, 8.5 million Afghans actually voted that fall, electing Hamid Karzai as president with 55 percent of the vote from among 18 candidates. By year's end, a respected cabinet was in place and a peaceful inauguration completed. The year 2005 built on this success with a nationwide effort again turning out millions of voters to elect members of the *wolesi jirga*, or lower house of parliament. The winners took their seats by year's end.

All in all, as 2005 came to a close, we had achieved significant progress toward accomplishing the objectives of the 2001 Bonn conference and the follow-on 2004 Berlin conference, but most importantly, we had built a solid basis of hope among the Afghan people for a better future. Without hope among the population, any COIN effort is ultimately doomed to failure.

Afghanistan Since 2005

Much has changed in Afghanistan since 2005 ended so promisingly. The Taliban and al-Qaeda have gathered strength, changed tactics, and significantly increased both their capabilities and their attacks.

As one measure, there were 139 suicide attacks in 2006, as compared to 17 in 2005, 5 in 2004, and 2 in 2003. In the first six months of 2007, there were over 80 suicide attacks.³¹ Across the border in Pakistan, further offensive operations against al-Qaeda and the Taliban have been largely suspended since the aggressive Pakistani military efforts in 2004 disrupted much of the terrorist base structure in tribal areas of Waziristan.³² Consequently, a large potential sanctuary for the Taliban and al-Qaeda has gone largely unmolested for nearly three years.

On the American side of the ledger, the United States publicly announced in mid-2005 that NATO was assuming full responsibility for military operations throughout Afghanistan. By the end of that year, the United States declared that it was withdrawing 2,500 combat troops.³³ Unsurprisingly, this was widely viewed in the region as the first signal that the United States was “moving for the exits,” thus reinforcing long-held doubts about the prospects of sustained American commitment.³⁴ In my judgment, these public moves have served more than any other U.S. actions since 2001 to alter the calculus of both our friends and adversaries across the region—and not in our favor.

As promised, by late 2006, NATO had assumed command of the military effort in Afghanistan, commanding over 26,000 troops (including 12,000 from the United States). An additional 10,000 Americans served under U.S. national control, many in logistics units and SOF. Twenty-six NATO PRTs are now deployed across Afghanistan, but they vary widely in size, composition, and mission (according to the contributor)—and now report through a different chain of command than do NATO’s maneuver units in the same battlespace. The American-led three-star CFC-A headquarters has been inactivated, and the senior U.S. military commander is a two-star general once again

located at Bagram—but in tactical command of only one-quarter of the country, Regional Command East. Headquarters, ISAF, has tactical responsibility for all of Afghanistan—and is assisted by a staff including 14 NATO generals.³⁵ Operational responsibility for Afghanistan resides in Brunssum, the Netherlands—over 3,000 miles distant. An American four-star general commands ISAF, but he officially reports only through NATO channels, not the United States. Both the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, and the Commander of U.S. Central Command own the Afghan theater and its battlespace—and direct forces in Afghanistan who report separately up their two reporting chains.³⁶ OMC-A has evolved into Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan and remains located in Kabul. No senior U.S. military commander lives and works at the American embassy. [The] U.S. Embassy Kabul is in its final stages of “normalization,” designed to make it function and look like every other U.S. embassy in the world. It remains, of course, in a combat zone.

Continual turnover of U.S. senior leaders has made continuity of effort a recurrent challenge in this very complex COIN fight. Since 2001, the U.S. endeavor in Afghanistan has seen five different chiefs of mission and six different military commanders—not counting those who served less than 60 days.³⁷ Since mid-2005, the comprehensive U.S.-led COIN strategy described above has been significantly altered by subsequent military and civilian leaders who held differing views. With the advent of NATO military leadership, there is today no single comprehensive strategy to guide the U.S., NATO, or international effort. Unity of purpose—both interagency and international—has suffered, unity of command is more fragmented, area ownership has receded, and tactics in some areas have seemingly reverted to earlier practices, such as the aggressive use of airpower.

The “bag of capital” representing the tolerance of the Afghan people for foreign forces appears to be diminishing.³⁸ NATO’s ISAF has assumed a narrow focus on the “20-percent military” dimension of COIN. It views the remaining “80 percent non-military” component of successful COIN operations as falling outside the purview of what is, after all, a “military alliance.”³⁹ Both NATO and Coalition tactics, too, seem to convey the belief that the center of gravity is no longer the Afghan population and their security, but the enemy. In many ways, these changes take us “back to the future” of 2002 and early 2003—and they, in all likelihood, do not augur well for the future of our policy goals in Afghanistan.

The Afghan people, whose aspirations rose to unprecedented heights in the exhilarating days of 2004 and 2005, have experienced a series of setbacks and disappointments. Besides facing threats from a more dangerous Taliban, President Karzai is under growing pressure from powerful interests inside his own administration. Corruption, crime, poverty, and a burgeoning narcotics trade threaten to undermine public confidence in the new democratic government. NATO, the designated heir to an originally popular international military effort, is threatened by the prospects of mounting disaffection among the Afghan people. This threat is perhaps only exceeded by political risk at home in Europe, owing to the prospect of dramatically increased NATO casualties as the lethality perfected in Iraq migrates east with jihadist fighters freed to fight other battles in Afghanistan.

Looking Ahead—Tomorrow and the Day After

At the end of the day, what is most important to the United States and to our friends in this region is that success or failure in Afghanistan will dramatically shape the future of a strategically

important region for decades to come. Afghanistan’s popular image is that of a backward country once best known as a “terrorist-supported state,” but it remains at the center of a global energy and trade crossroads—one which is only growing in significance. It is also situated in an exceptionally important neighborhood: to the east lies Pakistan, the second largest Islamic nation in the world, and likely armed with dozens of nuclear weapons; to the northeast is China, with growing regional energy and security interests; across the north, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan—three former states of the Soviet Union—are struggling against internal forces of instability while confronting powerful neighbors; and to the west is Iran, whose looming nuclear program and support for terrorism in the region is cause for grave concern. This neighborhood defines strategic interest for the United States and the West—and within it, Afghanistan remains a friendly state anxious to increase its connections to the West and especially to the United States. At this juncture of history, the United States and its alliance partners in NATO can ill afford to walk away from this region with any other outcome save long-term success in Afghanistan.

Notes

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1. Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Reestablishment of Permanent Government Institutions (Bonn: December 2001), henceforth referred to as the Bonn process. This UN-supported response assigned lead nations to oversee varied security-sector reform efforts in

- Afghanistan: police—Germany; military—United States; justice—Italy; disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration—Japan; and counternarcotics—United Kingdom.
2. Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) 180 (now comprising Headquarters, 10th Mountain Division) retained its name upon the departure of XVIII Airborne Corps until March 2004, when it became CJTF-76. Its focus became tactical and low-end operational as Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan, the senior Coalition headquarters in Kabul, assumed the role of high-end operational and theater (i.e., regional) strategic levels. NATO’s ISAF in October 2003 consisted of approximately 5,500 troops located exclusively within the city of Kabul.
 3. Author’s conversation with chief, Office of Military Cooperation, September 2003.
 4. Conversations with senior U.S. commanders, 2003; see also Nicholas D. Kristoff, “The Wrong Lessons of the Somalia Debacle,” *New York Times*, 5 February 2002.
 5. See *The CIA World Factbook* online entries for Afghanistan and Iraq, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>.
 6. Author’s first visit to Afghanistan, predeployment, September 2003.
 7. Author’s conversation with an infantry battalion commander, December 2003.
 8. Author’s conversation with Gen John P. Abizaid, October 2003: “. . . your mission is ‘big Pol’ and ‘little mil.’”
 9. Conversation with a former senior U.S. commander for Afghanistan, August 2003.
 10. This headquarters officially became Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan (CFC-A) in early 2004. Command responsibility was assumed in November 2003.
 11. The first augmentation of our staff beyond the original six members came by moving the entire CJTF-180 CJ-5 (future plans) section to Kabul under Combined Forces Command. Col (now brigadier) Ian Liles, UK, was the CJ-5 largely responsible for drafting the initial “Security Strategy South and East.” By May 2005, CFC-A staff stabilized at just over 400 members.
 12. See, for example, *The History of Revolutionary Warfare*, volumes I–V (West Point, NY: United States Military Academy, 1974). Among other valued texts I read during my 19 months of command were John A. Nagl’s *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) and Louis Sorley’s *A Better War* (New York: Harcourt/Harvest Books, 2007).
 13. Gen Barry R. McCaffrey, USA (Ret), comments to the author on the depth of consistent understanding of CFC-A COIN strategy during his visits to units across Afghanistan, 2004.
 14. “Strategy” here is used as a more commonly understood interagency and international substitute for what would be called in military parlance a “campaign plan.” Our complete campaign plan addressing all elements of power eventually became a 400-page document.
 15. The footprint of fewer than 20,000 Western forces in Afghanistan in 2003 was light compared with over 100,000 Soviet troops at the height of their ill-fated military involvement. My belief remains that the “light footprint” approach in Afghanistan holds great advantages, despite its many challenges. See Rory Stewart, “Where Less is More,” *New York Times*, 23 July 2007.
 16. This occurred under CJTF-76, which succeeded CJTF-180 in April 2004.
 17. This was a powerful advantage. Direct access and a personal relationship with the president, vice president, and secretaries of state and defense gave Ambassador Khalilzad and the Afghan enterprise a strong voice at the most senior policy levels in Washington.
 18. Christopher Griffen, “A Working Plan: Hope Isn’t

- the Only Strategy for Afghanistan,” *Armed Forces Journal* (April 2007).
19. Our entire headquarters staff at this point had fewer than 40 people.
 20. Our six-day-a-week security core group meetings brought top U.S. interagency leaders together to “synchronize” outlooks and information almost every morning. Among the attendees were the ambassador, military commander, USAID chief, Afghan Reconstruction Group (ARG) chief, intelligence chief, OMC-A chief, and deputy chief of mission. All left updated with a common view of events in Afghanistan, thus insuring our daily efforts remained well coordinated and mutually supportive.
 21. The embassy interagency planning group (EPIG) was led by Col John Ritchie, USA.
 22. Gen Charles C. Krulak, Commandant, USMC, created the three-block-war construct.
 23. Gen Sir Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 5.
 24. Discussion at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Shkin with LtCol Mike Howard, USA, commander, 1-87 Infantry, 10th Mountain Division, winter 2003–4.
 25. Personal observation. The reaction of President Karzai, his cabinet, and outward reactions of the Afghan people to this effort were very positive.
 26. Herat riots, August 2004; preparations for civil disturbances in Kabul, August 2004.
 27. Paraphrasing LtCol David G. Paschal, commander, 2-87 Infantry, 10th Mountain Division: “The longer I spent in one place, the more people became comfortable with me and were more willing to share information. At first, they were fearful, then they watched with curiosity, but then they gained confidence in us and our ability to provide security and services. With ownership we were able to build a level of trust.” Outbrief to Headquarters, CFC-A, 5 May 2004.
 28. The Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Executive Steering Committee met monthly and comprised senior representatives of all nations contributing PRTs or considering such a contribution. It was typically attended by the UN senior representative of the secretary general and cochaired by the Afghan minister of interior (who oversaw PRTs in the Afghan governmental structure) and the senior U.S. (and later NATO) military commanders.
 29. After the departure of Headquarters, XVIII Airborne Corps, in the spring of 2003, CJTF-180 was formed around Headquarters, 10th Mountain Division; later, CJTF-76 formed around Headquarters, 25th Infantry Division (Light), and subsequently, Headquarters, Southern European Task Force (SETAF).
 30. Personal observations and discussions with senior Pakistani military officers 2004.
 31. Figures on 2003–6 suicide attacks are from former Afghan Minister of Interior Ali [Ahmad] Jalali.
 32. Situation as of mid-July 2007. The Pakistani military response in the FATA to the outburst of nationwide terrorist attacks following the government’s 10 July assault on the Lal Masjid (“Red Mosque”) in Islamabad had yet to fully develop as of this writing.
 33. As reported by the Associated Press and AFX News Limited. See *USA Today*, “NATO to take over Afghan security in 2006,” 4 August 2005; and *Forbes.com*, “U.S. to reduce troop numbers in Afghanistan soon,” www.forbes.com/finance/feeds/afx/2005/12/26/afx2414408.htm.
 34. A remark we commonly heard from Afghans of every stripe was “You Americans are not going to abandon us again, are you?” The Taliban were often noted for saying “the Americans may have all of the wristwatches, but we have all of the time.”
 35. CFC-A during this era operated with two generals: one U.S. three-star commander and one UK two-star deputy commander. UK deputies were, in succession, MajGens John B. Cooper and Peter Gilchrist, both exceptional talents. The CFC-A staff principals were entirely composed of colonels

or Navy captains; CFC chiefs of staff were, in succession, Col Thomas J Snukis, USA, and Col David W. Lamm, USA, whose efforts were nothing short of heroic.

36. For example, forces under the “Operation Enduring Freedom mandate” (e.g., U.S. Special Forces) in Afghanistan report through a U.S.-only chain to Adm William J. Fallon, Commander, U.S. Central Command, in Tampa; forces under the “NATO mandate” (e.g., U.S. infantry battalions) report through Headquarters, ISAF, in Kabul (tactical level), to Commander, Joint Forces Command, Brunssum, the Netherlands (operational level) to the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, Gen Bantz J. Craddock, in Mons (strategic level).
37. Ambassador Robert Finn, Deputy Chief of Mission David Sedney, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad,

Ambassador Ronald E. Neumann, Ambassador William B. Wood, LtGen Paul T. Mikolashek, LtGen (now Gen) Dan K. McNeill, LtGen John Vines, LtGen David W. Barno, LtGen Karl W. Eikenberry, and MajGen David M. Rodriguez.

38. President Karzai press conferences; April 2006 riots in Kabul; protests to civilian casualties.
39. David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: Praeger Security International Paperback, August 2006). According to Galula, successful counterinsurgency is 20 percent military effort, 80 percent nonmilitary.

About the Author

Lieutenant General David W. Barno commanded 20,000 U.S. and Coalition forces in Operation Enduring Freedom for 19 months from 2003 to 2005.

SSgt Daniel J. Demuro Jr., assigned to Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 773 at FOB Salerno, removes a jammed M89 feeder from the 20mm nose cannon of an AH-1W Super Cobra on 5 October 2004.

Photo courtesy of SSgt Rusty Baker, USAF





Marine Light Attack Squadron 773 (-) Reinforced Summary of Action

Adapted from Unit Award Recommendation

Unit: Marine Light Attack Squadron 773 (-)
Reinforced

Recommended Award: Navy Unit Commem-
dation

Period of Award: 1 October 2003–31 May
2005

Status: Approved

Originator: Commander, U.S. Marine Forces,
Central Command

Citation:

For exceptionally meritorious service in support of Combined Joint Task Forces 180 and 76 in support of Operation Enduring Freedom from 1 October 2003 to 31 May 2005. The Marines, sailors, and soldiers of Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron (HMLA) 773 (-) Reinforced (Rein) sustained the longest continuous combat deployment of a Marine squadron since the Vietnam War. Through three consecutive deployments, HMLA-773 (-) Rein flew 4,465 combat sorties, compiled 6,782 mishap-free flight hours, participated in

more than 20 combat operations against al-Qaeda and Taliban forces, and accomplished an impressive 100 percent mission completion rate without incurring a single aviation mishap. Employing the formidable combat power of the AH-1W “Super Cobra,” the UH-1N “Huey Gunship,” and a U.S. Army UH-60 “Blackhawk” Company, the “Red Dogs” were credited with the destruction of over 300 enemy combatants, the disruption of numerous enemy planning cells, and time-critical combat air support to dozens of joint service agencies serving in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Over an 18-month period, the remarkable achievements, aggressive fighting spirit, and combat proficiency of the Red Dogs, struck fear in the enemy and earned praise from three infantry battalions, dozens of Special Forces units, and the joint service aviation elements they supported throughout southeastern Afghanistan. By their outstanding courage, combat effectiveness, and superior performance of duty under austere conditions, the officers and enlisted personnel of Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 773 (-) Reinforced reflected great credit upon themselves and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

Summary of Action

On 23 September 2003, HMLA-773 received a Prepare to Deploy Order from Headquarters Marine Corps directing the unit to prepare for combat operations, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. In keeping with Commandant of the Marine Corps’ direction, “the Marines can deploy to any part of the world in eight days,” the Red Dogs Pre-Deployment Site Survey and Advance Party arrived at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, on 1 October 2003. Thus would begin the longest continuous combat deployment for a single USMC aviation squadron since the Vietnam War.

Soon after, the main body of HMLA-773 (-) Rein arrived in Afghanistan, joined the Combined Joint Task Force-180 (CJTF-180), and was designated Task Force (TF) Red Dog on 29 October. Hitting the ground running, TF Red Dog was operational within one week of arriving in country and began flying area familiarization flights on 3 November. On 10 November, TF Red Dog commenced air tasking order (ATO) combat flight operations. Operation Mountain Resolve began on 17 November with the Red Dogs providing close air support (CAS), armed reconnaissance, quick reaction force (QRF), armed escort and insert/extract missions from Forward Operating Base (FOB) Jalalabad and FOB Asadabad.

Operation Avalanche began on 1 December with TF Red Dog based out of FOB Salerno. The squadron flew missions in support of the U.S. Army’s 10th Mountain Division. Tasking included border checkpoint security, convoy escort, armed reconnaissance and medevac escort. On 31 December, TF Red Dog engaged enemy forces for the first time in Afghanistan. A U.S. Army ground convoy came under ambush by a determined band of al-Qaeda terrorists in the eastern border area of Mangretay. As the 12-vehicle convoy entered restrictive terrain, insurgents launched a pre-planned ambush attacking the lead and trail elements simultaneously. Sustaining a heavy volume of small-arms ground fire from the brazen insurgents, a section of Red Dog AH-1Ws attacked four separate enemy positions claiming 11 confirmed enemy killed in action. With their support, the ground convoy cleared the ambush zone while sustaining only three casualties.

The squadron began 2004 with continuous operations out of FOB Salerno in support of the Army’s 1st Battalion, (Airborne) 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, and 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment. In mid-January, FOB Salerno and

FOB Chapman in the Khowst area sustained multiple coordinated rocket attacks. The Red Dogs provided QRF protection for the bases while hunting the perpetrators. Coordinating with 1/501, Afghan Militia Forces (AMF), and other government agencies based at FOB Chapman, the Red Dogs provided CAS and surveillance for operations that captured four of the suspects. Later that month, the Red Dogs responded to a ground convoy ambush site with three injured soldiers, providing continuous CAS coverage, medevac, and medevac escort.

On 12 February, TF Red Dog's timely response was critical to countering a sustained rocket attack on FOB Chapman. Arriving on station at the rocket point of origin, The Red Dogs assumed forward air controller airborne (FAC[A]) duties for a U.S. Air Force B1-B attack utilizing precision munitions. After the air strikes were completed, the QRF remained overhead in support of AMF advancing to the site for bomb damage assessments.

In March, HMLA-773 (-) Rein Detachment Two arrived in country to assume the squadron mission. The Red Dogs conducted a unit relief in place without conducting an operational pause. During April, the squadron supported Operation Dragonfly, providing convoy escort in support of the 1/87 and fulfilling an increased QRF and medevac escort requirement. On the evening of 14 April, the Red Dog QRF prevented enemy forces from overrunning a border control point (BCP) manned by friendly AMF. Two UH-1Ns were directed to insert U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) in the vicinity of the BCP during heavy fighting along the border high ground. A section Red Dog AH-1Ws were directed to locate, identify, and engage the enemy forces. As friendly forces were falling back in the face of a reinforced platoon-size element and running dangerously low

on ammunition, the UH-1Ns inserted two joint tactical air controllers (JTAC) into a hot landing zone. The AH-1Ws located the enemy positions thereby drawing their fire away from the friendly ground forces. The Red Dogs' coordinated and violent response created confusion and fragmented enemy forces while inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy.

In May, the Red Dogs continued to provide the QRF for FOB Salerno that continued to come under frequent enemy rocket attacks. On the morning of 29 May, BCP 2, south of Salerno, was again targeted by enemy forces. When attacked with a barrage of 107mm rocket fire, U.S. Army and AMF requested air support in order to relieve the siege and conduct effective counter battery fire. A section of Red Dog AH-1Ws launched, then checking in on station, they were directed to find the location of the rocket point of origin and observe subsequent impacts of supporting artillery fires. Following an exhaustive search of the area, the Red Dogs identified dug-in fighting positions, a reinforced cave complex, and locations of recent anti-Coalition militia (ACM) activity. The reconnaissance continued until the flight was engaged with a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) from a ridgeline along the Afghan border. The section of Super Cobras returned fire on the ridgeline and cave complex with 2.75-inch rockets and their 20mm guns inflicting enemy casualties, including three enemy killed in action (EKIA).

In June, three U.S. Army H-60 "Black Hawks" augmented HMLA-773 (-) Rein. The event marked the first time since Vietnam that a Marine squadron took operational control of a joint service unit while serving in combat. The unit supported Operation Verendrye providing armed reconnaissance and convoy escort in support of the U.S. Army's 2d Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment. On 16 June, a convoy of Special Forces and Afghan

security forces were ambushed while proceeding to a rocket point of origin from an earlier attack on FOB Lwara. The convoy sustained 25 casualties in the ambush and returned to base requesting medevac and QRF aircraft. The medevac aircraft launched from FOB Salerno, but were forced to turn back due to reduced visibility. The Red Dog QRF, returned to the FOB with the medevac flight. After boarding medics at FOB Salerno, they launched again with zero lunar illumination and limited visibility in order to insert the team of medics and provide casualty evacuation back to FOB Salerno. The flight reached FOB Lwara, inserted two of the three medics, and departed with one critically wounded patient and the remaining medic.

On 22 June, the insurgents struck again with a rocket attack at FOB Salerno that wounded two U.S. Army soldiers, three local national interpreters, and damaged or destroyed 10 U.S. military vehicles. Firing from 18 kilometers to the southeast and employing a forward observer element, the ACM forces successfully launched a 45-minute sustained attack with seven 122mm rockets, several rockets hitting FOB Salerno. Launching less than 10 minutes from the first rocket impact, the Red Dog QRF proceeded to the rocket point of origin. They located the enemy taking cover among the rocks along a tree line. When the Red Dogs came under RPG and small-arms fire, they attacked with 2.75-inch rockets, and their 20mm guns. The follow-on report from CJTF-76 intelligence identified as many as eight EKIA. Furthermore, one of the enemy casualties was identified as a high value target (HVT) that Special Forces units had been attempting to kill or capture for several months.

In early August, the Red Dogs were involved in the largest engagement against al-Qaeda and Taliban forces since Operation Anaconda. On the night of 1 August 2004, BCP 4 was attacked by

approximately 300 anti-Coalition militia intent on over-running the small outpost to conduct follow-on attacks within the Khowst area. Outnumbered approximately four to one, the 5 Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF) personnel and 70 Khowst Provincial Force (KPF) soldiers were in a dire situation. At approximately 0200L, the Red Dogs launched the QRF. Ten miles from the battle, the flight observed tracer fire from every direction engaging the besieged outpost. Upon arrival, the Marine Super Cobras were immediately directed to the east of the BCP in order to suppress enemy small-arms and machine-gun fire from an adjacent ridgeline. They quickly silenced the enemy positions to the east of the BCP with accurate 20mm fire. The on-scene commander then directed the section to find and engage any enemy movement on the western ridgeline flanking the BCP.

The Red Dog AH-1W section then came under an intense barrage of RPG fire coming from one of the bunkers within the BCP. Determining that the enemy forces had over-run the western-most bunker complex of the compound, the Marine helicopters engaged approximately 50 to 75 of the enemy with deadly volleys from their 20mm guns and 2.75-inch rockets. They pressed the attack as the enemy forces broke ranks, abandoned their positions inside the outpost, and retreated back into Pakistan. The follow-on BDA reported 65 EKIA, more than 60 enemy wounded, and 22 enemy prisoners of war were taken into custody. The senior U.S. controller on site credited the Red Dog crews with saving the lives of every Coalition and Afghan soldier at BCP 4.

In the early evening of 10 September, BCP 3 came under attack by a significant enemy force armed with RPGs, small arms, and shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles. Friendly U.S. forces located north of the BCP consisted of a 105mm

artillery battery and “Jaguar 04”, a special operations tactical air controller (SOTAC). Jaguar 04 stated that the Afghan and Coalition troops were under attack from a vastly superior force in both firepower and numbers. Unable to get “eyes on” the battle from his position, Jaguar 04 requested immediate air support and airborne control of artillery and aircraft fires. The Red Dog section maneuvered north of the BCP to spot and control the artillery mission. Then Jaguar 04 handed off “Demon 15”, a section of Air Force A-10s, to the Marine aviators to coordinate close air support. With that, the Red Dogs assumed FAC(A) responsibilities for the battle. Quickly coordinating an airspace deconfliction plan, the Red Dogs directed effective artillery fire onto the enemy positions. Friendly forces reported the enemy breaking contact and fleeing to the south toward Pakistan. The Red Dogs then engaged the retreating enemy forces with 2.75-inch rockets and 20mm cannon fire, pinning them down and halting their retreat into Pakistan. The Red Dogs then controlled the A-10 section on multiple passes on the enemy positions. Next, the Red Dogs coordinated for air medevac of friendly forces while continuing to press the fight with the A-10 section, and their own munitions. The next morning, the Red Dogs inserted special operations assets into the objective, where they detained one local national, linked up with friendly forces and reported approximately 10 EKIA, and 5 enemy wounded in action (EWIA).

On the afternoon of 20 September, HMLA-773 (-) Rein was again in the thick of the fight after a Special Forces patrol in contact with the enemy required emergency medevac. After an ambush by heavy machine-gun and RPG fire, the patrol suffered numerous friendly casualties. The squadron launched a section of Marine Cobras to escort medevac aircraft. On approaching the ambush area, the Red Dogs learned that the enemy fortified their

positions and planned to ambush medevac helicopters. The Red Dogs escorted the medevac aircraft into the zone and then joined with another AH-1W section. At this point, the patrol was still heavily engaged from multiple enemy positions up in the high ground. With the patrol’s JTAC controlling the action, the Red Dogs attacked the enemy while remaining under continuous ground fire. During the four-hour engagement, the Red Dogs engaged two compounds with TOW missiles, neutralized multiple enemy positions with 20mm cannon and 2.75-inch rockets, and designated targets for other Coalition aircraft. As a result, numerous secondary explosions were observed as the Marine Super Cobras engaged fortified positions containing weapons caches. Post engagement patrols reported eight EKIA and destroyed stockpiles of antipersonnel mines, RPGs, and other small arms.

The first democratic elections in the history of Afghanistan in October 2004 promised the prospect of a busy month for the squadron. During the week prior to the election, HMLA-773 (-) Rein responded as the QRF on multiple occasions. In addition, they supported Operation Dragonfly, which resulted in the discovery of several weapons caches and the capture of several enemy fighters. Missions included point, area, and route reconnaissance missions, medevac escort, ground convoy escort, and airborne sniper operations. Next, the Red Dogs were heavily tasked with operations safeguarding the ballots cast in the elections. Toward the end of the month, the Red Dogs participated in a large-scale joint mission headed by Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) to the Mangretay area. The mission was deemed a success by ODA as numerous buildings and other structures known to support ACM activity were destroyed.

In November, al-Qaeda and Taliban forces continued their efforts to strike the Coalition

and to destabilize the country after the successful elections of the past month. The Red Dog QRF responded on numerous occasions to enemy rocket attacks and ground forces in contact in the Llwarra region. The squadron also prestaged a QRF section in Orgun E to cut our response time in half.

The first few days of December began quietly with the squadron conducting routine missions, including convoy escorts, armed reconnaissance flights, medevac escorts, and CAS training for ground controllers. On 6 December, all that changed when enemy forces executed a coordinated night attack against BCP 6, east of FOB Salerno, with a diversionary rocket attack aimed at the FOB. A section of Red Dog Cobras quickly launched into the night and immediately observed tracer fire, explosions, and illumination rounds at the BCP. Afghan forces manning the BCP expended nearly all of their ammunition in their panicked and undisciplined defense. The Marines observed tracer fire and explosions in the southern part of the BCP. The Red Dogs suppressed several enemy positions while searching for the point of origin for incoming mortar fire. Next, the Red Dog UH-1Ns inserted ODA forces and an ammunition resupply to help stabilize the situation. The Red Dogs then located the enemy mortars and silenced the tubes with 2.75-inch rockets. ODA took control of the situation, relieving the Afghan Security Forces commander of responsibility and consolidated forces in defensive positions.

On 17 December, TF Red Dog aircraft were again called into action as a U.S. Army patrol was engaged in the vicinity of Llwarra. Three Red Dog AH-1Ws responded to provide close air support only 200 to 500 meters from the engaged U.S. forces. The division expended all their 2.75-inch rockets and 20mm cannon ordnance, thereby allowing the U.S. forces to disengage. On 18 December, squadron UH-1Ns successfully tested a new aerial

delivery system for future emergency resupply missions that allowed supplies to be accurately dropped without the aircraft landing or damaging the payload.

In February, the operational tempo picked up from the previous month. On the night of 11 February 2005, enemy forces attacked FOB Llwarra with a squad-size unit employing mortars, RPGs, and small arms. The Red Dog QRF launched from FOB Salerno within minutes of the call. Flying with night-vision goggles through treacherous terrain, the section doubled back their flight path several times to negotiate dangerous weather that impeded movement to the objective area. Once on station, they identified multiple enemy positions around the FOB. The Red Dogs quickly laid down 20mm covering fire, while coordinating the attack run-in of U.S. Air Force A-10s while under steady ground fire.

On 24 February 2005, a platoon-size enemy force infiltrated Afghanistan from Pakistan and ambushed an Afghan convoy and the nearby BCP simultaneously. Following several volleys of RPGs and heavy machine-gun fire, four Afghan soldiers were seriously wounded and Coalition forces requested the QRF at FOB Salerno to launch in order to disrupt the enemy attack and effect a medevac of the wounded soldiers.

Two Red Dog AH-1Ws were already airborne conducting a counter-rocket armed reconnaissance mission. They were joined by another AH-1W and a U.S. Army Black Hawk with a Special Forces team on board. The division immediately responded overhead and cut off the enemy's ability to egress across the Pakistan border. The Super Cobras maneuvered through massive volleys of RPG and machine-gun fire locating the enemy positions. Though sustaining damage by enemy fire, the Red Dog section engaged the enemy at close range to allow the Black Hawk's safe insert

of the SOF team into a hot landing zone. Despite sustained RPG, machine-gun, and small-arms fire directed at their aircraft, the Red Dogs flight of three Cobras combined with a section of A-10s to maintain constant overhead cover during the eight-hour battle. The battle produced 20 enemy casualties, while the Special Forces team was able to collect a significant amount of classified intelligence, communications equipment, and weapons.

On 22 March, enemy forces launched an accurate 122mm rocket attack at night on FOB Salerno. Simultaneously, a company-size element of insurgents attacked BCP 6. The Red Dog QRF was alerted for launch in response to the rocket attack. Running through an incoming barrage, with impacts landing on the flight line, the Red Dog ground and aircrew made the launch. As the section made its way toward the rocket firing point, the battle going on at BCP 6 was obvious. The section then proceeded directly to the BCP to join the fight. Negotiating heavy machine-gun and RPG fire, the section engaged enemy positions with deadly volleys of 2.75-inch rockets, TOW missiles, and 20mm cannon fire. The section stayed on the attack until they were out of

ordnance. A second Red Dog section of UH-1N gunships relieved them on station.

The second Red Dog section continued the attack with 2.75-inch rockets and .50-caliber and 7.62mm door guns. In addition, they relayed the coordinates of several enemy positions for the combined fires from supporting artillery, British Harriers, and Air Force AC-130 gunships. As the battle at the BCP waned, the second Red Dog QRF section returned to the rocket firing point and expertly ran an adjust fire mission of the Salerno counter battery artillery. The enemy position was silenced, ending the rocket attack on FOB Salerno. The follow-on assessment identified that the BCP was attacked by a force of more than 100 of the enemy, resulting in 44 confirmed enemy casualties.

The focus of the squadron shifted during the latter part of March as TF Red Dog was relieved of its combat responsibilities in theater. Personnel, equipment, and aircraft prepared to redeploy home. The return of the last deployed members of the squadron in mid April marked the conclusion of the longest deployment of a Marine squadron since the end of the Vietnam War.



Marines of Kilo Company, 3d Battalion, 3d Marine Regiment, await extraction during Operation Mavericks, an operation conducted to capture suspected anti-Coalition forces in the vicinity of Mehtar Lam, Afghanistan, on 21 March 2005.

Photo courtesy of Cpl James L. Yarboro



From Bridgeport to Blessing

by Ed Darack

Marine Corps Gazette, August 2006

My time with the Marines in the mountains.

My first experience with the U.S. Marine Corps occurred at an unlikely place—at 14,200 feet on Alaska’s Mount McKinley. Marine mountain leader instructors from the Mountain Warfare Training Center (MWTC) at Bridgeport, CA, had come to scale North America’s highest peak as part of an ongoing training regimen. I never actually met any Marines on the mountain (they had long since departed after a successful summit bid), but I came to know very well the sturdy snow cave they’d built—as it saved my life during an intense five-day storm. I’ll never forget the snow cave or the Marines I never met.

Fast Forward

Nearly 15 years later, in March 2005, I had the great fortune of spending two weeks at the MWTC as a freelance photographer/writer for an array of writing and photography projects. Base leadership had arranged for me to observe a full suite of operations at the MWTC, from mountain medicine to the high-altitude evaluation of the MV-22 Osprey. My primary task, however, was to “embed” with the Marines of 2d Battalion, 3d Marine Regiment (2/3), during a workup for their forthcoming deployment to Afghanistan. I followed Whiskey

Company (Weapons Company operating as a line company) through the mountains outside of Hawthorne, NV, and Echo Company at the tail end of their training in California's Sierra Nevada Mountains.

Life in the cold, high mountains came as a completely new experience for the majority of the Marines of 2/3, who are based in Kaneohe Bay, HI. And life inside a Marine infantry unit came as a completely new experience for me. The Marines thrived on the challenges of the mountains' wild temperature swings, navigational difficulties, heavy loads in thin air. I'd experienced similar challenges during my times in the mountains, but I never carried the added weight of body armor, a Kevlar helmet, radios, batteries, weapons, and rounds on top of my standard camping and photography gear. I found the attitudes of the Marines inspiring, nobody complained, nobody quit, each acted as a professional. Many outsiders might consider Marines and mountains to be an "oil and water" type combination. Observing the Bridgeport-based instructors work with the 2/3 Marines, however, proved to me that the cultural environment of the Marine Corps is ideally suited to the challenges of alpine realms.

I spoke with 2/3's executive officer, Major Robert [M.] Scott (now Lieutenant Colonel Scott), at the end of my two weeks at Bridgeport. "I'd like to embed with 2/3 in Afghanistan," I said, my appetite whet to experience just what the Marines were training for. Major Scott gave me his contact information, stating that he'd look into the possibility.

Afghanistan

I arrived in Kabul six months later laden with four cameras, 200 rolls of film, camping equipment, and body armor. After credentialing as a freelancer at Combined Forces Command, Afghanistan,

I grabbed a taxi to Bagram Airfield, where the Army Combined Joint Task Force 76 public affairs representative briefed me on what lay ahead, "You're goin' somewhere with the Marines." After two helicopter flights, a one-hour-long convoy to the village of Watapor, and a three-hour terror ride through "IED (improvised explosive device) alley" in the back of a "highback" in a drenching thunderstorm, I reached that "somewhere"—Camp Blessing.

Initially established by a small Army detachment, Camp Blessing (named for Jay Blessing, a member of that detachment who was killed in the area) lies adjacent to the town of Nangalam in the mountainous Kunar Province of eastern Afghanistan, about 20 miles from the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Marines have maintained a presence at Camp Blessing throughout much of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), including contingents of various sizes from 2/8, then 3/6, followed by 3/3. [The] 3/3 handed Blessing off to 1st Platoon, Company E, 2/3 in June 2005. Commanded by 25-year-old First Lieutenant Matthew [D.] Bartels, Blessing is the only all-Marine operated forward operating base (FOB) within a combat zone in the entire global war on terrorism, and the first of this type since the Vietnam War. "Really, we're a fire base, not a FOB. At FOBs, most personnel run to bunkers during an attack. Here, everyone stands-to. Everyone shoots back," explained Bartels from the roof of the combat operations center. "Everywhere you look—360 degrees you're staring at bad-guy country," he continued as he pointed out specific locations.

They launch 82mm mortars at us from that ridgeline. . . . They stormed the camp once from there. . . . That's Rocket Ridge, from where they launch 107mm Chinese rockets

at us . . . and that valley—you came right by it on your way up here last night—that’s the Korengal Valley. That’s real, real bad guy country. That’s the vicinity of where they shot down the Chinook helicopter and shot up the Navy SEALs. This is the farthest we’re pushed north. This is the tip of the spear. We set our watches by the mortar and rocket attacks here. Welcome to the edge of the empire.

Ringed with Hesco barriers and concertina razor wire, the perimeter of the camp is studded with Type 75, ZPU-I antiaircraft batteries (aimed at the surrounding mountains); recoilless rifles; DShK 12.7mm heavy machine guns; and 82mm mortar tubes—all Chinese- and Soviet-made and all captured from anti-Coalition militia (ACM) during weapons cache raids. “For us, Soviet weapons systems represent a substantial component of our defensive fire plan,” Bartels noted.

We have a great relationship with the locals of Nangalam and other villages of the Pech River Valley. We reach out to them regularly. We have people coming to the gate almost daily with intel for us, and we help them however we can, particularly with medical care. We even stitched up a villager’s donkey the other day. As soon as we verify their information, we act on it—a big dividend being the weapons you see here.

Thanks to Bartels’ and his Marines’ interactions with the locals, this tiny camp provides a sizeable chunk of the battalion’s actionable information.

First Lieutenant Bartels then introduced me to one of the camp’s most important assets, its ASF contingent.

ASF stands for “Afghan Security Forces”—they’re locals whom we hire directly, and they live here on base with us. They’re the guys who use those Soviet and Chinese weapons. They’re incredible fighters; most of them grew up battling the Soviets. They hate the ACM, and they’re very loyal to us.

Earplugs set and straps of my flak jacket and Kevlar helmet cinched, I climbed onto the loading ramp of a CH-47 Chinook, one of two courtesy of Army Task Force Saber. Just over one full day after arriving at Camp Blessing, I watched the camp grow small as the helos lifted Marines, ASF, and me toward a high ridge for a surprise insert on a mission to find an ACM 82mm mortar position. Operation Valdez, named in honor of Lance Corporal Steven A. Valdez, was on.

With two Apache gunships flying close cover and an A-IO soaring overhead, the Chinook pilots set us onto a grassy landing zone adjacent to a joint direct attack munition crater. I reached for my backpack but felt a stiff tug toward the rear of the helicopter. “Just get off the bird!” a Marine yelled over the screeching din of jet engines. I acted as instructed, keeping a close eye on the spinning rotor blades once out of the craft. “Now get away from the helo! We’ll get your stuff for you. We’re one big target right now, and this thing still has tons of fuel on board!”

Kalashnikov and rocket-propelled-grenade (RPG) wielding ASF personnel maneuvered alongside Marines to establish a defensive perimeter. I just ran and took pictures. Not two minutes passed before the Marines had 30 cases of bottled water, 50 cases of meals, ready-to-eat [MREs], and everyone’s gear offloaded. The Chinooks’ engines spun up, and the helos roared into the sky.

Marine First Lieutenant Patrick E. Kinser, a

rifle platoon commander and a Bridgeport-trained mountain leader, quickly identified a patrol base position. As the ASF occupied an upper and lower camp, the Marines established a well-hidden patrol base between the two.

Meanwhile, above our base, a scout/sniper team that included First Lieutenant Bartels and former Bridgeport mountain leader instructor Staff Sergeant Keith Eggers kept close watch over not only the patrol base, ASF, and Marines but also the surrounding ridgelines where ACM could lurk. I quickly learned to appreciate the scout team's ability to rule the immediate area of operations from above and maintain a guardian angel presence at all times.

"They found the mortar position," stated First Lieutenant Kinser with a satisfied tone after receiving word from a patrol. "And they also found the cave where they hide when Camp Blessing returns fire." After a brief pause, the 25 year-old added, "That cave won't be around for much longer."

I joined a patrol to the just-discovered mortar position the next day. Moving through steep mountains with a heavy pack is difficult enough; "running the hills" with a "convection oven" Kevlar helmet and heavy body armor just magnifies the skin chafing, bone jabbing, and the feeling of "crushed chest." Halfway up the ridge, I swore that I'd never watch a newscast of Marines in Afghanistan the same way again, that I'd never forget how much more difficult having donned flak and Kevlar makes moving and I wasn't even carrying a weapon.

"Here it is, Ed," stated Corporal Justin Bradley, the patrol leader, pointing at a small divot in the soil just below the crest of a prominent ridge. I learned long ago about the ease with which I could get lost in the mountains. Similarly, as Corporal Bradley pointed directly at that very nondescript mortar position, hidden away in the trees

and further obscured by surrounding boulders, I immediately understood just how difficult pinpointing enemy locations in the mountains can be.

"What? How do you know?" I asked. Bradley pointed out the telltale signs to me after rechecking the location's 10-digit grid reference with a global positioning system. "Now, let's take a look at that cave," the patrol leader said as he rounded the base of a house-size boulder. A flat slab rested at the base of a large rock under which about four people with gear could hide. "That's it, a 'bad guy' hole."

The next day, the Marines and the ASF contingent broke camp and pushed to the mortar position. The Marines collectively lightened their load that day by 150 pounds of explosives. As Corporal Brett Bailer, an assaultman, prepped the explosives (for two distinct detonations of 75 pounds each), the rest of us took cover a few hundred meters down the ridge crest. FWHAP! A cloud of pulverized rock rose into the clear morning sky. "Keep an eye out for falling rocks!" First Lieutenant Kinser bellowed; not even a grain of dust rained down on us. We waited for Bailer's second detonation. While waiting, I stared north toward the high mountains of the Hindu Kush and felt the earth rock back and forth for about 30 seconds. "Is that an earthquake?" I asked. "Probably something Bailer did to the mountain with all that C4 [composition C4 plastic explosives]," a Marine joked. We quickly forgot about what we later learned was the devastating Pakistani earthquake.

FWHAP! Once the sky cleared of the second detonation's debris, we pushed onward toward the crest of the ridge. Tantil Now, a remote village about halfway between our location and the Pech River, was our next goal.

"ASF's picking up al-Qaeda traffic on the Icom [intercom]," First Lieutenant Kinser barked as we worked our way through trees and boulders along the ridge. I ran up to Kinser's position; two ASF

translators and the ASF contingent leader stared at the radio. Sultan, one of the translators, stated solemnly, “Forty al-Qaeda fighters are setting up PK [Russian machine gun] and RPG positions along that far ridge.” Our route to Tantil Now took us directly below that ridge, through open fields with virtually no cover for about two kilometers.

“Game on, Ed,” Corporal Bradley stated. “Make sure your plates are in. Looks like we’re gonna take contact.”

“Take contact? What’s that mean?” I asked. “Get shot at,” Kinser quipped. “Listen,” the lieutenant began intently, “we can hear the prayers from the mosque in Tantil Now through the air, and we can hear the same prayer from that same mosque in the background over the Icom. They’re in that village!”

“We have to practice dispersion, Ed, and that means you have to stay 30 feet behind me, and Anaya, the corpsman, is 30 feet behind you. Got it?” Bradley asked. “But . . . what if they shoot at us?” I asked. “We shoot back,” he paused briefly before laughing:

. . . and you take pictures of us shooting back. Don’t worry. You’ll be fine. Remember, the scout/snipers are above us on another ridge. They can see everything. If a bad guy tries to set up a PK, or pops up with an RPG launcher, that’ll be the last

thing he ever does. You wanted to run with the Marines in a mountain warfare environment in the mountains of Afghanistan—well this is it. You’re here.

Bradley paused briefly before adding, “The bad guys are good at fighting in the mountains, but we’re a hell of a lot better.” I started laughing with my friend, now a very good friend. “You know what I told my friends and family before coming out here?”

“What?”

“The safest place in the world is anywhere in the world, so long as you’re surrounded by U.S. Marines.”

“Well, Ed, you know what?” the 22-year-old asked. “You’re surrounded by U.S. Marines.”

“And so we’ll walk out of here without a scratch,” I added.

“That’s exactly right.” And we did.

Note

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About the Author

Mr. Ed Darack is a freelance writer/photographer who documented U.S. Marines in Afghanistan and authored the book *Victory Point: Operations Red Wings and Whalers—The Marine Corps’ Battle For Freedom in Afghanistan* (Berkeley, 2010).

U.S. Marine Corps Cpls Thomas Stickles and John Polandner, both riflemen assigned to Kilo Company, 3d Battalion, 3d Marine Regiment, provide security on a rooftop while other Marines conduct searches through buildings during Operation Mavericks on 19 March 2005. The operation was conducted to capture suspected anti-Coalition forces in the vicinity of Mehtar Lam.

Photo courtesy of Cpl James L. Yarboro





Operation Red Wings

by Ed Darack

Marine Corps Gazette, January 2011

What Really Happened?

The events of Operation Red Wings, which spiraled into disaster shortly after the insert of a four-man Naval Special Operations Forces (NavSOF) reconnaissance and surveillance (R&S) team during the opening phase of the operation, present warfighters (and those covering military operations) with a broad array of vital contemporary case studies relevant to those functioning at the battalion staff, company, platoon, and squad levels. These include studies in deconfliction between conventional forces and SOF, the paramount necessity of unity of command/effort, communications in complex mountainous terrain, mountain ambush tactics, and the importance of comprehensive, detailed planning, among others. Despite these lessons (the knowledge of which will arguably save lives in future operations), little has been discussed in professional military papers about Operation Red Wings. However, much has been written and discussed about Red Wings in general media (which is often referenced by warfighters for their ongoing professional military education), and much of this, including the content of two books on the topic, is rife with misinformation.

Background, Key Points, and Aftermath

In November 2004, 3d Battalion, 3d Marines (3/3), arrived in Regional Command-East (RC-East), Afghanistan, and assumed responsibility of their

area of operations (AO), which included the restive Kunar Province. [The] 3/3's overarching goal was to continue to increase stability in the region with Afghanistan's 18 September 2005 national parliamentary elections on the horizon.

[The] 3/3 deployed not as part of a MAGTF but as an infantry battalion to be integrated into a combined joint task force (CJTF). [The] 3/3's staff identified deconfliction issues with SOF units working in the same geographic areas that 3/3's AO covered. However, 3/3's staff also identified force multiplicative opportunities they felt working with SOF would avail to the battalion. [The] 3/3 developed a novel model that allowed for operational integration, deconfliction, and de facto operational control (OpCon) of SOF ground units and SOF support assets not normally available to conventional forces.

One of the culminating achievements of 3/3's tour in RC-East was the forced surrender of a regional high value target anti-Coalition militia (ACM) leader named Najmudeen, whom conventional and SOF units had sought for years. Subsequent to Najmudeen's surrender, which occurred just after Operation Spurs, 3/3 conducted Operation Mavericks and then Operation Celtics. All three of these operations incorporated SOF in their opening phases. In May and June 2005, during the relief in place/transfer of authority with 2/3, 3/3's staff began planning Operation Stars, which was to focus on ACM activity in the Korengal Valley region to the west of Asadabad, the Kunar's provincial capital. Due to a decline in actionable intelligence feed, however, Stars had to be delayed, and ultimately 3/3 handed what at that point was a "shell" of an operation to 2/3.

[The] 2/3's staff took the operational shell, renamed it Red Wings and, through analysis of intelligence, identified a relatively small (fewer than 20 ACM), little-known cell and its leader,

Ahmad Shah, as the focus for Red Wings. (Shah was attempting to fill the regional ACM power void after Najmudeen's surrender to 3/3.) Shah based his operations high on the slopes of Sawtalo Sar Mountain, which sits between the Korengal Valley and the Shuryek Valley. The purpose of Red Wings, in continuance of 3/3's operations, was to disrupt ACM activity (with Shah as the focus) prior to the 18 September 2005 national elections.

The Marines planned to have a six-man scout/sniper team traverse a series of valleys and ridges under cover of darkness to a group of predetermined observation points high on the slopes of Sawtalo Sar for the opening, or shaping phase, of Red Wings. Once the scout/sniper team had positively identified Shah and his group, a larger force of Marines was to undertake the direct action phase, while a company-size element of Marines functioned as outer cordon. For this second phase, 2/3 required assault support capable of low-illumination infiltration/exfiltration. Not having an associated aviation combat element, the 2/3 staff requested support from the 160th Special Operations Air Regiment (Airborne) (160th SOAR[A]) from Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A). Red Wings was similar in design to operations conducted by 3/3, but 2/3 sought the integration of only a SOF aviation support element, not ground forces. The SOTF, which had recently undergone a command change to one less amenable to SOF combined force integration, responded that 2/3 could be granted 160th support but only if SOF ground personnel undertook the opening two phases of Red Wings and were tasked as the lead supported elements with full OpCon (inclusive of 2/3) for these phases. With no alternatives, the battalion staff agreed. The ground force that agreed to undertake the supported first two phases of Red Wings was a NavSOF group consisting of

an assortment of U.S. Navy SEALs deployed to Afghanistan at that time. The NavSOF element planned the specifics of these first two phases of Red Wings with 2/3's staff providing input, including briefing the SEALs with preselected 10-digit grid reference points on the target area for calls for fire from a 105mm artillery battery at Forward Operating Base Wright (outside of Asadabad) and a recommendation to augment the SEAL's communications plan (to carry a more robust, albeit heavier, radio), among other points.

Operation Red Wings began with an insertion of a four-man NavSOF R&S [reconnaissance and surveillance] team near the summit of Sawtalo Sar late in the night on 27 June 2005. As with the specifics of the planning of this phase, 2/3 played no direct role in command and control, as this was the "SOF supported" portion of the operation. The team was inserted by helicopter within one mile of a populated area—sparsely populated, but populated nonetheless. Late in the morning on 28 June 2005, unarmed locals soft compromised the team. (Soft compromised means opposing forces have detected you; hard compromised means they're trying to kill you.) Within approximately one hour of the compromise, a group of between 8 and 10 of Shah's men (including Ahmad Shah himself) ambushed the R&S team, utilizing AK-47 fire, PK (Pulemyot Kalashnikova—designed by the Soviet Union and currently in production in Russia) light machine-gun fire, rocket propelled grenade (RPG) fire, and possibly an 82mm mortar system. As the R&S team descended into the northeast gulch of Sawtalo Sar (on the Shuryek Valley side of the mountain) under the press of the ambush, Shah's men engaged the team with coordinated plunging, interlocking fires from multiple superior topographic positions. The R&S team attempted to establish communications with their combat operations center via satellite through an AN/PRC-148

radio, which failed, and then attempted communications with an Iridium satellite phone, which failed. Shah's men killed three of the team within one hour. Hours later, a quick reaction force (QRF) was launched, consisting of members of NavSOF and Marines, in separate aircraft. [The] 2/3's air officer requested that, before any aircraft attempted any insert, members of the QRF positively identify member(s) of the R&S team, either visually or by radio. The pilots agreed. No positive identification could be made. Despite this shortfall, aviators of one of two MH-47s [Chinooks] of the 160th attempted to insert eight NavSOF personnel near the summit of Sawtalo Sar. During this insert attempt, one of Ahmad Shah's men shot the MH-47 out of the sky with an RPG, killing all 16 personnel on board.

Shah's men recovered virtually all of the R&S team's gear, including three M4s fitted with M203 40mm grenade launchers, rounds for the M4s and M203s, low-illumination visualization equipment, an intact AN/PRC-148 radio, a sniper spotting scope and, among many other items, a laptop computer with an intact hard drive containing classified material, including detailed maps of the U.S. and British embassies in Kabul. Coalition forces could only presume that Shah would utilize what he and his men recovered from the SEALs in their future attacks against U.S., Coalition, and Afghan civilian and government personnel and facilities.

A massive search and recovery effort was launched in the wake of the ambush and subsequent MH-47 shot down. A local villager who had befriended Marines at Camp Blessing, roughly eight miles distant, had found and then protected the only survivor of the R&S team; he sent another villager to Blessing with a note from the survivor. As the bodies of the SOF personnel were recovered and the survivor rescued, Shah and his men absconded into Pakistan, where they produced

and distributed one of two videos they shot during the ambush for propaganda purposes. While the massive Coalition presence during the recovery effort achieved the desired end state of the operation (disruption of ACM activity), this was a short-lived and pyrrhic “victory.” Foreign fighters flowed in to join the emboldened Shah due to his overnight infamy. (Media had reported only a few facts of the operation, and the dramatic loss of so many U.S. troops was the lionized focus of this coverage.) Within weeks, Shah’s attacks began anew, including an improvised explosive device (IED) strike on a convoy of Marines in late July 2005 and renewed mortar and rocket attacks on both military and civilian targets.

Red Wings was an incredible tragedy for the families, friends, and associates of those lost. From a tactical/operational standpoint, and from an analysis of its influence on furthering security in the region (the operation’s purpose), the opening phase of Red Wings was an unmitigated monumental disaster—one of the greatest, if not the greatest, in recent military history. Because so many resources were pushed to aid the recovery effort (the search and recovery was called Red Wings II), other planned operations (not just in that part of the AO but throughout Afghanistan) had to be delayed and many cancelled altogether. Ahmad Shah, a once unknown local Taliban aspirant, gained instant global fame and saw his ranks, finances, and armaments (including those taken from the SEALs) burgeon, enabling him to renew his attacks with greater intensity and frequency.

Marine Corps Ethos, the Media, and the Truth

In the spring of 2005, when I first embedded with 2/3, Major Robert [R.] Scott and Major Thomas [D.] Wood, respectively the executive officer and operations officer of the battalion, discussed how

information on military operations is often unfortunately skewed in one form or another. One of their key points was that just as painting a military operation or unit in an unfairly negative light hurts the overall war effort through erosion of public support, exaggeration and omission to deflect responsibility or to “glorify” a unit or event with excessive grandiose aggrandizing will, in the long run, prove just as injurious (if not more so) to the military as a whole. An inaccurate narrative will only erode the public’s faith and confidence in the military once the public realizes the extent of that narrative’s inaccuracies, especially if the public perceives that the misinformation can be traced to the military itself. Military stories should be told comprehensively and honestly, inclusive of the good, the boring, the bad, the funny, and even the embarrassing. The idea of America having a Marine Corps because the citizenry wants and not needs a Marine Corps falls in line with having the Marine Corps story told accurately.

The Misinformation Trail

Like coverage of most disasters, military or otherwise, media outlets raced to gather any detail of Red Wings they could uncover. Outside of the helicopter shot down and American military deaths, however, CJTF-76, the lead military command in Afghanistan at the time and the core of which was comprised of the Army’s Southern European Task Force, public affairs released little. Since no media had been embedded with relevant units during Red Wings, news gatherers could only rely on daily public affairs briefings for their information.

Within two weeks of the ambush and shoot down, a number of articles attempting to provide in-depth coverage of Red Wings emerged. While correct on certain aspects of the tragedy, such as only one member of the R&S team surviving and the number of SOF personnel killed,

nothing was reported on the background, development, and purpose of the operation. Furthermore, basic facts of Red Wings—even its name (most articles referenced it as Redwing)—were misreported, usually grossly. Media accounts also omitted Marine Corps involvement in the operation’s background and design, as well as in the recovery effort of Red Wings II.

This dissemination of inaccurate information reached a whirlwind pace in June 2007 with the publication of the book *Lone Survivor: The Eyewitness Account of Operation Redwing and the Lost Heroes of SEAL Team 10*, about the only surviving member of the R&S team.¹ While the survivor, Petty Officer Second Class Marcus Luttrell, was given authorship credit, the book was actually written in its entirety by a British writer, Patrick Robinson, who penned primarily military fiction titles. In an article written by Robinson in February 2010, he states that the Navy chose him to be the ghostwriter of *Lone Survivor* based on his series of novels involving SEALs.² Shortly after Luttrell and Robinson met, just weeks after Red Wings drew to a close, the two secured a book deal and then a movie deal. Robinson began writing the manuscript as Luttrell returned to active duty. The Navy reviewed and approved the manuscript, endorsing it as accurate.

Shortly after Red Wings, a number of Marines of 2/3 carefully reviewed Luttrell’s after-action report (AAR) and the R&S team’s gear manifest to learn of any recent changes in enemy tactics, techniques, and procedures and, more importantly, to ascertain what additional threats they might face during operations and patrols due to Shah acquiring the SEAL team’s gear. In the AAR, Luttrell stated that the team was attacked by 20 to 35 ACM. (Analysis of two videos made by Shah, as well as other intelligence, indicated 8 to 10 total, a common ACM team size for this

area.) Twenty was the number initially released by CJTF-76 public affairs. In *Lone Survivor*, however (which was released the same week Luttrell retired from the Navy), Robinson writes that the team faced hundreds and that Ahmad Shah was one of the top lieutenants to Osama bin Laden. During the battle, according to *Lone Survivor*, the SEALs killed dozens of “Taliban.” Robinson does not discuss Marine involvement in Red Wings in *Lone Survivor*, or the prior operations after which Red Wings was based, or the purpose of the operation, or the development of the operation, or any of the command relationships during Red Wings. The (very gripping, yet extraordinarily unrealistic) narrative of a small special operations team inserted on a lonely mountain to not just surveil, but to take down the operations of one of Osama bin Laden’s top men—who had hundreds of fighters with him—continued to propagate throughout the media.

Roughly three years after the release of *Lone Survivor*, another book covering Red Wings was released. Published by a prominent military publisher, this book focuses on the commander of the R&S team, Lieutenant Michael Murphy, USN. Although highlighting Murphy the individual, the book nevertheless provides a narrative of Red Wings, a narrative again riddled with misinformation. The author explained, based presumably on information from his sources, the precipitating event and the genesis of operation Red Wings:

On June 3, 2005, Shah’s forces ambushed and killed three Marines from Company C, 1st Battalion (Airborne) near Forward Operating Base (FOB) Orgun-E, located outside the town of Orgune in the Paktika Province in southwestern Afghanistan along the Pakistani border. Killed were Captain Charles D. Robinson and Staff Sergeant Leroy E.

Alexander. Seriously burned was Staff Sergeant Christopher N. Piper, who subsequently died of his wounds. The Marines approached CJSOTF-A's commanders and requested the capture or elimination of Shah.³

While Paktika Province lies in eastern Afghanistan (not southwestern Afghanistan as the author states), no Marines operated in Paktika at any time near the planning or execution of Red Wings. Of course, there is no such unit in the whole of the Marine Corps as "Company C, 1st Battalion (Airborne)." Robinson, Alexander, and Piper were all members of 1st Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group, which fell under the command of CJSOTFA while in Afghanistan.

The Marines never approached CJSOTF-A's commanders to request anything but the low-illumination assault support capability of the 160th SOAR(A); what they received in return was a mandate, rooted in strict adherence to U.S. Special Operations Command doctrine, to integrate SOF ground forces for the opening two phases of the operation and to designate those forces as the supported lead component of Red Wings if 2/3 was to receive 160th support.

Conclusion

The full story of Operation Red Wings yields invaluable information for warfighters of all Services as well as civilian journalists covering military operations. An accurate, comprehensive account of the planning; the AO; the enemy; NavSOF involvement; execution; breakdown of command, control, and communications; all that went awry on Sawtalo Sar; and the aftermath provides volumes in lessons learned. But if public affairs officials, authors, reporters, and editors, either through gross incompetence or by intentionally chipping the story into a custom-honed narrative—regardless

of how noble they believe their motives may be—allow these lessons to be drowned in a morass of misinformation, then they are lessons doomed to be learned again and again.

The sentiments Majors Scott and Wood articulated to me in 2005 remain relevant and vital now more than ever. A healthy democracy with a civilian-controlled military requires a high level of transparency of the military. This is an important concept deeply rooted in the Marine Corps' culture of fidelity to the nation's citizenry. The many Marines I've worked with over the years on media projects continue to not just preach it, they also prove it. It's one of the reasons why so many of us civilians continue to want a Marine Corps.

Notes

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1. Patrick Robinson (based on interviews with Marcus Luttrell), *Lone Survivor: The Eyewitness Account of Operation Redwing and the Lost Heroes of SEAL Team 10* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2007).
2. Patrick Robinson, "Writing *Lone Survivor*: The Honor and the Anguish," *The Huffington Post*, 1 February 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/patrick-robinson/emlone-survivorem-the-sto_b_444843.html.
3. Gary Williams, *Seal of Honor: Operation Red Wings and the Life of Lt. Michael P. Murphy, USN* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010).

Author's Note

The following officers (rank at the time) and organization were contacted and interviewed (in some cases) to write this article:

First Lieutenant Matthew D. Bartels (commander, Camp Blessing, 2/3).

Lieutenant Colonel Norman L. Cooling (commanding officer, 3/3).

Lieutenant Colonel James E. Donnellan (commanding officer, 2/3 [preselected before 2/3's Afghanistan deployment to relieve Lieutenant Colonel MacMannis after 30 days in country]).

First Lieutenant Patrick E. Kinser (platoon commander, 1st Platoon, Company E, 2/3).

First Lieutenant Robert A. Long (assistant operations officer/sniper platoon commander, 2/3).

Lieutenant Colonel Andrew R. MacMannis (commanding officer, 2/3).

Naval Special Warfare Public Affairs: no response.

Major Andrew T. Priddy (operations officer, 3/3).

Captain Casmer J. Ratkowiak (air officer, 2/3).

Major Robert R. Scott (Executive Officer, 2/3).

Second Lieutenant Regan C. Turner (platoon commander, 2d Platoon, Weapons Company, 2/3).

Major Scott A. Westerfeld (intelligence officer, 2/3).

Major Thomas D. Wood (operations officer, 2/3).

About the Author

Mr. Ed Darack's book *Victory Point* was chosen by the Naval Institute as one of the best books of 2009.

Then-LtCol Jim Hogberg, PRT commander in Helmand Province, meets with Nawa District officials in April 2005 to survey a potential site for a school.

Photo courtesy of Col James A. Hogberg





The Chai Patrols— Conducting Stability Operations in Afghanistan

by Colonel James A. Hogberg

Backdrop

The ancient code of Afghanistan's Pashtu community is hospitality, honor, and revenge . . . although not always in that order. To be assigned as the Provincial Reconstruction Team commander of Pashtu-dominated Helmand Province, Afghanistan's (and the world's) largest producer of opium, is akin to living an episode of the Sopranos every week. While friendly, entertaining, and even patriotic at times, behind the scenes it can be sarcastically violent as someone is seemingly always getting whacked. It is a place where smuggling and drugs permeate everything to include the government and police. It's not if corruption exists, it's how corrupt is it? In contrast, this southwestern corner of Afghanistan, dissected by the fertile Helmand River, is also amazingly hopeful and promising. Underlying the drug lords, warlords, religious extremists, illiteracy, and abject poverty is a growing

young populace that embraces education, Western technology, religious moderation, and possess a self-deprecating sense of humor. There are also old timers who still remember a more prosperous youth and understand that the cycle of war in which they have spent the majority of their lifetime needs to be broken if there is to be a future for their children and a rebirth of their country.

It's all about the chai . . . or tea. Pashtu hospitality demands that chai precede all discussion. Rarely is an issue too pressing not to drink chai and engage in social conversation first. Thirty minutes earlier, a suicide bomber in a vehicle-borne IED attempts to crash the gate of the Helmand governor's building and kill security counsel attendees. Instead, the bomber prematurely detonates the explosives and is subsequently shot dead by Afghan security personnel. Inside, chai is served to the provincial governor and the U.S. Provincial Reconstruction Team commander in defiance of the attack and turn to other issues. Engage in a conversation on the side of the road with a subsistence farmer and soon be invited to his village for a glass of chai and lively conversation. Drive 200 miles cross-compartment to visit a remote Afghan mountain outpost overlooking historical smuggling routes, metaphorically within site of the edge of the Earth, and expect to see several guards with AK-47s slung, crouched low around an open fire, boiling chai, and quick to dispense Pashtu hospitality. It is soon clear that bringing stability to this tumultuous region of the world will require a unique approach that combines insightful kitchen table diplomacy, humor, persistence . . . and, of course, large amounts of cultural awareness that begin with chai.

The Mission

Absent political sensitivity and nuances, the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) would

have been better named the Provincial "Stability" Team to best define its mission of dispensing doses of governance, security, and reconstruction. The PRT assisted and cajoled provincial officials in bringing government to the people who were by circumstances wildly independent and otherwise untouched by basic public services. The PRT trained, mentored, and helped organize dysfunction local law enforcement whose leadership protected the drug trade yet still understood that their forces were responsible for providing rudimentary levels of public protection. The PRT also facilitated reconstruction and economic development through civil affairs projects, nongovernmental organization coordination, and community engagement.

During the summer of 2005, more than 150 Afghan police officers were killed in Helmand Province as a mixed result of both an insurgency and their own involvement in drug smuggling activities. Poppy production continued unabated and many farmers in the province dismissed Coalition counter-drug campaigns and reported record yields. Left to conduct stability operations and share a battlespace with a small Special Forces detachment, the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team fluctuated in size from 60 to 100 personnel and comprised a mixed-match of personnel in different stages of deployment from all Services, including a U.S. Army National Guard infantry platoon, two squads of active duty U.S. Army military police, a handful of Air Force communication specialists, a U.S. Army Reserve civil affairs team, human intelligence collectors, several individual augments to include the commander, from the Marine Corps, and Navy, and Department of State civilians.

Absent an infantry battalion that was present in neighboring provinces to keep an insurgency in check, the Helmand PRT might seem ridiculously small to conduct stability operations in

Afghanistan's largest geographic province (more than 16,000 square miles) with a population exceeding 1 million people, and where only one decrepit paved road transects the countryside. On the other hand, when conducting stability operations, is bigger necessarily better? Can a small, energetic, and autonomous team tasked with projecting governance have a better and more profound effect than the traditional big stick carried by an infantry battalion? Below are the observations of one such team.

Observations

“The other half of the population,” reaching out to females in a conservative Islamic society

Traveling 12 bumpy hours in Humvees over desert trails and tertiary mountain roads to reach the remote village of Baghran, a former Taliban stronghold that still harbored sympathizers, most soldiers initially wondered where the women were. The dusty village market was filled with men, yet the burka-clad women were nowhere to be found. However, in a visit a month later, accompanied by a medical assistance team that included U.S. female military health care providers (medics and doctors), local village women streamed out of homes to receive much needed medical care. A courageous Helmand Minister of Women's Affairs had opened a women's center in three of the province's "moderate" areas. In his comments at one such opening ceremony, the provincial governor does not mention the word woman or female in his entire address, using the platform instead to push a hypocritical antidrug agenda. The U.S. commander, when asked to speak, recites a past history of several Afghan female leaders and encourages female education by explaining how women are integrated in the world's largest Islamic country, Indonesia, where many are doctors, engineers, and teachers.

He then asks of the audience whether or not their daughters and mothers should be entitled to see Afghan female doctors or be taught by female Afghan teachers, just as other Islamic countries allow females to be educated in such professions.

In the "long war," education along with a viable role for "the other half of the population," is the definitive solution. In a country where female illiteracy rates start in the single digits, where do you even begin to address what is clearly generational in scope? How do you plant a seed for the future that will eventually blossom?

Traveling through rural Helmand, it became clear that addressing female education and economic opportunity could be a showstopper. It was also clear that in a more moderate provincial capital and several urban areas there were opportunities to set conditions that eventually could help improve the plight of women as well as polarize insurgency support. With limited resources, the PRT used some of its Commanders Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds to build girl's schools in these urban centers and focus additional funding on economic development projects that targeted women. The idea was to place resources where they would be best received and least threatened, hoping that over time opportunities for women would build outward and become more acceptable.

The Helmand PRT worked closely, but in the background, with the provincial women's minister to create skilled job opportunities that women could pursue indoors and not be immediately dismissed by religious conservatives. Start-up funding was provided to establish an art and apparel academy where graduates would receive a sewing machine and other supplies required to establish their own small home businesses. Similarly, a beauty trade school was also established where women could become "certified" beauticians and

receive an initial inventory of material to also start their own home business. Participants pledged to pay back the cost of the program with future earnings so it could continue for others. More than 700 women signed up for 350 coveted seats in the first series of classes. Additional funding supported a local nurses and midwife school.

Because education seemed to be a generational issue that had bypassed the vast majority of female adults, it was important to meet the immediate needs of these women with something other than traditional education. A lifetime of war had created a significant underclass of women in Helmand Province that had been mostly abandoned by even protective tribal networks. Called the Provincial Woman's Union, this group included war widows and disabled and abused spouses from drug dependent husbands. They clung together, surviving by working menial jobs or begging. Partnering with USAID program managers, the PRT created several fledgling business opportunities to support these women, such as a jam and pickle processing plant and a small dairy processing plant. Afghans consume large amounts of jam with bread for breakfast. While fruits were widely available, they were typically exported for processing. Similarly, many families maintained a cow, and milk could easily be collected and processed into dairy projects locally. Again, these ventures could be conducted mostly indoors, remain low-key, and would not directly threaten the existing cultural environment. The PRT used its funding to construct the necessary buildings, while USAID provided equipment, instruction, and marketing experts.

While the construction of girl's schools and a handful of small business opportunities might seem small to an outside observer, from a strategic perspective, it's profound. In a conservative society still reeling from the harsh treatment of the

Taliban, this activity plants a seed for the future, while providing hope to a pivotal disadvantaged segment of society at a level that can be readily absorbed. It gives regional women leaders, who understand that there is a better way, the energy to keep fighting. The PRT discovered that it was best not to preach about women's issues, but rather to set tangible examples of how opportunities for women could be created within cultural boundaries and, where appropriate, present a common sense argument as to why mothers and daughters should not be denied opportunities, such as education and business, that are clearly present for females in other Islamic societies.

Triangulation and the religious leadership

By his own admission, the head of the Provincial Ulamas (religious leadership counsel) estimated that more than 80 percent of the mullahs had one foot in with the dark side. When tasked with finding moderate religious leaders, an initial meeting of the PRT commander with prominent provincial mullahs yielded slurs, stares, and accusations. Warning against the initial meeting, the provincial governor had eventually conceded. Following speeches by the PRT commander and an Afghan colonel, mullahs engaged in a three-hour tirade and debate that berated everything from Coalition forces to Pakistani influences. One mullah wanted to return to the days of cutting off limbs for criminal offenses and then pondered why none of his congregation seemed to listen to him anymore. Recorded for local television and radio, the initial event garnished such a response that it yielded an encore presentation. Afghans were hungry to witness such an open debate, and the group suggested a follow-on meeting.

It seemed better to have them shouting at you than shooting at you. Subsequent meetings yielded more civility. While finding moderation

may be an elusive task, at least there was hope for creating an attitude of indifference. While the head of the Ulamas understood the need to move away from extremism, he could not be seen advocating such meetings (his predecessor had been assassinated by the Taliban). Instead, he would appear as merely the go-between by telling the PRT commander to tell the governor to tell them to have a meeting. Creating a public directive would give him the necessary cover. A consistent message was conveyed that it was not necessary to agree or even cooperate with Coalition forces, however, it was inappropriate to deny Afghans the basic rights and economic opportunities available to others, particularly Taliban leaders living in Pakistan who enjoyed electricity, roads, and schools, yet preached against these same things in Afghanistan. Mullahs were encouraged to return to their villages and start their own community projects rather than advocate the destruction of anything built by the Coalition.

The PRT eventually committed resources toward the construction of a “madrassa” or religious school. Unlike madrassas across the border in Pakistan that seemingly mass produce Islamic extremism, this school would be administered under the Ministry of Education and operate more like a parochial school with academic standards coexisting alongside religious instruction. Local religious leaders were anxious to create a flagship institution and teach a more moderate form of Islam that they said represented Afghan values. Whether or not this venture will succeed is yet to be determined and, if the mullahs fail to deliver, the building would be turned into a traditional school; however, the dialogue and planning for such a project between mullahs, mainstream Afghans, and newly elected officials created a stake for the religious leadership in the new government that is difficult to deny.

Reconstruction and economic development should follow a “systems approach”

There has to be a method to the madness. Haphazard spending of aid dollars combined with an overabundance of “feel good” projects without considering second- and third-order economic effects are common pitfalls of well-intentioned aid providers.

A Provincial Development Counsel consisting of provincial ministers as well as PRT representatives met weekly to discuss economic issues. A standing invitation was provided to any other aid providers. In order to receive funding, projects typically were required to fall into one of two categories—they were either designated as a system development and partnership project or as a “red zone” emplacement project. One such system project included a “farm-to-market” road funded by the PRT that connected agriculture cold storage facilities built by USAID, as well as a school built by a nongovernmental organization. Red zone emplacement projects involved establishing an individual project, such as a school or road, in an area of rising instability and insurgent activity. Managing and overseeing the project offered the PRT and provincial leaders the opportunity to provide a positive presence, while engaging local leaders and the public on security and other issues.

While large-scale infrastructure is typically planned and funded centrally by agencies, such as USAID, these projects ultimately take time. However, for Afghan villagers who had not seen any evidence of reconstruction more than four years into stability operations, time was quickly running out. Lack of visible government support quickly turns to disillusionment and potential support for the insurgency. Managing expectations becomes important; while waiting for the larger effects of long-term development, leadership engagement and smaller projects, such as

irrigation canal cleaning or road improvement, can sustain support for the central government.

The “Chai Effect”—listen more than you speak, articulate a vision, and do not be too quick to judge

With electricity reaching less than 25 percent of the Afghan population, oration is an art and open public speaking a primary means of communication. Decision making in Afghanistan is traditionally based on consensus. Common interest groups create a “shura,” and a district shura consist of a counsel of elders who represent various factions of the populace. Local disputes are often deferred to the district shura for resolution. However, shuras are not just confined to local government. There are women’s shuras, businessmen’s shuras, and religious and tribal shuras. These common interest groups are embedded throughout Afghan society. If a decision is required, a shura is often created or consulted to obtain consensus.

The Helmand PRT conducted what affectionately became known as the “Chai Patrols,” or groups traveling to different shuras and going through the social ritual of drinking chai and conversation, then listening, and finally speaking. Following a security incident, such as a Taliban execution or IED attack, chai patrols might be sent to different police checkpoints to calm down the neighborhood. Soldiers would gather with local police or other officials to drink chai and offer reassurance.

In a tribal centric environment, the PRT was often viewed as a neutral observer. They were routinely invited to attend various meetings involving different tribal factions simply because it was the only way to get everyone around the table and talking. When speaking with Afghans, who are traditionally very forthright, it is important to not be overly judgmental but instead articulate a vision for what might be. Often the first and

second meeting yield very little, however, subsequent meetings that demonstrate commitment are likely to show very positive results. It is important to have hip-pocket speeches ready to match the oratory ability of Afghan leaders. A social order of speaking is also prominent, making it sometimes more important to listen than it is to speak.

Corrupt leadership, at least it is entertaining

Helmand Province provides 40 percent of Afghanistan’s \$2.8 billion opium output. Drugs permeate virtually every level of that society and it is rare to find a government official without ties to smuggling. Hashish is grown in police garden plots. A district administrator complains of a bomb exploding under his vehicle, the suspect is the district police chief. Another district police chief petitions the PRT to purchase \$500 motorcycles for his police station, yet maintains his own living compound worth several hundred thousand dollars that was admittedly obtained through smuggling operations. Widespread allegations circulated that the provincial governor controlled much of the regional drug trade, while the provincial police chief directed the drug smuggling activity for Helmand’s most populace tribe.

Looking past the corrupt leadership was a daily practice at the PRT. Not unlike the majority of the population, the provincial police chief, who commanded a force of 1,500 men, was illiterate, and the governor, who was undereducated, frequently read aloud to himself at meetings. As former warlords, they remained in place because each filled a power vacuum. Tribal confluences, an intermittent insurgent threat, and far-reaching drug interests dictated, at least for the near term, an intimate tribal knowledge and strong-arm approach to government.

Despite local shenanigans, it was important to keep a close hold on government officials.

Networking with corrupt government leaders still provided useful information and many were still in a position to make institutional changes as long as it did not interfere with their more nefarious activity. The best work-around was to identify individuals within an organization who could assist in making institutional changes that would outlast the current leadership. As Afghanistan's new structure matures, leadership dominated by former warlords will eventually become diluted by a more educated class. At the tactical and operational level, bringing about institutional change is far more important than harboring an obsession with the removal of corrupt officials.

Schedule leadership engagement and bring government to the people

Establishing a routine leadership engagement cycle helps establish credibility and project sincerity. Every Sunday, the PRT would meet with the provincial police chief and his staff; on Mondays, the PRT would meet with the governor and his security counsel; on Tuesday's, the PRT would be with the Provincial Development Counsel to discuss economic development. The remainder of the week would be set aside for visits to any of 13 rural or remote district centers. Monthly engagement opportunities included the women's ministry, businessmen's shura, and religious shura.

Afghan leaders do not traditionally bring government to the people. Many former warlords still use the "kiss the ring" approach to management. Representative tribal leaders often come to the provincial center to petition their government rather than visiting their constituency. In turn, the governor or other leaders dispense token tribute to obtain loyalty. In a tribal-centric environment, it is difficult not to show or generate the perception of favoritism. To break this cycle, the PRT routinely invited various provincial ministers on trips

to outlying districts, even going so far as to fly the provincial counsel and governor by helicopter to more remote locations so they could address "the people" many of whom had never experienced representative government.

Mitigate risk. The honor system works . . . so does the governor's brother, goats, and sheep. Be a good neighbor

Projecting a force of as few as 60 soldiers across a 16,000 square kilometer area of responsibility in rugged Afghanistan can be daunting and security is always an issue. Intermittent violence came to the PRT in the form of suicide bombers, IEDs, and small-arms fire. With ground infantry and air support more than two hours away, other methods were needed to mitigate risk and still be able to project influence. The PRT worked hard to leverage the support of the community, but also adapted by using a little creativity and the centuries-old Afghan Pashtu honor system.

In one instance, a district shura arrived at the PRT from Helmand's most distant and mountainous area. A suspected Taliban stronghold, this area had yet to be visited by civil affairs teams or provincial officials. The shura declared that they were ready for economic assistance after seeing the project activity in neighboring districts. Because security remained an issue and the mountain passes that led to the district center were channeled and easily emplaced with IEDs, the PRT remained skeptical about a visit. However, when shura members produced a written security guarantee with individual signatures and thumbprints, Afghan honor was now on the line. The host becomes culturally responsible for security, something taken extremely seriously, and those who break their oath may be ostracized, imprisoned, or upon whom revenge would be extracted. As an additional measure of security,

the PRT invited the governor's brother along on the three-day mountain visit. As a recognizable warlord familiar with the terrain and custom, he drove ahead of the military convoy, successfully navigating any IEDs.

Medical and veterinary teams also become a useful tool to mitigate risk. Desperate for this type of support, Afghans would ensure that medics and vets could work in a secure environment. The PRT routinely traveled to remote and "unstable" locations accompanied by veterinary support or medical support but felt confident that any threat would be neutralized by the community's desire to receive such services. Civil affairs soldiers trained to deworm animals could provide medicine to several hundred animals in a matter of hours at a total cost of less than \$100. Such gestures of goodwill are not a panacea for abject conditions, however, they facilitate engagement with local leaders and establish dialogue in areas where the insurgency may have undue influence.

PRT soldiers were invited to participate in a soccer match against a group of local all-stars. For security reasons, the event was a "gut check" that required a leap of faith and logistics to pull off. Even though the match was not announced until game day, a crowd of more than 3,000 gathered at the same local soccer stadium that had been used four years earlier to conduct public executions. Joint Afghan and U.S. military police patrols provided security in and around the stadium. Two weeks before the national election, the "friendship match" was used to kick off a series of PRT project ground breaking and completion ceremonies that were designed to generate public confidence in government and security. With the home team blowing out the Americans by a score of five to one, it was more than a victory for the Afghans. That simple event produced goodwill and leveraged community support.

Information operations is an important tool for leveraging the support of the community. The PRT consistently invited local Afghan press to report on its progress and the community events they participated in. Unfortunately, they often over emphasized military public affairs operations and projected information upward through a military organization that seemed intent on self-gratification. Afghans needed to see a story as told by fellow Afghans to give the community confidence in government and they could then visibly measure progress. Because literacy rates are extremely low, radio, television, and leadership engagement are the most effective information methods.

Once peace has been won, concentrate on being a good neighbor. In areas where progress had been made and where the hustle and bustle of normal life seemed to flow, the PRT made a practice of quiet community engagement but were careful not to be seen as overstaying its welcome. Convoys would be small, gunners waved more, and a greater effort was made to be less threatening to local Afghans.

Distributing aid is a business. Get used to it

A company contracted by USAID to oversee day labor jobs and wages for Afghans as an alternative to poppy production had 5 of its 14,000 workers executed by suspected Taliban operatives. As a result, operations were suspended and thousands of workers were left unpaid as the company held out for months for an increase in their contract to provide additional security. For Afghanistan, 5 out of 14,000 are pretty good odds for staying alive . . . better than the U.S. military. One might assume that signing a contract to work in Afghanistan would carry some inherent risk, certainly the Afghans who chose to accept the work were aware of the risk; instead, contractors used

the opportunity to attempt contract renegotiation, halting development momentum and giving impetus to an otherwise dysfunctional insurgency.

Providing aid is a business, and USAID and many nongovernmental organizations simply contract out economic development programs. Centralized oversight is often fleeting, particularly in outlying areas. The commonality of working at the “edge of the empire,” however, provides an opportunity for partnership and shared experiences. Security information sharing and other communication helped develop informal relationships that could inspire performance. The PRT held biweekly, unclassified security briefings for nongovernmental agencies and contractors working in the area. These briefings inevitably would develop into other partnership opportunities where economic economies of scale could be applied. In addition, the PRT offered its own expertise to provide decentralized oversight for the projects of non-governmental agencies and USAID.

Interagency partners . . . the goal is for the military to fade away and go home

Initial PRT organization provided for a five-man military police element or Police Transition and Assessment Team. Headed by a 20-something Army sergeant, the team was tasked to work with local law enforcement, critiquing officials and jails and identifying requirements. Despite good intentions, the partnership between a buck-sergeant and a 55-year-old former warlord police chief with a force of 1,500 men is mismatched. While additional military police were brought onboard to manage a training program, retired U.S. police chiefs were quickly contracted as mentors to work with Afghan police leadership. These contractors created evaluation reports that went directly to the Afghan Ministry of Interior, so their

opinions mattered. With proven experience running civilian police forces, they were better positioned to pressure compliance and encourage institutional changes.

Stability operations are transitional. A soldier’s ultimate objective is to return home. At the end of the day, support, diplomacy, and economic development will need to transfer to civilian control. In an unstable environment, the military provides both the near-term leadership and security safety nets that set conditions for civilian leadership. As conditions permit, the military should then fade away. The PRT provided a platform for interagency partners and facilitated their important engagement. The Department of State and U.S. Department of Agriculture provided experts in diplomacy and economic development. Because the security environment was not permissive, interagency coordination with the military was crucial. The more civilian expertise that can be infused into economic development the better, so skill sets that include city planning, judicial review, banking, law enforcement, and engineering are in high demand.

The military often fills the gaps in civilian leadership during stability operations. With the Taliban horrors still a close memory, many Afghans simply responded better and felt more confident with military control and the security it represented. The military commander was invited to speak at civic engagements more frequently than Department of State representatives. To break this cycle, a comfort factor with civilian leadership can be developed through close interagency partnership. The Helmand PRT commander traveled routinely with a Department of State counterpart, with both giving complementary speeches. In areas of governance and mentoring elected officials, every opportunity was pursued for a civilian-led effort.

*Judicial reform . . . Afghan revenge
can be unique*

When asked why a 75-year-old Afghan man was in jail, the district police chief replied that his son had committed murder but could not be found, so the father was serving time in his stead. Following a kettle bomb explosion in his garage, one Afghan warlord told local police not to investigate further, he knew who did it and would take care of it . . . case closed. In rural Afghanistan, where law enforcement has little reach, a tribal shura or counsel of elders often decides criminal restitution.

In Afghanistan, cultural law, Islamic law, and constitutional/Western law are all equally pliable. What really matters is consensus and community acceptance. Absent the resources and infrastructure to maintain an adequate jail system, restitution or even personal retribution becomes a more efficient process by default. If a crime takes place in the remote countryside, the police are often hours away and often lack communication. They have to be given time to “gather a posse” and then, not unlike those from the Old West, begin to hunt the bad guys.

Sometimes restitution is meted out by a judge and, just as often, particularly with matters of honor, it is delivered personally. With the ability to apply constitutional law in an infancy stage, other methods do apply. It is often disingenuous to admonish Afghan law enforcement and judicial officials for not following what might be considered as due process until adequate systems are in place, such as courts and prisons, and the resources allocated to maintain them. What really matters is the acceptance of the Afghan people in matters of judicial resolution rather than outsider opinions.

Summary

During the 2005 national elections, Helmand Province, with its conservative makeup and once

the stronghold of Taliban support, surprisingly yielded Afghanistan’s youngest elected official. An 18-year-old female, the 2005 high school graduate was elected to the provincial counsel in an extremely competitive race. When asked to identify her constituency, she explained that many younger voters had supported her. In particular, young, educated, male voters who had become disillusioned and mistrustful of male officials. Many explained that only educated females should be elected because they are the least corruptible and best qualified to set the course for Afghanistan’s future.

Despite an intermittent insurgency, the opium trade, and the presence of religious extremism, this is just one example that, as Afghans continue on an upward generational plain that includes education, economic development, and independence, they will ultimately be able to disengage the dark side of humanity perpetuated by the Taliban and become peaceful international neighbors.

The Afghans of Helmand Province that I met seemed to respond best to a smaller military presence focused on setting the conditions for good governance, security, and economic development, as opposed to a larger foreign military presence that might act as a magnet for insurgents and be perceived as imposing to the average Afghan. Although this posture sometimes opened up remote villages and districts to Taliban activity, it also helped to alienate the insurgency as locals grew tired of their growing demands. The security concerns of a small PRT military footprint was partially mitigated by nonthreatening community engagement that helped reduce but not end instances of direct military activity against the PRT. This methodology, although challenging at a tactical level, had a positive response among local Afghans. Security conditions may dictate that larger future U.S Forces are assigned to Helmand Province or elsewhere in Afghanistan, however, these efforts

should only represent a transition for long-term economic and diplomatic engagement, and that means drinking a lot of chai.

Notes

Provincial Reconstruction Teams first appeared in Afghanistan in 2003 and were designed to bridge the broad gap between traditional military operations and nongovernmental aid. With a force protection element, they provide security for military civil affairs teams and others conducting stability operations, as well as serve as a platform for the activities of interagency partners, such as the Department of State, USAID, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in areas with a moderate risk environment. The PRT organization continues to evolve. Today, more than 20 PRTs operate in

Afghanistan, commanded by both U.S. and Coalition members.

About the Author

Colonel James A. Hogberg was assigned as a Marine individual augment to Task Force Bayonet (led by the Army's 173d Airborne Brigade), Combined Joint Task Force 76 (OEF-VI), and commanded the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team in Lashkar Gah throughout 2005. This 60- to 100-man Helmand PRT operated without the benefit of a maneuver battalion to help quell an intermittent level of insurgency. Although the PRT dealt with IEDs, small-arms fire, and several suicide bombing attempts, their only casualties (four wounded in action) took place outside the province while traveling to Kandahar by convoy.



Afghan national policemen receive training instruction from U.S. Marines with the help of an interpreter in Golestan, Farah Province, Afghanistan, on 10 December 2008. The Marines, assigned to Company K, 3d Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment (Reinforced), train the police to help strengthen overall security in Afghanistan. The 3/8 is the ground combat element of Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force-Afghanistan (SPMAGTF-A).

Photo courtesy of LCpl Brian D. Jones



Interview:

Major Thomas Clinton Jr.

*by Combat Studies Institute,
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas*

Major Thomas Clinton Jr., U.S. Marine Corps, deployed to Afghanistan in April 2004 to lead a 13-man embedded training team assigned to coach, teach, and mentor 1st Battalion, 3d Afghan National Army Brigade, which was considered a commando unit. The following has been edited from the original transcript for space constraints in this work.

Major Conrad Harvey

My name is Major Conrad Harvey (CH) and it is Monday, 12 March 2007. I'm interviewing Major Thomas Edward Clinton Jr. (TC). Can you go ahead and give me some of your service background?

Major Thomas Edward Clinton Jr.

I was commissioned in '93 in the United States Marine Corps through the Platoon Leader's Course. I went to 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, at the 1st Marine Division. I served as a platoon commander in a rifle company and a dragon's platoon commander in a weapons company. I served as a company executive officer (XO) and also as a rifle company commander, and then I went on to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and was part of Marines Barracks Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, for two years as a guard officer. I was the XO of Rifle Company Windward and then I was the commander of Headquarters Company at Guantanamo Bay.

I went to Amphibious Warfare School for a year, which is a Marine Corps career-level course, and then went on to command two companies in 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, one as a headquarters company commander and then later as a rifle company commander. I transferred to The Basic School in 2003, where I was head of the maneuver section [that] teaches all the tactics to brand new lieutenants coming into the Marine Corps. I was then a company commander and did an advisory tour for approximately six months with the Afghan National Army (ANA). I returned to the states and then transferred to be a student here at the Army's Command and General Staff College (CGSC).

CH: Can you . . . tell me about your experiences in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) since 9/11?

TC: I have two experiences with the 7th Marine Regiment and then . . . I did the advisory duty [that] was termed as embedded trainers to the ANA. That was a program that started at the end of the Taliban's rule after the Army's Special Forces (SF) had basically ejected the Taliban from Kabul and 3d Special Forces Group, I believe it was, immediately started to stand up the ANA, the initial battalion. Something that was kind of unique was that the battalion I was with, the 1st Battalion of the 3d Brigade, was considered a commando battalion. They were stood up by 3d Group; and then when 3d Group was taken away to hunt down [the] Taliban, [while] the Army National Guard, the Marine Corps and some regular Army, I guess, came in and assumed the mission of training and advising the fledgling ANA. [The] 1/3 Commando was the only one that had Marines at the time; they only had Marine advisors.

CH: Did you get any special training prior to that assignment?

TC: Unfortunately, no. The Marine Corps, in my opinion, did not learn its lessons well from Vietnam. At the time, it wasn't considered a dangerous billet; it was considered that you're going to go there and be almost like in a School of Infantry environment where you're going to train new recruits. Of the initial teams that went over, we were the third iteration. The first team that went over just did training and assist. The second team that went over, halfway through the tour, went into combat operations with them. They were authorized Title 10 to go on patrols and do combat operations. By the time we got there in April 2004, we were in full-on combat operations. The 1/3 guys were in combat operations, and they were pretty well versed in what they were doing. So that's the kind of thing we fell into. The training we got—the Marine Corps had an element at the time that was doing some training, advise-and-assist type stuff, but they were focused more on peacetime training. They had been sending guys to Georgia in the central Asia area, sending guys to Africa, and were assisting different forces, kind of like what the Marine Corps did during the small wars. They did a lot of police training, checkpoint training, and that type of thing in small units, probably no bigger than a platoon. But this was the first time, really, since the end of the Vietnam War in '72, that you had Marine advisors accompanying forces in combat operations in a strictly advise-and-assist role. That's one of the things that's the hardest to break Marines of, and even the chain of command you were working for—Army, Marine Corps, and SF. Guys did not realize that, at the end of the day, advisors are not commanding. Advisors are not in control unless all hell breaks loose. But never once did I have to take control of a situation other than to facilitate maybe air support or medical evacuation (medevac), or my guys would facilitate air support or

medevac. Only in those rare cases did we have to take control of a platoon, a company, or a battalion. That was a hard thing to deal with because a lot of people didn't realize that it was *their* army, *their* forces, and you had no constitutional authority to tell them, really, what to do. There were a lot of commanders who were talking to me as if I was the commander of that unit. I just told them that what they want to do is what they want to do. So our training, known as SCET, which stands for security, cooperation, education, and training—it used to be called special Coalition warfare, which I was referring to earlier. The Marine Corps was sending guys to South America and Georgia and were helping a lot of these police agencies and governments deal with drugs and things like that, but it was strictly in a peacetime role. So this SCET itself, at the time, really didn't have any cadre to train, didn't have any funding to train, didn't have a program of instruction, and there weren't any standards. As Marines have done throughout the ages, they've taken bits and pieces of things and adapted them, but—and I can speak for the team prior to us and the team after us—all the training was generated from initiative within the unit itself. We had a 13-man detachment, all senior enlisted and officers. We had one sergeant who eventually made staff sergeant while we were over there. So we did a lot of convoy-type training, reflexive shooting, went over the basics, taught classes to each other—patrolling, offense, defense, basic squad/platoon stuff. A lot of medical stuff, we did on our own. We did a lot of communications training to make sure we were up to speed on the radios and stuff which, remind me later, I'll talk about because the gear we fell in on was atrocious. When we got over there, the gear that the unit had was strictly for self-defense. There were some pistols, a couple carbines, but there weren't any tactical satellite (TACSAT) radios or machine guns or

light machine guns or any of that stuff you would think you would need to protect yourself in an environment like Afghanistan. At any given moment, you could find yourself in the middle of the wild, wild west. Guys would say that the Taliban were shooting at us. Well, how the hell do you know it's the Taliban? It could just be some p——d off local, for all you know. That's how wild the outer land is. But that's the training we had.

CH: Can you walk me through the process of getting into country and getting yourselves oriented?

TC: We got into country and the whole time we're being told by the Marine Corps side of the house that we're not going to be in combat operations, we're not doing any of that stuff. We're not allowed to do that. We're just going there for six months of training and then coming back. Fifteen days after we arrive in country, my guys are with companies in combat operations as a part of Task Force 31, which was an SF [Special Forces] task force operating out of Kandahar. So there went the "strictly training" thing. Fifteen days into it, my guys were coming under fire from whatever the action was—ambushes, raids, anything like that. So we spent about three months in Kandahar. That was a wacky relationship. We were attached to Task Force Phoenix, which was a multinational Coalition joint task force. At the time, it was commanded by a command element out of the National Guard from South Carolina, and then halfway through our tour they went home and a unit from Illinois came in. That was really difficult because in the National Guard group that was commanding and running—you had British, Germans, Canadians; we even had Mongols teaching artillery to the Afghans. So you had this big coalition of guys. The French were there teaching the officer corps and the British were teaching

the NCO [noncommissioned officer] corps, which makes for some interesting encounters. But you had all these guys training, and that's what they came to do was to strictly train.

At some point, somebody decided the Afghan Army had to get out of the training mode and go for what it's built for: to fight the enemies of the national government. So they were initially attached to SF units, and the advisors who were National Guard, Army, or Marine Corps would take these guys down to wherever they were going to operate in, hand them over to the SF guys and they would take them out on training missions, which is a weird thing. As a side note, I did not see at any time an SF unit engaged in training the national army. SF had their own little militia groups, which were their indigenous forces that they were using, much like they used them in Vietnam. They weren't training these guys to take over. They were training them to assist in hunting down and killing members of al-Qaeda or the Taliban. When we got there, we were allowed to go on missions with them. Here's the chain of command: each team was made up of a Marine captain and two staff sergeants (or a gunnery sergeant and a staff sergeant) and they would go with each of the companies. So you had one Marine captain who was advising and assisting the Afghan company commander. Oh, by the way, that company is attached to an SF operational detachment alpha (ODA), which has its own captain and chain of command. So you have these two units working together. Technically, the SF battalion has tactical control (TACON) over the Afghan battalion, but you're on loan from Task Force Phoenix and this is where the problems started.

We would come under fire—and especially with the second iteration of command from Task Force Phoenix. Task Force Phoenix was trying to tell us what we could and couldn't do tactically,

even though we were tactically under the control of the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF), which was commanded, I think, by Colonel Pat[rick M.] Higgins [USA] at the time, in 3d Group. So you had that going on. It was a weird combination. Then in my case, I'm at a firebase on the border with two of our Afghan companies and the battalion staff, and I got SF captains who are in this weird relationship with me. I outrank them, but they have tactical control of the area and I'm just there to advise and assist. They technically couldn't tell me what to do because I outranked them, but at the same time they had tactical control of what was going on, so it was a weird mix of what was going on but we made it work. We had really professional officers and staff NCOs on the Army side but it was a weird situation to go into. Technically, if it had been Vietnam, I would have been out there with the battalion and my guys and no SF or anything. Unfortunately, we were tied to SF because they controlled the areas of operation (AO) and they also backed us up because they had the ammunition and some of the weapons that we ended up having to borrow from them, so that made it difficult.

What really happened was that Task Force Phoenix never accepted the fact, in my opinion, that we had gone into combat operations. Training was over, or as one of my gunnery sergeants who was wounded (not seriously) while advising, said, "Sir, preseason is over. We're in the season and points are going up on the board. Unfortunately, Task Force Phoenix still thinks they're at training camp but actually we're already three games into the season and we're not doing well." But we did three months in Kandahar and did quite well. We didn't lose anybody, although we did have some minor wounded. No Americans from our side were wounded.

CH: Could you describe your AO, generally your working environment and your relations with the Afghans?

TC: Kandahar was a funny region and that, to me, is what you would call a classic counterinsurgency war. You knew the enemy was out there but nobody was giving them up. I probably talked to 10 or 15 Taliban on a weekly basis, but I just didn't know it—and they might have been Taliban because it was safer for them to be Taliban than it was to be a member of the Coalition. But the ANA commander, Colonel Mohammed Esok, was pretty professional as far as Afghans go. You have to accept the fact that Afghans are not Americans. Afghans do what they do to survive. There are a lot of rumors of Afghan commanders being drug dealers, gun runners, having their own militias. But at the end of the day, as an advisor, you have to count on them to protect you. In some cases, there are only two or three Americans with that Afghan unit at a time. We had guys saying, "Oh, that guy's dishonest. He's selling drugs and he's shaking down the locals." But you know what? That's the way of life there. They are not Arabs. Don't ever call Afghans that or they'll cut your throat. I had one guy yell at one of my guys because he called him an Arab, and he was pretty pissed about it. It's a very martial culture. They believe in the gun and the knife. But at the same time, they're not Americans and that means they don't do long-range patrols and they're not good at tactical discipline for long periods of time. They just don't function that way. They don't do well being away from their families. If you're taking a battalion that's been mustered in Kabul from the outlying areas and you go down south, there's no real phone system, there's no mail system, there's no Internet for them to use, and so keeping in contact with their families is very difficult and very trying.

When we go on a deployment for seven months to a year, we don't think much about it. But to them, it's a very debilitating thing. In fact, they thought very highly of us, the way we were spending all this time away from our families to help them. The ones who really did care were constantly saying thank you. You always knew they really liked you because they would ask you all kinds of in-depth question[s] about your family. Some of the guys were suspicious when they were trying to find out about our families, but they really care because that's how their culture functions. If they didn't care, they wouldn't ask you anything. Which goes back to the training. We got the hand-wave cultural stuff and the history and everything, and 90 percent of it was b——l s——t. We came back and actually fed a bunch of stuff back into the Marine Corps intelligence activity, telling them which of the cultural training was BS and which only applies to specific regions. "This only applies if you're in Herat on a Tuesday." There were all these Western visions, just like Iraq and everywhere else I've been in the Middle East. The U.S. has got it wrong. They think they know what the culture is because some Brit or American wrote it.

CH: Can you give me some examples?

TC: First of all, not all Afghans are devout Muslims. They're just like any other religion in America. You have ultra extreme Catholics, Baptists, Protestants, and then you have other guys who say they were raised a certain religion but don't go to church anymore. They don't stop and pray five times a day. If they were on mission, they didn't stop and pray. They were patrolling; they were serious. So Islam is not as strict as you think it is. Amongst the extremists it is, but within the ANA very rarely did I see anybody young praying. The

only time they would go to mosque is if they were back in garrison and the battalion commander, who is also the spiritual leader of the unit, made everybody go. But other than that, very rarely did I see any of our guys praying. I saw little groups here and there, but not everybody was this ultra extremist Islamic person. It's a good thing to rally to if they're in trouble, though.

There's another thing I like to call the "myth of the mujahideen," or the "myth of the muj'." The Afghans are tough fighters. Some of them will break and run, but I never saw it. In fact, I saw guys stand there when they should have taken cover get hit. But the myth of the muj' is that we think they're so fierce because they threw the Soviets out of Afghanistan. The Soviets, for a lack of a better word, f—d them up royally. And when the Spetsnaz got into that war—and you talk to someone like my battalion commander who was 17 and is Tajik. He fought in the mountains with Ahmad Shah Massoud. He was the real deal. This guy could barely walk from his injuries. But in a lot of these cases, a lot of these guys were wiped out. The thing I call the myth of the muj' is that they only fought when it was convenient for them. They would come down from the hills, a bunch of guys mustered, maybe smoke a couple hookah pipes and go down and assault a column of 100 tanks and trucks being driven by a bunch of conscript Afghans and Soviets, and then they would disappear for a month and not come back. On the other side, you had the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA), which we would like to say were all these dummies who didn't know what they were doing. But there were some Soviet trained Afghan officers who I would fight by their side today. They were extremely well versed in what they did and knew what they were doing. But it was interesting dynamics. You'd take these muj' who are a loose collection of guys, stick them

together with Soviet guys and Soviet discipline, which, you know, the old Soviet Army—you don't go on a head call or eat chow unless you're told to. So you mix this group of guys together and it makes this weird dynamic. They're not these freedom fighters who would stand until the last man. I mean, they'll break and run if it means they can live to fight another day. So there's a lot of myth about what they can and cannot do.

But it's funny, you have Soviet influence, you got muj' cultural influence, and now you're trying to slap decentralized training and command philosophy, Western philosophy, on top of this menagerie of guys with different backgrounds. Oh, and let's throw in the tribal too, because you got Tajik, Pashto, Hazara, all these weird groups, so it's a wacky dynamic. A lot of times, you spent a lot of your time trying to read the terrain. Some companies had a Hazara first sergeant or a Tajik first sergeant and the commanding officer was Pashto, and those two guys hated each other. The Tajiks are a very militant and proud people. I would liken the Tajiks to the Apaches. They're a warrior culture unto themselves. The Pashtos are a little bit more slick; they're always looking for an angle. Not that the Tajiks aren't, but the Tajiks would rather throw down with you in a knife fight. When it came down to it, the CIA would rather use Tajiks than Pashtos, because Tajiks would stand and fight. Pashto units were cowards. Not all, of course, but the guys who would break and run were Pashto. One of my company advisors, a guy named Captain Pat[rick T.] Faye, likened it to being as if we were in the *Godfather* movie constantly. You always felt like you were in that mafia atmosphere where everybody is smiling and hugging and everyone is a comrade, but you just never know when one guy is going to turn against another guy. There was a lot of infighting among the company commanders for positioning with the battalion commander.

When I was a battalion advisor, I had company commanders constantly talking to me trying to position themselves. They figured if they couldn't get to the battalion commander that day, they would come seek me out and try to position themselves, hoping I would say something positive. The staff was like that too, and I dealt with the staff mostly. But they would constantly be trying to pimp me, asking me what I thought the battalion commander was going to say about things. "Can you mention this to him? I would very much like to be promoted." My battalion commander was the same way. Toward the end, I had some issues with him. The Afghan upper echelon is very political. One day he said to me, "Major [Thomas] Clinton, I just got a letter from Major [Christopher M.] Bourne (ph)," who was my predecessor. I asked him what happened. "He's congratulating me on making full colonel." I said, "Really? When did that happen?" He wanted to know from me why I hadn't told him he had been selected for colonel. "Man, this is the first time I've heard about it." Then what I like to call my "street sense" clicked in and I asked him for the letter that he had in his hands. He quickly changed the subject to something else. There was no letter. He was pimping me to see if I could find out something because the promotion period was coming up. I wasn't really involved in that. We had to recommend officers for promotion. But once again, officers you recommended for promotion, we're basing that on American standards, whereas the Afghan Ministry of Defense, the brigade, and the corps headquarters were basing promotions on "Who will best support me?" That's not too dissimilar from the way the South Vietnamese military worked in the '60s. Guys were promoted, selected, and put into certain billets because of their political affiliation. But that's a little bit on the Afghan culture.

CH: So how was training the ANA?

TC: A lot of the training we did was at the forward operating bases (FOBs). Believe it or not, a lot of them are very good shots with AK-47s and even better shots with an M4 rifle and an M16. They understand the basics. They're willing to learn, they're really sponges, especially the senior enlisted and the junior enlisted. I've trained with and trained the Jordanians and trained with the Saudis. I've trained with the Eritreans and the Kuwaitis too, and everything is *insha' Allah* [if Allah wills]—and there wasn't a lot of that amongst the ANA. If we said we were training this day, we were training that day. Now, getting them to set the training up themselves was the hard part. We were at the point where we were trying to break them off the nipple with SF, and rightly so. They did everything for them. They facilitated the training and gave it to them. The Marine detachment who took over from the SF did the same thing. The guys before us were trying to wean them off and get them to plan their own training. That's when we ran into some problems. The logistics officer (S-4) couldn't do anything; he was really frozen—one, by his personality, that he was a lazy b——d, and I truly believe he was. The other one was reinforced by the fact that he could not request anything from brigade, because in order for him to request something from brigade, he would have to have his battalion commander's permission, then the battalion commander had to go get the brigade commander's permission to do this, and only then the S-4 could send it up. It was a pain and it was crazy. It just didn't function. My guys went nuts and after awhile I just learned to accept it as how they do business, though.

The battalion commander, when they finally got an arms room, could not go down. We as company commanders and battalion commanders,

the units could go down and draw their weapons as long as the armory was open and do whatever training. But there was only one key to the arms room and the brigade commander had it. Nobody else could draw and you had to have special permission to take weapons out of the arms room. The way I got around that is we stacked arms and we had fire watch in the barracks. I was done with that. There's a lot of ammunition hoarding amongst the highers, and I truly believe that's not their fault. They're culturally waiting for the next civil war. Hoarding was rampant throughout the ANA, and getting them to plan was very hard too. I know the brigade staff tried to get them to do brigade planning. Another thing about Afghan culture, when they're given the opportunity to stand up and talk to a group of people, stand by because they'll go on for hours. It's their chance to run their mouth formally. There's a reason why at the *shura* that only the old men speak—because they're short and to the point—whereas the young guys haven't learned that yet. Training them at the company, platoon, and squad level was relatively easy compared to training staff functioning. Company-, platoon-, and squad-level tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs)—attack, defense, patrol—they're very good and picked it right up. They had been doing it for a while, and we constantly remediated. I think that was the only hard part; they couldn't understand “We did it right once, why do we have to continue to do it?” Well, because you get rusty and you have to continue to remediate and you have new guys coming in and there's different configurations.

Training brigade and battalion staff was hard. We didn't do a lot of it, and if we did, it would have never been reinforced. We went to Kandahar, worked for CJSOTF, came back to Kabul, went back onto Phoenix, did some training and they went on leave, then we went back to CJSOTF, this

time on the border. CJSOTF would take these guys, just break them up into companies and then let them function as a battalion. Everybody is yelling, not at me personally, but they're c—k-sucker-ing the system asking why these guys can't function as a battalion. Well, you're never going to let them function as a battalion. You're basically training little mercenary companies for the SF to back up their militia. Some of my guys ran into trouble with that. Some of the SF guys believed that the militia was in control of an area and that was it, and the militia was shaking down the locals for cash. One of our Afghan company commanders, who I think was a very righteous guy and really believed in the cause, had issues with that and threatened to kill the militia commander. The SF guys had the balls to say something to one of my captains, saying it was b—l s—t and that this was the militia's area. I had to point out to the SF captain that the only legitimate army in Afghanistan is the ANA and the militias were only to be used in FOB defense.

The militias were being used in offensive actions; and from my understanding when I got into country, they were not supposed to be used for offensive actions, but they were doing it. That's the other broken thing, which might have changed. Of course, it's been three years now. But you had two armies. You had the legitimate ANA, which was trying very hard to build up. The guys don't get paid much, there's no pension at the time, there's no incentive other than you get three hots, a cot, and [a] roof over your head. And if they deployed down to Kandahar or the border, they got deployment pay. Well, the militia is getting paid 10 times what an Afghan soldier was getting paid, and I can't remember the figures off my head. I'd have to look them up. So what's the incentive to join the ANA? So in a way, the SF effort was really shooting the national army effort in the foot, in my opinion.

I just don't understand why SF wasn't strictly in the advise, assist, and train mode like they were supposed to be doing. Now, granted, I know there had to be some SF to hunt down and kill guys, but who better to do it with than the locals?

Going back to this whole weird chain of command thing, you just didn't know where you stood half the time. It was a weird dynamic having been in the Marine Corps for, at that point, several years. There's no manual that showed me how to function this way. It was really frustrating how jacked up it was. We didn't have proper equipment. I had made several requests up the chain to the point where I became such a nuisance with everybody that Lieutenant General Wallace [C.] Gregson [Jr.], who was the U.S. Marine Corps Central Command (MarCent) commander, sent his deputy out to find out what was going on. He flew out and was the first officer above the rank of major who had ever come out and seen us in the five months we had been there. We were kind of out of sight, out of mind. When the National Guard command changed over, the general in charge made a decree that no Afghan unit will operate in anything smaller than a company. Well, every day my guys are sending out squad-size to platoon-size patrols like you would do with any Army or Marine company in your sector. You have to keep pressure on the enemy and you need to know what's out there. You're doing stability operations. You're walking through the same village every day, you're shaking hands, you're getting to know your environment, you get to kind of pick out who's squirrely and maybe spend enough time with the village elders smoking the peace pipe, drinking chai tea, and smoking their crappy cigarettes, and you get to know them.

Much like we're learning now: you get to know them and after a while you've known this guy for two months. He's the guy who's going to

show up or one day pull you aside and say, "There are some guys in town who don't belong here." He'll give you a heads up. My beef is that they told us we couldn't operate with less than a company. That's BS! You can't tell me that. First of all, you *can't* tell me that. I'm TACON'd to the CJSOTF. They said they had already talked with SF who said they would not employ us that way. I told them that's not the way you function in a combat environment. You can't do company-size patrols every day; it's just physically impossible. Plus, you don't need a company full of Afghans charging through a village every day.

They made silly decrees, and it was all based on the fact that they never came out and saw what the common operational environment was out there. Their whole time was spent inside the Kabul region, going from Bagram to Kabul, maybe flying down to Kandahar, maybe going out to Herat on a windshield tour. But the higher command never came out and saw what the hell was going on. That was the same, I think, for a lot of the Army National Guard and Army guys who were doing it. It goes back to my thing that they never wanted to accept the fact that we had trained in the continental United States (CONUS) to train Afghans and that was it. They never considered us going into combat operations, so when the situation changed, they continued to do what they trained to do. It's a shame because there are some great American advisors in those other units who were doing a great job kicking a——s and taking names. They were just wearing an Army uniform or a National Guard uniform. But they were all being crippled, in my opinion, by the total incompetence and ineptitude of the f——g chain of command to realize what was going on. The sad thing is that they finally stopped harassing me after an ambush in which two SF soldiers were unfortunately killed. My gunny was severely wounded, I

had 18 Afghans wounded, and 2 of our interpreters were shot up, not to mention we lost several vehicles. Then, and only then, did they realize, “Holy s——t!” And the first thing anybody really cared about was whether or not they were wearing their body armor and how come we were driving around in pickup trucks. Well, because that’s the only thing we had.

CH: You were saying that there were some equipment issues . . .

TC: When we started off, we had an iridium phone and everybody had a 9mm pistol and an M4 carbine. We had no night-vision equipment, no aiming lights, or anything like that. We had the iridium phone and seven PRC-119s. We had no TACSAT and the iridium phone was only to be used in case of emergency and there was only one—and we had five companies in the battalion—you do the math. That was our link to the outside world and it was a shame because we did two separate 18-hour convoys from Kabul to Kandahar with no overnight site or anything. It was a straight shot of 18 hours of driving, and we were all done on our iridium phone. That would be like driving from Massachusetts to Florida and not talking to anybody until you get down to Florida. It was disgusting. Looking back on it now, I’m so glad nobody ambushed us because it would have been days until somebody figured out what happened to us.

The only thing that gave us security was that we had over 500 Afghans who were well armed. They had old Soviet stuff. They had recoilless rifles, machine guns, RPKs, RPGs, AK-74s, AK-47s—you name it. But for the advisors, we had very little in the way of equipment. We had no up-armored Humvees. The Humvee we did have was the hangar queen that one of the Marine

expeditionary units (MEUs) had left behind from 2001. We found out the hard way that, when you put armor on it and it’s not designed to carry all that weight, it overheats the engine and destroys it, especially in the 100-degree heat of Kandahar. We found out that pickup trucks were the best thing to use because they could be fixed on the local economy and, believe it or not, they could take a lot of punishment and you could put six Afghan soldiers in the back of a little Toyota HiLux pickup. We also got pretty good at rigging radios and stuff in those things to be able to talk. I mean, it looked like *Road Warrior*. We actually had an old Soviet 12.7mm machine gun off of a tank or something mounted in the back of one of our vehicles, but that’s the type of equipment we had. It wasn’t until the end and the team that replaced us that we got the multiband inter/intra team radios (MBITRs) and headsets. We had a hard time when we went in country trying to find small arms protective insert (SAPI) plates for our Kevlars. Nobody wanted to give us SAPI plates because there was so much worry about losing control of the item. So we didn’t have a lot of that stuff.

We had very poor medical equipment. Thanks to 1st Battalion, 3d Special Forces Group’s doctors, they gave us more than we could ever imagine—everything from IV kits, tourniquets, to anything you needed, you name it. We found out the hard way that the stuff you crush up, the clotting agent, doesn’t work. It causes guys to go into shock, or if you don’t wash it out and you leave it there, it burns. We had a lot of equipment issues. I think the Marine gods were probably smiling and laughing at us, but we were doing what Marines have probably done throughout the centuries—begging, borrowing, or stealing from anywhere we could. We borrowed shit from the New Zealand SF guys. We had nothing but ball ammunition.

When I got to Kandahar, we came out of there with grenades, antitank rockets. Somebody asked me why I needed antitank rockets and I said because the Taliban still had tanks in some places and BMPs [*Boyevaya Mashina Pekhoty*, or infantry fighting vehicle] dug in in some of their strongholds. Not to mention an AT4 [antitank weapon] does a good job on a truck with a bunch of bad guys in it. So we had a lot of equipment issues, but I think that's been overcome now. The teams that followed us, in fact there are two Marine teams in country now that have pretty good equipment. They have the MBITRs and they have up-armored Humvees, but at that time it was taking a while for the idea to materialize that we've gone from training to combat operations. . . . That was another weird thing. We had a guy show up with no desert utilities who had to go and buy desert utilities, which was interesting. The ANA wears the old Marine Corps/Army woodland uniforms. SF guys wear a variety of things, but their militia wore the same uniforms as they did.

My big thing was, why were we wearing desert uniforms when we should be wearing what the ANA is wearing? Marine Corps advisors in Vietnam adopted the same dress as the Vietnamese battalions because they didn't want to stick out. But the typical Marine Corps or Army straight-leg guys were saying "Oh no. That's not an issued uniform. You can't wear that." But they weren't the guy walking around as the only guy wearing desert utilities with a radio on his back and a map on a patrol alongside the battalion commander. Who do you think the Taliban or al-Qaeda is going to shoot first? They are going to hit the guy with the radio. They knew. Hit the guy with the radio, the American. One time, we were ambushed and the first things they attacked were the .50-cals on the vehicles and they shot at all the Americans. They knew if they could take us out that the Afghans

would be in trouble. Luckily they weren't very good shots.

CH: What are some of the TTPs that you came away with?

TC: If you're going to be an advisor, you're not making a U.S. soldier or a U.S. Marine out of them. You're making them a good soldier, a good fighter who can do the basics. You could try to impart some of your ethos and stuff on them, but you have to do it within their culture. So remember, they're not Americans. There are some cultural things where you just have to look the other way. We have things we call redlines. We knew the battalion commander and some of the company commanders were skimming money. They were taking money from their soldiers as tribute. Can I prove it? Not really. But did the soldiers really complain? No. But our thing was that if the soldiers started complaining, we would probably look into it. Physical abuse was a redline. We did not tolerate physical abuse. That was difficult because a lot of these DRA guys were taught that way. That's how the Soviets disciplined their soldiers, through physical abuse. You have to accept the fact that, much like Arabs, they won't tell you the truth. They're going to avoid it to save face. I always tried to make it sound like it's their idea and I always praised them. Your best Marine or soldier is not always your best advisor. You have to have patience. You have to be willing (and this is going to sound weird) to be humiliated, but not to the point where it's going to scar your reputation.

CH: Could you give an example of that?

TC: Sure. At the time, we paid the battalion. We would go down to Task Force Phoenix, which was in Kabul, and we would get the money. It was like

in the old days of the Corps and the Army, you were the paymaster. But the deal was that their personnel officer (S-1) maintained accountability. So, just like the old days, if you weren't there on a day, if you decided to have an unauthorized absence, you didn't get paid for that day. So say you were there for all 30 days, you were paid for all 30 days. I think they were always trying to manipulate the system to see if they could get more money out of us. But what happened was that they were slow. The only way you could get the money was after they verified who was who and they were all there. There was some certification process that I can't remember off the top of my head. The paymasters would deal out the Afghan money to us and then we would take it back and pay them. Well, they were late in doing it, which delayed them going on leave because they have to go on leave. There are no banking systems so they have to take the money home. Well, the battalion commander was fuming, and it was completely his staff's fault. They blew it out their a—s. He came in and told us he was in trouble, and I knew it because the battalion was p—d. The troops were getting restless; you could see it. The battalion commander was on the hot plate. He told me I had to tell the battalion that they were not going to get paid today—and I bit my tongue. And it was the best thing I ever did, and this is why.

I went out there in front of the whole battalion and told them through the translator that it was my fault and my fault alone. I accepted the responsibility. If they were going to be mad at anybody, they could be p—d at me. I told them I apologized and basically threw myself on my sword. From that day on, I had the battalion commander in the palm of my hand because he knew I was willing to take a shot to the face for him. I don't know if he was testing me or not, but I've thought about this over the years and talked to my

wife and some other people about it, and actually talked to my brother about it too. (He's a Marine himself.) I really think he was testing me to see if I was going to stick up for him. After that, I had a bodyguard assigned to me, I had my own radio operator—I mean, this was after three months into it. We had a good relationship. So what I'm saying is that you got to be willing to put up with some BS to make some strides. Don't put your values aside, don't go native, but there are some things you have to learn and sometimes you smash into them. Another thing we didn't tolerate—one of my captains caught a company commander taking money off of a dead Afghan soldier, and we crucified him. Not literally, but he was done. He's lucky the first sergeant didn't drag him off and shoot him in the bushes. He was pilfering money off a dead soldier. He claimed he was going to send it to the guy's family. I asked him how, there wasn't any mail system. Some other things—have utmost patience and remember you are never in command. You are an American first and never do anything to compromise your principles as an American soldier or Marine. Don't ever do that. But at the same time, you have to be willing to take some body blows. You have to humble yourself. You need to know your stuff, because they expect you to know it. Just like your Marines or soldiers expect you to know your job, you better know your stuff and then some, because they're really looking to you to learn.

Another TTP is to get used to drinking tea, get used to smoking, get used to sitting around and shooting ragtime, because that's how they do business. Having worked in the Middle East quite a bit and in Afghanistan, talk about your family and bring pictures of your kids. Not your wife, but your kids. In fact, Colonel Esok has several pictures of my kids that he kept in his office and, as of a year ago, I know they're still there because

the other advisor had seen them. But that's a sign of kinship and clanship among the Tajiks at least, I believe. They are a very family oriented people. The family is everything to them. The one truism is: don't ever talk about wives. Colonel Esok is a little bit Westernized; he had been trained in Britain. He was taken out during the war and trained there, so he would make some jokes about being careful or else my first wife would have my a——s. But I never joked to him about his wife. I just never did it. He would make some jokes, but nothing bad. You must know your stuff, the culture, and then don't be wedded to what you have been told culture wise. Don't be afraid to ask about something being true or not.

CH: What about the religious aspects?

TC: My Afghan commander, Colonel Esok, was a strict Muslim, but he never pushed Islam on anybody else unless you were an Afghan. He wasn't any different than any nun or priest when I was growing up. Colonel Esok was very concerned about my spiritual well-being, though. He would ask me if I had prayed today to God. Muslims, at least this brand of Islam, recognize Jesus as a prophet. Don't bring up religion with them, but if they bring it up talk to them about it. I asked all kinds of questions. In fact, if you want to learn more about Islam, talk to a Muslim about Islam. Some of the Americans got upset with me. They wanted to know why I was talking about Islam. They'd ask me what I did today and I told them I had spent six hours in a philosophical discussion about Islam and Christianity with Colonel Esok. They couldn't believe I had done that, but I explained that he's the one who brought it up. I'll tell you what, I learned a lot talking to him. Make every effort to learn the language. We worked with our interpreters at night to learn the language, and

don't be shy to use it. They'll laugh and make fun of you as you pronounce words wrong, but they'll help you. Every little bit helps because it shows you give a s——t.

Just like with your soldiers and Marines, don't become wedded to those guys or don't become friendly with them. Be cordial, but with Afghans, especially, because they don't understand. If you show the enlisted guys any amount of attention or stuff like that, that's bad news if you're going to Afghanistan. I would not do that. You have to remember too that a lot of these guys don't read or write. They really don't know anything about current events outside what they're told. Some of them are farm boys. Some of the city guys do know. You have to remember that a lot of these guys grew up in Pakistan, so their vision of the world is limited. Unfortunately, six months is not long enough. We should have been there a year, living with that battalion. That's what the Marines and Army did in Vietnam. They stayed for a year. Not a full year, but sometimes longer than six months.

Also, use common sense. If it feels wrong and smells wrong, it is wrong. But you definitely have to put a cultural filter to everything you're doing. You know the old saying, "Think before you open your mouth"? You really have to think and then think like an Afghan or an Iraqi or a Saudi. How is that going to be viewed when you open your mouth? If you're a field grade officer, they recognize the rank structure. If you're senior enlisted, like a gunny or a first sergeant or a sergeant first class, they recognize us. So when you open your mouth, you're speaking with the authority of the U.S. military. Don't promise stuff you can't deliver. I got boxed into a lot of stuff. They try to shame you, but so what? You don't know how many times my battalion commander would get upset with me: "You promised me." I said, "I didn't promise you anything. I said I'd look into it, but I don't have the

money to pay for this.” Afghans think that anybody who raises their voice and yells is a crazy person. So yelling and screaming like we’re used to to get a point across doesn’t do anything and you immediately lose credibility. Instead, don’t show up to a meeting. That sends a better message. On several occasions, I would show up late to prove a point. Afghans think they’re pretty good about keeping time, but they’re not. It depends on how they’re feeling that day. I was punctual when I wanted to be punctual and there were other times when I wanted to prove a point.

Like Colonel Esok wanted to talk to me because he had gone out and spent some money thinking I was going to back pay him. He went out and bought some equipment off the black market because they were so badly supplied. We had to buy socks and things like that because getting something from [the] supply system was like getting blood out of a stone. After I told him not to buy it, yet because I didn’t have the money, he went out and bought these ICOM radios, these little hand held radios, anyway. He was buying them from a buddy of his and he was getting a kick-back from us. So say they were 50 bucks a piece. They were probably 20 bucks a piece and he was getting 30—and they probably stole them from somebody else. But I got wise to that early on. It goes back to what we were talking about. You’re living in almost a mafia-type society . . .

CH: What about any operational TTPs?

TC: We did classic counterinsurgency—patrols, looking through the villages. Another TTP is that if you’re working with indigenous forces, send them into the village and let them do the talking. Make it look like you’re almost serving them, that you’re just another trooper or Marine with the unit. That helps out a lot. Kids like to talk to Americans, but

be careful about talking and giving stuff to kids because the enemy will target them and do horrible, horrible things to children. So be careful with what you do with children. A lot of guys like to give them candy and stuff, and we stopped them right away from doing that. One, because it’s dangerous. Any time a U.S. unit rolled through, some of the kids were throwing themselves at the front of the vehicles to get you to stop because they were trying to get something from you. I never saw it, but there were reports of Taliban mutilating and killing children because they took candy from Americans. I believe it, I just never saw it. So you have to be careful of that. But always put an indigenous face on it. My thing was to play up to their national pride, speaking specifically about Afghanistan. They are a nation unlike the Iraqis. They want to have a central government and they want to believe they’re a world player, but they don’t want the central government telling them what to do—although they want all the benefits, just like Americans. I don’t want to pay taxes, but I want nice roads, cops, firemen, Social Security—but I don’t want to pay any taxes.

They’re no different than Americans. They want roads, schools, water, wells, all this stuff. Wait until they try to institute a DMV [Department of Motor Vehicles] over there. I mean, everybody has a vehicle. Compared to them, the Afghans think Americans have money coming out of their butts. I gave a class once on the American Revolution 101. I talked about taxation and all this stuff. When I started talking about the taxation piece with England, they asked what taxes were. I started explaining that it was much like your warlords who used to tax people. “Oh no, that’s just stealing.” Then I had to explain the whole tax thing. The officers were enthralled because they didn’t have any concept of taxes. There’s no real concept of a central government that has all

this overarching power from Asadabad to Herat in the west down to Kalat and Kandahar in the south and Spin Boldak and Mazar-e Sharif to the north. They have no concept of a government agency that taxes and does all that stuff, so that's an education. So when you thought all the mathematics and history you had in college and high school didn't count, I'll tell you what, I was on Google making sure that what I was saying was right when I had the chance. Teaching them about America. That's how you get guys to talk about their government and how they think things are going. They'll open up then. From an advisor's standpoint, be yourself and be personable. If you're

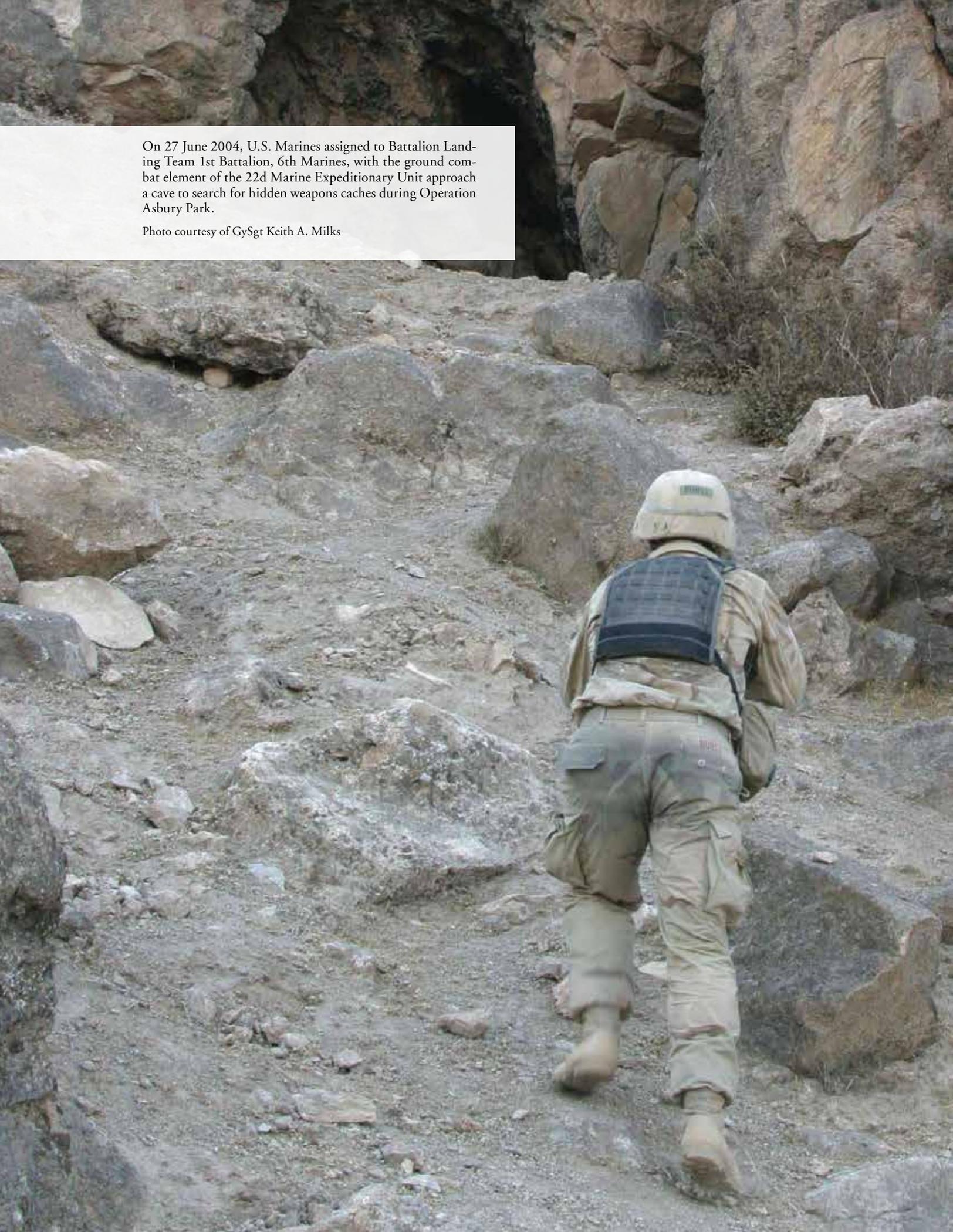
going there to get a combat tour, thinking you're going to get yours and win a medal, you're in the wrong business. I can count on both hands how many times I was shot at, and most of them were not firefights. Those things were like gunfights at the OK Corral and there's like five or six guys at the most. I watched a guy step out who literally tried to spray a platoon of Afghan soldiers and they let him have it.

Note

Oral history courtesy of the Operational Leadership Experiences Program of the Combat Studies Institute.

On 27 June 2004, U.S. Marines assigned to Battalion Landing Team 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, with the ground combat element of the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit approach a cave to search for hidden weapons caches during Operation Asbury Park.

Photo courtesy of GySgt Keith A. Milks





Marines Deliver in Mountain Storm

*by Colonel Kenneth F. McKenzie,
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U.S. Marine Corps*

*U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings,
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In winter 2004, the U.S. Central Command committed its theater reserve, the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (22d MEU[SOC]), into central Afghanistan to serve as the main effort of Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) 180's Operation Mountain Storm. The operation was designed to preempt a long-anticipated Taliban "spring offensive" and help set the conditions for successful voter registration and national-level elections.

The operational concept developed by CJTF-180 planners called for the 22d MEU to enter Afghanistan through the southern airfield of Kandahar in March 2004. The physical and logistical challenges were daunting. Located in southern Afghanistan, Kandahar Airfield lies just 10 miles southeast of the former Taliban capital, Kandahar City. The ship-to-shore movement to Kandahar Airfield required the MEU to traverse southern Pakistan's Baluchistan region, one of the most rugged and remote lands in the world. Avoiding the 8,000-foot ridges with rotary-wing aircraft lengthened the transit to 420 miles.

Difficult Terrain

After force closure at Kandahar, the MEU struck north 80 miles to operate in the Oruzgan Province area. By way of bone-jarring routes leading north from Kandahar City, there are only two main passes that afford operational access to Oruzgan Province. They cut through the 8,000-foot ridgeline that separates Oruzgan from Kandahar Province and were to occupy much of the MEU's attention as it transitioned to Tarin Kowt, the capital of Oruzgan.

Oruzgan Province stretches about 130 miles north to south and 95 miles east to west. With poor unpaved "roads" and deep, narrow passes, Tarin Kowt was home to Mullah Omar and his family during the Soviet occupation in the 1980s. The province, long considered a Taliban stronghold, is suited ideally to insurgency because of its geography and isolated populace. It is dominated by some of the most hardline ethnic Pashtuns in the country—people who reflect the rugged mountains around them.

At the heart of the MEU's area of operations (AO) was Tarin Kowt, a small town of 17,000. The lush vegetation that follows several watersheds leading down to the town contrasts sharply with the steep, arid mountains that surround it. At the bottom of the Tarin Kowt "bowl" (at 4,400 feet) was an old abandoned dirt airstrip that became the centerpiece of the 22d MEU's air-ground operations.

Mission Analysis

Before forces began to move, MEU planners and subordinate commanders visited Bagram twice to conduct detailed planning with the CJTF-180 staff, the core of which came from the Army's 10th Mountain Division.¹ The task force staff incorporated the 22d MEU's staff in all facets of operations plan development. Thus, the MEU clearly understood the joint task force (JTF) commander's

intent. Two early decisions by CJTF-180 were key to effective operations: the MEU was to function as a Marine air-ground task force (MAGTF) and was assigned its own AO, with attendant freedom of movement.

Based on analysis of the campaign plan, 22d MEU planners developed a mission statement:

Commencing 25 April 2004, 22d MEU (SOC) conducts combat operations to defeat anti-Coalition militants (ACMs), secure major population areas, and support civil-military operations (CMO) in AO Linebacker to create a secure and stable environment in order to facilitate United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)-sponsored voter registration and elections.

The MEU's primary task was to set the conditions for a safe election process leading to [the] establishment of a secure and stable government in Afghanistan. This entailed finding and defeating anti-Coalition forces, securing major population areas, and supporting civil-military operations across the MEU's AO—with the emphasis on voter registration.

The MEU commander's intent provided the working framework for mission accomplishment:

- Develop a bottom-to-top intelligence architecture capable of identifying locations of anti-Coalition leaders and enablers, areas of sanctuary, and infiltration lanes. The intent was to gather and fuse intelligence at the MEU level without being entirely dependent on higher sources. The previous work of Special Forces and other agencies in the AO was most helpful in this regard.
- Provide a visible security environment for voter registration.
- Capitalize on MAGTF flexibility to conduct

intelligence-driven combat operations against enemy forces.

- Aggressively link combat and civil-military operations to achieve long-term security.
- Take advantage of existing CJTF-180 capabilities and work closely with higher, adjacent, and supporting units.
- Develop the infrastructure and logistical capability austerely so as to fight the MEU without detracting from support to front-line forces.
- Because the fight will be carried by non-commissioned officers, tailor combat support and combat service support to meet their requirements.

Campaign Planning and Execution

The 22d MEU designed a four-phase operation that capitalized on MAGTF strength while leveraging joint and national assets. **Phase I (25 March–24 April)** consisted of shaping operations. Based from Kandahar, the MEU executed a series of five, long-range, overt patrols into Oruzgan Province. Moving in high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles (HMMWVs) and locally procured vehicles, the MEU capitalized on support provided by Special Forces teams operating in the area and used its Maritime Special-Purpose Force as the main effort. These initial operations were designed to study the terrain, select a site for the MEU forward operating base (FOB), begin contacts with the local populace to help identify Taliban leaders, and establish a working relationship with the Oruzgan provincial governor, Jan Mohammed Khan.

The MEU commander accompanied Marines on one of the operations and spent two days with Mohammed at his gubernatorial headquarters in Tarin Kowt. After the initial contact, a Marine field-grade officer equipped with secure communications

was assigned to the governor's entourage. The value of these liaison efforts in the subsequent phases of Mountain Storm cannot be overemphasized.

The 22d MEU first gained contact with the enemy during the shaping phase. While moving through the 6,600-foot defile known as Central Pass, a convoy was ambushed by direct fire and a remote-controlled improvised explosive device (IED). A medium tactical vehicle replacement (MTVR) was destroyed by the Italian antitank mine that formed the core of the IED and one Marine was injured severely. (This was the only effective IED attack against the 22d MEU during its seven-month deployment.)

Phase II (25 April–10 May) was devoted to securing the Tarin Kowt bowl. After arriving in the province, the MEU concentrated on establishing its FOB near Tarin Kowt. A strategic imperative of the Taliban was to ensure that Oruzgan Province remained isolated from the rest of Afghanistan, thereby affording safety to Taliban operations and support.

Establishment of the FOB was critical to the MEU's concept of sustainment and combat power projection. Named after Marine Colonel John W. Ripley of Dong Ha fame, the base would feature a 6,000-foot runway, a complete helicopter fueling and rearming point, and 13 helicopter landing pads. The MEU command-and-control center was set up in the middle of the Oruzgan bowl. Until the airstrip became operational, however, all equipment and resupply had to traverse the 85 miles from Kandahar over Route Tiger, a two-day trip on primitive, vehicle-destroying roads ripe with ambush sites.

Two combat operations served as a shield behind which MEU [Marine] Service Support Group 22 [MSSG-22] and the command element deployed to FOB Ripley. The MEU air combat element, Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 266

(Reinforced) [HMM-266], helilifted two reinforced rifle companies into AOs Georgia and Alabama; a third company was landed in AO North Carolina. The air assaults attacked Taliban elements in areas they viewed as safe and provided cover for movement of the six large convoys that carried the bulk of the MEU's logistical support infrastructure to Ripley.

While these operations netted large weapons caches—especially in AO Georgia—the greater effect was to directly challenge the Taliban's ability to continue to isolate Oruzgan. Establishment of the command-and-control center at FOB Ripley ended Phase II. The 22d MEU had positioned itself right in the Taliban's backyard.

Phase III (11–31 May) featured intelligence-driven operations aimed at facilitating voter registration. Oruzgan Province had long been denied to UN voter registration workers because of well-founded concerns about personal safety. To this end, Phase III operations focused on clearing Taliban forces from southern Oruzgan, improving the security environment, and—most important—initiating voter registration.

In early April, the MEU commander and key staff officers met with Southern Region UNAMA officials in Kandahar to discuss the way ahead. There was consensus that the most important step would be to create the visible perception that the security situation would allow voter registration to proceed unmolested. Agreements were reached between the MEU and UNAMA to provide area security for voter registration sites, action plans for countering attacks, and medical evacuation support. An overarching plan was crafted for initiating and expanding voter registration throughout Oruzgan Province.

Hand in hand with voter registration was initiation of a broad array of civil affairs projects designed to show a credible alternative to the

negative path offered by the Taliban. Under the MEU's direction, numerous civil affairs projects were initiated in Oruzgan and northern Kandahar Province, and extensive medical and dental outreach programs were initiated.

Underwriting these long-term projects were combat activities. Operations Thunderball in AO Tennessee and Bladerunner I in AO Kentucky were directed against enemy elements operating in southern Oruzgan. These HMMWV and MTRV-mobile actions were built around heavily reinforced rifle companies and the battalion mobile command post. Contact was light throughout these operations because the enemy chose to withdraw rather than face Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 1/6.

As the MEU progressed through Phase III, it became clear that the threat to Tarin Kowt did not lie in the villages and bottomland of the Oruzgan bowl. Instead, anti-Coalition elements were concentrated in the distant highlands that ringed the bowl: Dey Chopan to the east and Cehar Cineh to the west. In the narrow valleys and almost completely inaccessible high ground of the two areas, Taliban sanctuary had been persistent and arrogantly self-confident. When voter registration began in earnest in Tarin Kowt and started to spread to the outlying districts, MEU planners focused on the high ground to the east.

Phase IV (1 June–13 July) built on earlier operations that had created the necessary logistical infrastructure, established security for voter registration and civil affairs work, and identified the rough foundation of the Taliban presence. Decisive combat operations against Taliban concentrations and sanctuaries would force the enemy to respond to the MEU's activities in Oruzgan.

On 1 June, BLT 1/6 embarked on Operation Asbury Park to directly target the Taliban stronghold in the Dey Chopan highlands. This proved to be one of the most effective operations



Photo courtesy of Gunnery Sgt. Keith A. Milks

The headquarters element of Charlie Company, BLT 1/6, the ground combat element of the 22d MEU(SOC), coordinate the search of the village of Miam Do, Afghanistan, for Taliban insurgents and weapons caches during Operation Thunder Road on 29 June 2004.

in Afghanistan since Coalition forces entered the country in October 2001.

For two weeks, moving exclusively in HMMWVs and locally procured Toyota Hi-Luxs and Land Rovers, the BLT engaged Taliban forces eight times. Reinforced with Afghan Militia Forces and accompanied by Governor Jan Mohammed, the Marines employed every available platform for close air support: [Lockheed] AC-130s, [Boeing] B-1Bs, [Fairchild-Republic] A-10s, [McDonnell Douglas] AV-8Bs, and Marine and Army attack helicopters. During this sustained operation, 85 Taliban were killed; another 40 probably were killed in closed-up caves or inaccessible high ground. The fighting ranged from air strikes to intense close-range

infantry engagements. In a testament to the leadership, fighting skills, and tactical acumen of small-unit leaders, no Marines were killed and only 14 were wounded.

Based largely on the success of Asbury Park and supporting operations, the combatant commander extended the 22d MEU's Afghanistan deployment by 30 days. On receiving this decision, CJTF-76 put the 2d Battalion, 5th Infantry (2/5), of the Army's 25th Infantry Division (Light) under the tactical control of the MEU. Now with two ground maneuver battalions, the MEU developed a plan to exploit the success of Asbury Park.

Commencing Operation Thunder Road, BLT 1/6 moved quickly into the Cehar Cineh area,

accompanied by the governor and Afghani forces. Located in the western part of AO Linebacker, the Taliban had yet to surrender Cehar Cineh to conventional forces. Concurrently, in Operation Asbury Park II, 2/5 Infantry relied extensively on its organic artillery and mortars and exploited the success of BLT 1/6 in the Dey Chopan area.

Both operations continued to dislodge enemy combatants from sanctuaries. While many weapons caches were uncovered, it soon became apparent that they had no more stomach for fighting. With Taliban authority effectively neutralized, the MEU took advantage of the two battalions' offensives by reinforcing security, accelerating civil military projects, and initiating voter registration.

Application of MAGTF doctrine and concepts was of prime importance to the MEU. Simultaneously leading two maneuver battalions and as many as five separate company/platoon teams required detailed planning and careful application of resources, especially given highly mobile operations and missions as diverse as providing security for women's health clinics and applying artillery, air, and theater intelligence assets to attack the Taliban. In addition, being weighted as the CJTF's main effort gave the MEU tactical and logistic support that a MAGTF is well equipped to employ.

Results

In the short term, the security environment in Oruzgan Province improved dramatically. Thousands of ordnance systems, weapons, and other combat implements were destroyed. The MEU was in contact 32 times and confirmed 101 enemy killed and another 50 probable kills, including several key Taliban leaders. Attacks against Coalition forces declined to nearly zero in Oruzgan and northern Kandahar provinces. Most significantly, attacks also declined to the south in and around

Kandahar City and the ring road to Kabul. These were decisive and measurable military effects but, as with everything in Afghanistan, only time will tell if they have long-term benefits.

Nonetheless, it is clear that improved security permitted the introduction of programs that will have the greatest effect on long-term security. The MEU's operations permitted the introduction of UNAMA voter registration teams; 58,357 Afghan citizens were registered in Oruzgan between 1 May and 10 July. These efforts represented more than 44 percent of UNAMA's provincial goal and helped overcome the initial hurdle of demonstrating to the populace that safe elections were possible in Afghanistan. Voter registration went hand in hand with 108 civil affairs projects that provided long-range hope for Afghanistan: for example, well digging, establishment of schools, and road and infrastructure improvement. An aggressive medical and dental outreach program cared for 2,000 patients, many of whom received assistance for the first time.

Conclusions

The early decision by CJTF-180 planners to employ the 22d MEU in accordance with MAGTF doctrine was the foremost reason for the MEU's strong performance. Its high degree of air-ground-logistical integration was of inestimable value to the kind of operations required in Oruzgan Province. (In addition to a full plate of complex tasks, the ACE [air combat element] furnished AV-8B [Harrier] sorties for use in other parts of the CJTF AO.) The MEU's organic firepower and mobility, ability to execute operations rapidly, and the dedicated effort to fuse intelligence from below and above proved decisive.

The grit and determination of the individual rifleman shone in an extremely harsh environment. Marine noncommissioned officers were

the most effective weapons in the MEU's arsenal. Small-unit leadership was tested in excessive elevations, heat, and dust; and it passed with flying colors. Marines remain the masters of small-unit actions.

The predeployment training provided to the MEU as part of the standard workup package proved to be a sound basis for operating in Afghanistan. In particular, the rapid response planning training provided by the II Marine Expeditionary Force Special Operations Training Group enabled the MEU to focus on time-sensitive targets with great effect and had a most positive effect on all other decision-making and staff operations.

CJTF-180 and -76 were supportive and eager to employ the MEU. They arranged a true "plug-and-play" joint environment and worked constantly to enhance the considerable intelligence capabilities of the MAGTF. In every way, they were dedicated to the effective application of individual service capabilities. Their leadership and support were essential.

The 22d MEU's deployment to Afghanistan demonstrated the inherent capabilities of the MEU(SOC) program in every measurable category. It traveled inland more than 500 miles to some of the most inhospitable terrain in the world and proved to be an expeditionary and exceptionally lethal force. It used combined arms in

intense firefights while concurrently conducting civil-military operations. The MEU's successful integration into a joint command served to reinforce the merits of the Marine air-ground team and demonstrate the value of its integration with a joint force.

[The] strategic results of the deployment still are being assessed, but recent peaceful elections—even in former Taliban sanctuaries—are nascent signs of long-term success. And, in Oruzgan Province, they result directly from the 22d MEU's determined march into the storm.

Notes

U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings 130, no. 11 (November 2004), 48–53. For more information, see U.S. Naval Institute at www.usni.org. Reprinted with permission.

1. CJTF-180 would change in mid-April 2004 to the 25th Infantry Division (Light), resulting in a designator change to CJTF-76.

About the Authors

Colonel Kenneth F. McKenzie was commanding officer of the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable). Major Roberta L. Shea and Major Christopher Phelps were the staff communications officer and intelligence officer, respectively.



A 22d MEU Marine kicks in a locked door during a search of the village of Khabargho, Afghanistan, for arms caches and Taliban insurgents during Operation Asbury Park. During eight days of intense fighting, more than 80 Taliban fighters were killed and only 8 Marines were wounded.

Photo courtesy of GySgt Keith A. Milks



Artillery “Gruntz” It Out

by Captain Matthew M. Maz, First Lieutenant Jason R. Gibbs, First Lieutenant David W. Litkenbus, and First Lieutenant Wayne A. Wood

Marine Corps Gazette, November 2004

A Marine artillery battery always needs to be prepared to serve as a provisional rifle company in combat. The experiences of Battery G, Battalion Landing Team, 1st Battalion, 6th Marines (BLT 1/6), during Operation Enduring Freedom prove that the battery can execute a variety of essential functions in combat. During BLT 1/6's combat operations in Afghanistan, the battery was assigned numerous tasks in addition to artillery operations, including humanitarian assistance operations, convoy operations, security for Forward Operating Base (FOB) Ripley, liaison and security for United Nations-sponsored voter registration, person-under-custody handling, and other stability and support operations. The battery's task organization for combat was unique in that it included the BLT's tank platoon (3d Platoon, Company D, 2d Tank Battalion), assault amphibious vehicle (AAV) platoon (2d Platoon, Company B, 2d AAV Battalion) and, for part of the time, several other detachments, to include the aviation combat element's low-altitude air defense platoon, forming a task force of [more than] 200 Marines and sailors serving directly under the Marine expeditionary unit (MEU), rather than its parent unit, BLT 1/6. This organization provided the flexibility necessary to accomplish numerous operations simultaneously.

Transition to a Provisional Rifle Company

Everyone is familiar with the cliché “every Marine a rifleman.” Unfortunately, it’s not as simple as an annual qualification on a rifle range to become a rifleman. When faced with converting an artillery battery into a provisional rifle company, the battery leadership had to be flexible and creative in how we attempted to overcome the inevitable challenge of organizing Marines with a diverse mix of military occupational specialties (cannoneers, fire direction controlmen, cooks, maintenance management specialists, motor transportation mechanics, etc.) into cohesive fireteams and squads and, ultimately, one cohesive rifle company.

The primary focus was to task organize around accomplishing all foreseen missions, while maintaining fireteam and squad integrity. Initially we organized the battery into three separate platoons: two rifle platoons and a weapons platoon comprised of the Marines assigned to crew-served weapons. On paper this looked great, and it worked because of the adaptability of the Marines, but we may have been able to organize more efficiently. We often found ourselves rearranging the task organization at the small-unit level because of the need for drivers and radio operators, and the need for cannoneers to man the howitzers (that were flown directly to FOB Ripley after the establishment of the base). A better solution may have been to evenly distribute the motor transport Marines and radio operators across the squads, while maintaining the integrity of smaller groups like the fire direction center. This organization would have made each squad virtually self-supporting. The concept of the weapons platoon worked well for the battery, because it afforded the battery the flexibility to attach machine-gun teams to the rifle platoons, as well as provide security for convoys. The AAV and tank platoons operated as rifle platoons. To

maintain unit integrity, we accepted the one large platoon (48 AAVs) and one small platoon (19 tanks) that resulted from these units’ table of organization strength in a BLT.

Despite ongoing changes to task organization, we were able to accomplish the wide variety of missions we were assigned. Mission success can only be attributed to diligent focus on infantry individual training standards (ITS) and superior leadership at the noncommissioned officer (NCO) level. The fact that all Marines were trained to basic riflemen standards ensured that the Marines could adapt and overcome the challenges presented by regular changes in task organization and the diverse missions we were tasked to accomplish.

It is paramount that Marines know the basics, especially land navigation, combat orders, patrolling, personal and crew-served weapons handling, rules of engagement (ROE), etc. Also, proficiency in communications skills cannot be overemphasized. Marines must be comfortable operating, troubleshooting, and maintaining radios and have a solid understanding of signal plans. Once Marines understand the basics, the unit can begin introducing platoon-level tactics, such as convoy operations, actions upon contact, room clearing, and cordon-and-search techniques.

Convoy Operations

Battery G conducted convoy operations almost daily. Typically, the convoys would be comprised of 5 to 55 vehicles and could stretch up four kilometers in length. The convoys were slow moving due to the size of the convoys, harsh terrain, and numerous enemy threats (i.e., land mines, improvised explosive devices [IEDs], ambushes, etc.). The majority of the terrain was mountainous, and traffic was limited to unimproved dirt tracts due to the fact that paved or improved roads were nonexistent in our area of operation. Most of these

routes were wide enough to accommodate only one lane of traffic.

Many of the convoy security procedures taught to Marines during basic unit training as an artillery battery, AAV, or tank platoon were still applicable in Afghanistan, such as positions in the vehicle, gear stowage, fields of fire/view, dismount procedures, and signals. Emphasis was placed on convoy briefs that addressed threat areas, procedures for halts, bump plans, ROE, actions upon contact, communications plans, close air support (CAS) availability, checkpoints, weapons test fire locations, etc.

The tactics, techniques, and procedures used to negotiate long choke-points, such as mountain passes, were complicated and employed many combat resources, but the risk involved was worth taking the time to do it right. Prepositioned units secured both sides of the pass in order to prevent traffic from entering. Forward air controllers contacted EA-6B Prowlers that possessed an IED jamming capability, and the planes conducted a sweep of the pass. Other CAS platforms loitered over the possible ambush sites offering reconnaissance and force protection. The two lead hard-back HMMWVs from the convoy provided more reconnaissance and ensured that all traffic in the pass had exited before bringing the main body of the convoy through.

Every convoy had to be prepared to handle a variety of maintenance issues, as vehicle breakdowns were commonplace. Mechanics were vital to the success of every convoy, and we ensured they were equipped with the proper tools and parts (hoses, fluids, tires, etc.). Oftentimes we would end up towing vehicles, so we always carried numerous seven-ton and HMMWV tow bars. Welding machines were also used during convoys to repair trailers and ring-mounts. Our contact truck traveled at the end of the convoy and was

always equipped with a radio to quickly respond to any problems.

Numbering each vehicle and assigning corresponding call signs as they were positioned in the convoy eased convoy command and control. Each vehicle had a radio in it. Not all had high-power radios but at a minimum man-packed AN/PRC-119s were used. The use of Motorola and ICOMs intrasquad radios was not allowed due to their susceptibility to signals interception and the risk of setting off IEDs. Squad-size elements rode in seven-ton trucks that were dispersed throughout the convoy in order to provide a dismounted assault force to be used when we gained contact with enemy forces.

FOB Ripley Security

Planning for FOB Ripley security began with [a] detailed map study and size estimation. To put the size of the FOB in perspective, it needed to be large enough to fit 8 helicopter pads, a runway capable of supporting C-130s, facilities for 2,000 Marines, numerous command posts, 2 M198 howitzer gun positions, an ammunition supply point, a motor pool capable of supporting nearly 200 vehicles, and compounds for a battalion of Jordanian Special Operations Forces and a company of the Afghan National Army. The final perimeter exceeded five miles.

Initially, FOB security was handled like the occupation of a defensive position. The battery was the first combat element on the ground in the area that would become FOB Ripley; therefore, we focused on reconnaissance, identifying likely avenues of approach and key terrain, emplacing crew-served weapons, establishing radio communications, formulating an effective fire support plan, and constant patrolling. The size of the perimeter gradually expanded as the remainder of the MEU began to flow into the area. Engineering supplies,



Photo courtesy of Gunnery Sgt. Keith A. Milks

Afghan children gather around a Humvee from BLT 1/6 providing security near the village of Miam Do, Afghanistan, during Operation Thunder Road on 29 June 2004.

such as concertina wire and HESCO barriers, arrived allowing the Marines to move from basic fighting positions into guard towers constructed from wood, HESCO, and International Organization for Standardization containers. FOB security evolved to include countermine wire plans, entry control points (with interpreters), the manning of confinement facilities, and the establishment of a quick reaction force (QRF). Dismounted and mounted security and presence patrols were conducted almost 24 hours a day for four months, focusing on limiting the enemy's ability to engage the FOB with 107mm rockets and denying the enemy observation of key locations inside the perimeter.

Prior to the arrival of two M198 howitzers to the FOB, organic fire support consisted of 81mm mortars attached to the battery. The mortars provided on-call suppression for dismounted patrols and supported the nightly illumination plan. When the M198 howitzers arrived via C-130, they increased the security capabilities of the FOB. This

was the first time in history that Marine forces had introduced the M198s to Afghanistan— indisputably, “the biggest guns in Afghanistan.” The howitzers ranged all the potential 107mm rocket sites, provided illumination for mounted patrols, and were tied into Q-36 counter-mortar radar through the fire direction center. The Q-36 radar and howitzers provided a quick “sensor-to-shooter” link critical to the counter-rocket fight. While the howitzers increased security, the requirement to man the howitzers, while simultaneously conducting multiple operations, placed a strain on our forces. Managing the number of Marines available to conduct operations, other than those directly related to FOB security, was closely monitored.

Keeping the Marines motivated and informed day in and day out over a five-mile perimeter became a full-time job for the unit's leadership. Engaged NCO and staff NCO supervision was crucial to ensuring that the Marines stayed intense, vigilant, and motivated.

Security for Humanitarian Assistance Operations

Upon arrival at voter registration, medical care, or dental care sites, Marines from the security squads dismounted, established a perimeter around the site, and cleared the buildings to ensure that the area was safe for support personnel to conduct their operations. One entry and one exit point were established. Patrons were marked with a magic marker once they entered and exited the facility. Marines providing security would be posted on rooftops or any dominating terrain feature in the area to provide early warning. Vehicle checkpoints were routinely manned in order to establish a presence in the area and control the flow of personnel and vehicles.

Occasionally, local government officials would not allow Marines to be involved in activities that were viewed as potential Taliban targets, such as United Nations-supported voter registration. Consequently, the MEU or the battery would provide a liaison to the local authorities, and a QRF was established in order to respond if necessary.

Conclusion

The battery truly proved itself as the “king” of more than artillery, considering its performance as a versatile combat multiplier in combat. The depth of the battery’s technical expertise, communications gear, vehicles, and weapons systems allowed it to adapt to numerous situations with successful results. However, deploying MEU (special operations capable) artillery units must develop a flexible

task organization that allows for easy transition to function as a provisional rifle company, while maintaining the ability to effectively employ their assets and still maintain squad and fireteam integrity. Strict training and adherence to infantry ITS will enable artillery units to become proficient riflemen. The stronger the infantry proficiency is at the individual level, the easier it will be to transition through changes to task organization and accomplish a variety of nontraditional missions for an artillery unit. With an ever-increasing demand on our forces, we have to be ready to assume the mission of infantry units during our training in preparation for the deployment.

Note

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About the Authors

Captain Matthew M. Maz served as the commanding officer, Battery G, 2d Battalion, 10th Marines (2/10).

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First Lieutenant Wayne A. Wood was the executive officer, Battery G, 2/10.

Marines of Kilo Company, 3d Battalion, 3d Marine Regiment, climb a stone wall on the way to a village during Operation Mavericks, an operation conducted to capture suspected anti-Coalition forces in the vicinity of Mehtar Lam on 19 March 2005.

Photo courtesy of Cpl James L. Yarboro





A Mission Ends

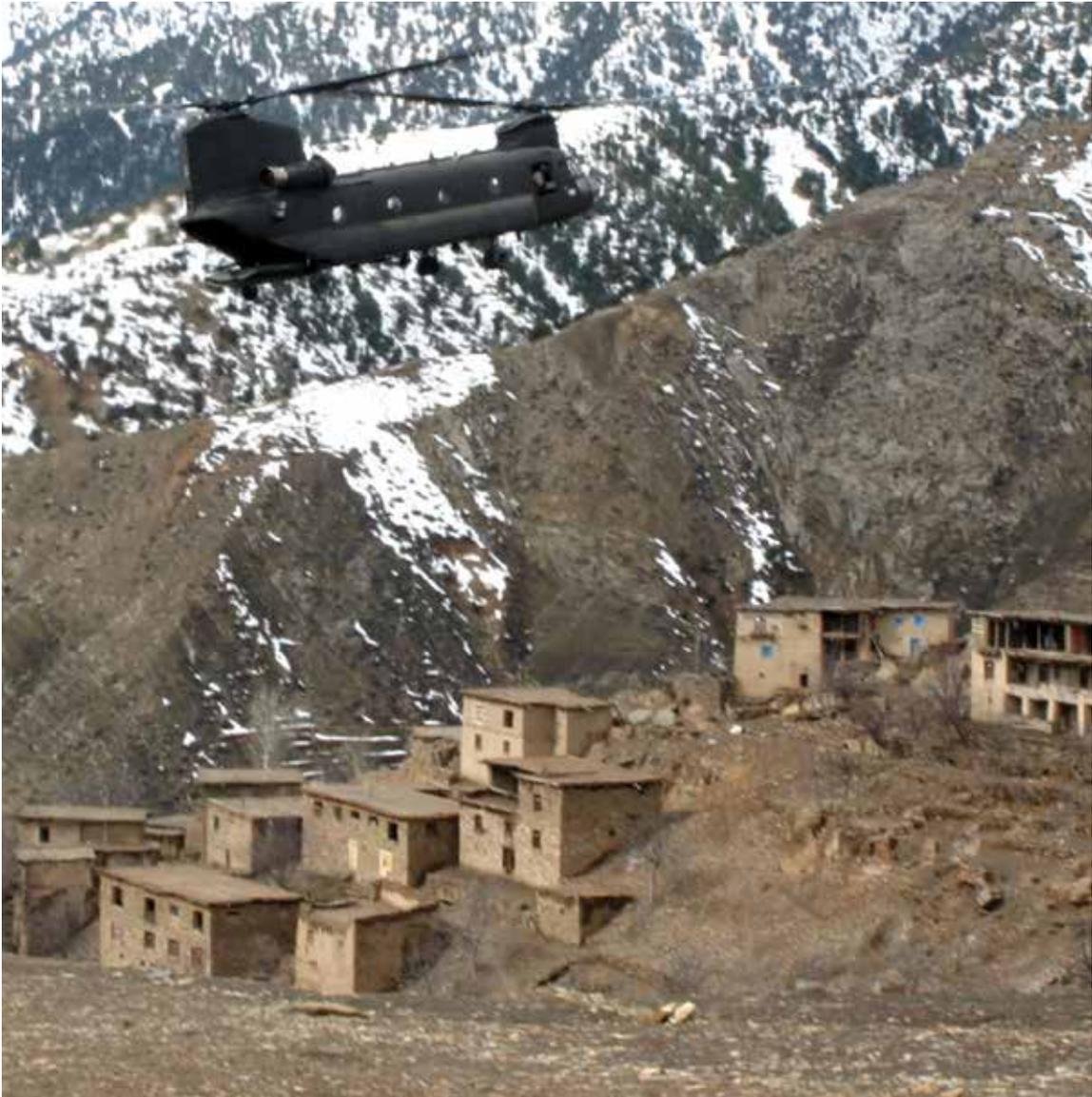
As Army, NATO Troops
Take Over in Afghanistan,
Marines Reflect on a Tour
that “You Never Forget”

by Christian Lowe

Marine Corps Times, 29 May 2006

They were members of the first conventional ground unit into Afghanistan, flying more than 400 miles aboard heavy-lift helicopters from amphibious ships off the Pakistan coast to take ground in a landlocked country. And after that precedent-setting flight, then-Brigadier General Jim [James N.] Mattis, commander of Task Force 58, forcefully declared to his leathernecks: “The Marines have landed, and we now own a piece of Afghanistan,” planting the American flag on a remote desert camp surrounded by Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters just weeks after 11 September. But after nearly five years and thousands of Marine footprints left on Afghanistan’s craggy peaks, the Corps is pulling out, leaving the defense of the fledgling Afghan government and the hunt for Osama bin Laden and his supporters to the Army and NATO troops, a top Corps official confirmed.

“We’re attempting to reduce our operational tempo and deployment tempo,” said the Corps’ plans, policy, and operations chief, Lieutenant



Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

A U.S. Army CH-47 Chinook helicopter lands during a mission to insert Marines assigned to Kilo Company, 3d Battalion, 3d Marine Regiment, during Operation Mavericks.

General Jan [C.] Huly, in an 18 May interview. “A good way to do that is not send as many units overseas.”

Huly admitted, however, the exodus will be a drop in the bucket of near-constant Marine deployments to Iraq and regular Marine expeditionary unit [MEU] pumps. So don’t expect more time at

home as a result. The move means infantry battalions and other units that were looking for a break from Iraq rotations by going to Afghanistan are now back in line to join their brethren in Anbar Province and other Iraqi hot spots.

But those rotations are in the maybe column; based on recent patterns, just because you’re in an

infantry battalion doesn't mean your seabag has an Iraq sticker on it. Despite the Marines' shrinking presence on the Horn of Africa, not every battalion that deploys to the Middle East goes into Iraq, and the units in that country don't always spend a lot of time there. Some MEUs have deployed in "theater reserve" status, meaning the battalion landing team stays mainly on its amphibious ships for the bulk of the deployment, conducts the odd training exercise in the region, and waits for a call to go into Iraq that may not come.

The Corps will still provide some support troops to the Afghan mission, including intelligence technicians and military training teams, Huly said. Marine expeditionary units could also be on call to plug in gaps if needed. The end of the Corps' Afghan deployments comes as the overall U.S. commitment to that country is on the decline. Military officials have said that American forces will be reduced from the roughly 23,000 troops there now to 16,500 by the end of the summer. And it also means the end of a duty many Marines say is unique, a mission some strategists have said is tailor-made for light infantry forces like the Marines.

"It's an area that, once you've been there, you never forget it for the rest of your life," said Colonel Kenneth [F.] McKenzie, commander of the 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit, which deployed to Afghanistan for nearly five months in 2004.

The Corps leaves Afghanistan with a mixed security situation, however. Recent clashes between NATO-led International Security Assistance Force troops—who are in charge of overall security for the Afghan government—and insurgents resulted in the deaths of about 90 enemy forces, 15 Afghan police, 1 Canadian soldier, and an American civilian near Kandahar. Huly said the security situation did not affect the decision to pull Marines from Afghanistan. "I don't think that was discussed," he said.

The country has seen a recent surge in violence, with enemy forces increasingly resorting to suicide bombers and roadside explosive devices—tactics common in Iraq. "We are predicting that the enemy will get more alert [and] more active in the summer," said Afghan National Army Lieutenant General Sher Karimi at a 4 May Pentagon press briefing. "So we are accordingly planning to be more alert, more active and have more aggressive operations, offensive operations, in many areas against the enemy."

Taking to the Hills

Since the landing at Camp Rhino by Mattis' Task Force 58—a combined force of the 15th and 26th MEUs—in November 2001, the Corps has sent a wide range of forces to Afghanistan to bolster security and hunt down terrorist holdouts. Marines were the first troops to secure and reopen the U.S. embassy in Kabul, sending the antiterrorism battalion from the now-disbanded 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade to hold the ground with a more robust force.

Since then, the Corps continued to send at least one battalion of leathernecks to the fight, with the Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii-based units of 3d Marines taking over the mission in late 2004 as the Army's Hawaii-based 25th Infantry Division took command of the Afghan counterterrorism operation, dubbed Combined Joint Task Force 76.

Marine Reserve units have also served in Afghanistan. The Marietta, Georgia-based Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 773 [HMLA-773] provided close air support and light heliborne lift to Marine and Army forces out of Bagram Airbase near Kabul and Camp Salerno in Khost in 2003 and 2004. Reserve CH-53E Super Stallion squadrons provided much-needed heavy lift for Coalition missions in the high mountains of eastern and central Afghanistan.

In the spring of 2004, the Camp Lejeune, North Carolina-based 22d MEU pushed inland, setting up combat outposts in the Taliban breeding ground of Tarin Kowt, north of Kandahar—an area generally devoid of any U.S. troops since Army Special Forces units left in 2002.

During their nearly five-month deployment, the MEU's grunt unit, 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, engaged in skirmishes for weeks against Taliban holdouts, killing more than 80 rebel fighters during a few intense weeks of fighting. "There's not a lot of urban area, there's a lot of rural area. It's a lot of open maneuver work," McKenzie said of Afghanistan's rugged terrain. "Units tend to operate over vast distances with very little or no infrastructure at all."

More recently, 1st Battalion, 3d Marines—the last unit to deploy to Afghanistan—participated in the largest air assault operation since Operation Anaconda in 2002. The operation involved six Marine and Army battalions, pushing more than 2,500 Afghan and Coalition troops through the eastern Korengal Valley in April and May.

Lessons Learned

Though Huly said part of the objective of withdrawing Marines from Afghanistan was to ease the strain on operational tempo, he admitted the relief would not be significant. "Taking one battalion out of the Afghanistan bin and putting it in the Iraq bin will afford some relief, but not a whole lot," he said. Neither, he said, would 3d Marines begin to assume unit deployment program stints on Okinawa, Japan—a historic ready supply of infantrymen for Japan-based Marine rotations.

The UDP [Unit Deployment Program] cycle has been disrupted by deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001. Some units have shipped over to Okinawa for the six-month UDP cycle

only to be deployed immediately to Iraq. Others have skipped the UDP pump altogether. Though the Afghan deployments have given the Corps manpower headaches as well as glory, overall the Corps has benefited from its experience in Operation Enduring Freedom, officials have said. The deployments have brought an increasing emphasis on mountain survival and combat training, prompting a boost in the number of students at the Mountain Warfare Training School in Bridgeport, California.

The deployments have also forced Marine units to operate to an even greater extent in close cooperation with sister Services and allied units. In late 2003 and mid-2004, Marine AH-1W Super Cobra squadrons were assigned to support Army units in southeastern Afghanistan. Aviators from HMLA-773 lived alongside soldiers with the 1st Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, near Khost, where they helped secure convoys and casualty evacuation missions and provided close air support to ambushed Army units in the remote mountains of Khost Province. "It is a very joint and combined environment," McKenzie added.

Afghanistan was also the proving ground for the experimental "distributed operations" platoon from [1st Battalion, 3d Marines] 1/3—a specially trained and equipped grunt unit with increased capability to operate far from support. The mountainous terrain and diffused enemy situation allowed the platoon from Bravo Company, 1/3, to test its capability effectively, the platoon's leader, First Lieutenant Carlo DeSantis, has said. "We were trailblazers there in that we were the first ones in," Huly added. "We were able not only to make contributions to the security and stability of Afghanistan through the normal way in which we operated, but we were also able to flex our ability and try out our distributed operations."

Note

Marine Corps Times, 29 May 2006. Reprinted by permission of Gannett Government Media Corporation.

About the Author

Christian Lowe is a Washington, DC-based journalist covering the Marine Corps for Gannett's *Marine Corps Times*.



Gen James T. Conway, then-Commandant of the Marine Corps, walks with Marines on 6 August 2007 at one of the gates connecting Pakistan and Afghanistan roads.

Photo courtesy of Sgt Nathan W. Hutchinson, USA



Marines Push to Take Lead in Afghanistan

by Sean D. Naylor

Marine Corps Times, 11 October 2007

Generals in the Army and on the Joint Staff reacted with surprise at a Marine Corps move to assume the Army's combat role in Afghanistan and expressed doubt that the Corps could handle the mission without substantial support from the larger ground service.

The New York Times and *The Los Angeles Times* reported 11 October that the Marine Corps has floated the idea of removing its estimated 25,000 troops in Iraq and taking over the mission in Afghanistan, where there are no significant Marine forces at present.

"This is not going to go down well with the Army," said a general on the Joint Staff, adding that the issue "is going to be more contentious and sensitive than many people outside of the inside team realize."

The Joint Staff officer was one of several generals who spoke only on the condition of anonymity and said the Marine initiative to supplant the Army in Afghanistan runs counter to the U.S. military's increasingly joint approach to warfare.

"We're seeking joint solutions to most of the challenges we face today, to include Afghanistan and Iraq," he said. "A single Service approach? Holy smokes. Why would we ever go back to that way of war fighting, particularly when it doesn't give you any advantage over your enemy and in fact

complicates life tremendously in terms of sorting out how you're going to support all of this?"

A retired Army general with Afghanistan experience agreed. "The fact that a Service would propose somehow that their service would take over a war seems to me to fly in the face of everything that's been done since Goldwater-Nichols was passed in 1986," he said, referring to legislation mandating integration of the capabilities of the military Services.

However, he said, "There's going to be a tremendous number of Army soldiers out there, even if, quote unquote, the Marines take over the mission," because the Marines would have to rely on the Army for support in Afghanistan.

"There are some extraordinarily obvious flaws in this," the retired Army general said. "The Marines don't bring any of the infrastructure, logistics, aviation, all of the other enablers that are necessary to fight in this environment successfully."

The Joint Staff general noted that although the Marine combat formations are organized on deployments into Marine air-ground task forces, or MAGTFs (pronounced mag-taffs), which combine ground maneuver forces with fixed-wing air support. "The MAGTF is not designed to do sustained operations inland without any extensive Army support as well as Navy support," he said.

Marine units are designed to be self-sustaining for up to 30 days in the case of a Marine expeditionary unit and 60 days in the case of a Marine expeditionary brigade, he said. For longer deployments, the Army is obliged "by law" to provide logistical support to the Marines, he added.

An active-duty Army general with recent Afghanistan experience said the Marines lacked much of the equipment that allowed the Army to fight effectively in Afghanistan. For instance, he noted that Marine helicopters are not as capable as those of the Army.

The Marines' twin-rotor CH-46 [Sea Knight] is not considered as strong as its Army equivalent, the CH-47 Chinook, a critical factor when operating in the rugged mountainous terrain of eastern Afghanistan.

"If you're along the [Pakistan] border . . . you'd better have the capability to get up around 10,000 feet," the Army general said. "It's a tough fight in Afghanistan. . . . It's not a cakewalk by any measure, and if you're not geared appropriately, it's even harder."

The generals also expressed concern that the Marines' seven-month rotations were ill-suited to the demands of a counterinsurgency campaign in which nurturing relationships with local figures over long periods can be the key to victory. Army units deploy to Afghanistan for at least 15 months.

"Marines rotate for seven months," said the retired Army general. "That's extraordinarily disruptive in a counterinsurgency campaign. The [Army] brigade that just came out of Afghanistan was there for 16 months."

"The Afghans, they have the utmost respect for the United States military and they don't want you to leave," said the active-duty Army general with recent Afghanistan experience. "If you're constantly churning at six months or seven months, as the Marines are doing now . . . people aren't going to connect with you, and you'll lose some of those gains."

Marine Commandant General James [T.] Conway briefly joked about the proposal at a dinner hours after the news reports hit the streets and were generating controversy, but otherwise refused to discuss it.

"Would any of you retirees like to go with us to Afghanistan?" he quipped at the Marine Corps Association's Ground Awards Dinner in Arlington, Virginia, where he was the guest speaker.

After the dinner, he declined to discuss the issue with a *Military Times* reporter.

“It’s premature at this time for me to talk about it,” Conway said. “If there is an appropriate point in time, if certain things happen, we’ll let you know so we can get it out to the Marines.”

Army General Dan [K.] McNeill commands NATO’s International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, and is the overall commander of U.S. forces in the country, which number about 26,000. But if the Marines provided the bulk of the U.S. combat forces, the Corps might push for one of its own to be given that four-star command slot, according to the retired Army general with Afghanistan experience.

“That’s certainly something that would be out there on the table now, wouldn’t it?” he said. The Joint Staff general agreed. “I’m sure that has entered the equation,” he said.

The generals also took umbrage at the implication in the newspaper stories announcing the Marine initiative that it was the Marines stationed in Iraq’s Anbar Province who played the leading role in fostering the “Anbar Awakening” that saw local Sunni tribes switch sides and take up arms against al-Qaeda in Iraq. They said that much of the credit belonged to Army Colonel Sean [B.] MacFarland and his 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division.

“There is concern [among Army officers] that we’re overplaying the Marines’ assertion that they’re the masters of counterinsurgency and they might be trying to export that into Afghanistan,” the retired Army general said.

The active-duty Army general with recent Afghanistan experience said there appeared to be a lack of analysis underpinning the reported Marine initiative.

“The question that has to be asked is: do they have the command and control, logistics and equipment architecture to conduct this fight?” he said. “You have to do a troop-to-task analysis on the ground in Afghanistan and work it backwards, and then say, what is the right force for this mission? As opposed to making a strategic announcement that this is where we want to go, and then trying to make it fit.”

Note

Marine Corps Times, 11 October 2007. Reprinted by permission of Gannett Government Media Corporation.

About the Author

Sean D. Naylor is a senior writer for the *Army Times* Publishing Company and the author of the book *Not a Good Day to Die: The Untold Story of Operation Anaconda* (Berkley Books, 2004).

Part III
The Buildup, 2008

The following articles outline the situation facing Marines when they returned in numbers to Afghanistan. Even though large-scale deployments ceased for a time, the Marine Corps continued to deploy Embedded Training Teams (ETTs), and Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC) deployed single companies to support Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A). After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the Marine Corps formed 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade-Antiterrorism (4th MEB [AT]) to provide a standing quick reaction force to combat terrorist threats. Soon after, the Marine Corps and U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) signed a liaison agreement and began to integrate Marine Corps capabilities into future special operations. By 2006, much of 4th MEB (AT) transferred to the newly established

MARSOC, which stood up as a component of SOCOM. The rapid growth and integration of MARSOC led to the 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion (1st MSOB) taking command of a joint special operations task force operating in northern and western Afghanistan in late 2009.

The long-term Marine presence in southwest Afghanistan began in early 2008 with the arrival of 2d Battalion, 7th Marines (or Task Force 2/7). Besides its line companies, the battalion received reinforcements to conduct its primary mission mentoring the Afghan police, including a combat engineer platoon, shock trauma platoon, a radio battalion detachment, and reconnaissance Marines in addition to DynCorp civilian contractors and personnel specializing in civil-military operations.

However, without all of the support organic to the MAGTF, the firmly ensconced insurgency complicated the battalion's mission. Rather than



Official U.S. Marine Corps photo, courtesy of Cpl Alex Guerra

Members of the Afghan National Police set to patrol with Marines from Alpha Company, BLT 1/6, in Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

depending on Coalition or other joint assets for support, the scale of the insurgency facing Task Force 2/7 prompted senior Marines to send detachments of Sikorsky CH-53E Super Stallions and Bell AH-1W Super Cobra helicopters to provide both heavy lift and close air support, respectively. From that point forward, Marines generally came to the fight as part of a MAGTF.

The 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (24th MEU) also arrived in Helmand Province in early 2008 and began conducting counterinsurgency (COIN) operations, most notably Operation Azada Wosa (“Stay Free” in the local Pashto language).

The MEU’s organic command-and-control assets enabled the U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command (MarCent) to attach additional aircraft in support of Task Force 2/7. Nearing the end of its deployment, the MEU played a key role when it was designated to act as interim command element and bridge for the newly designated Special Purpose MAGTF-Afghanistan (SPMAGTF-A). The SPMAGTF, commanded by Colonel Duffy W. White, continued to build the Marine presence, conduct operations against the insurgency, and develop infrastructure for follow-on forces before its relief by 2d MEB-Afghanistan in May 2009.

HA Brian Rumbles, USN, assigned to Golf Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, fires on two Taliban insurgents fleeing up a mountainside while on a mounted patrol near the Bala Baluk forward operating base in Farah Province.

Photo courtesy of Cpl Jason T. Guiliano





A Change in Mission

by Kristin Henderson

The Washington Post Magazine,
21 June 2009

“Fix bayonets.” Not long after giving that order, First Lieutenant Arthur [E.] Karell was hunched in a dirt trench crowded with Marines. The hushed darkness bristled with eight-inch blades fitted beneath the barrels of dozens of M16 assault rifles.

You fix bayonets when you expect to need the aggressive combat mind-set that’s produced by the primal sight of massed blades. You fix them when you expect to search hidden places. You fix them when you expect the fight could push you within arm’s reach of your enemy—gutting distance. In modern warfare, that’s extraordinarily rare.

The problem was, Karell didn’t know *what* to expect. He was from Arlington [Virginia]. He’d traveled the world. This place, though, was like nowhere he’d ever been. The 2d Battalion of the 7th Marine Regiment had deployed to Afghanistan last spring to train Afghan police. But when Karell’s platoon arrived in Now Zad, [Afghanistan,] the largest town in a remote northern district of Helmand Province, they’d rolled into a ghost town.

The Afghans who used to live here, more than 10,000, had been gone for several years, their abandoned mud-brick homes slowly melting into the dusty valley. Insurgents were using the place for

R&R. At night, all you heard were the jackals, ululating like veiled, grieving women. The fact that Now Zad had no civilian residents, much less any police, had somehow escaped the notice of the Coalition planners who had given the Marines their mission.

“They saw what they wanted to achieve but didn’t realize fully what it would take,” Task Force 2/7’s commander, Lieutenant Colonel Richard [D.] Hall, said at the time. “There were no intel pictures where we are now because there were few or no coalition forces in the areas where we operate. They didn’t know what was out there. It was an innocent mistake.”

So, with no police to train or civilians to protect, the Marines in Now Zad were left with the job of evicting the insurgents who had taken over the town. The fight to root them out began a year ago in the predawn twilight of 15 June in a trench.

Karell was about to lead the first assault of his first deployment. Some Marines in his platoon had done tours in Iraq, but Afghanistan was new to all of them. The dried-up irrigation trench they were in led toward the edge of Now Zad, then ran parallel to a thick mud wall that was taller than a man and separated the town from a small forest.

No Coalition forces had ever been beyond that wall. With the trees blocking their view, all they knew about what lay beyond was that whenever they got close, they were shot at. Whether the small-arms fire had been coming from bunkers in the wall or the trench alongside it, they didn’t know. So Karell gave the order to fix bayonets.

Silently creeping forward through the trench, Karell remembered feeling the same charged mix of fear and electric anticipation as when he rowed crew in high school and college—that last 30 seconds before a race as the craft slid into place. He and his platoon sergeant, Staff Sergeant Gabriel [G.] Guest, had been first to jump into the dark

trench and had already decided they would be at the front when the assault on the wall began. “We’re not asking them to do these things unless we’re willing to do it,” they’d reasoned between themselves, because the old cliché was true: “Everyone can get afraid out there.”

Among the Marines in the trench, Karell was one of the oldest at 29, though he looked younger. Now Zad’s blowing dust had cracked his voice, as if his teen years at Arlington’s H-B Woodlawn High School weren’t that long ago. After Harvard and the University of Virginia law school, he’d gone to work on K Street for Wilkie Farr & Gallagher, investigating corporate corruption in developing countries and watching the news from Iraq and Afghanistan. “Seeing these guys go off to these wars time and again, these young guys who are having kids they never see,” Karell remembered, “I couldn’t just sit there while that was going on.” He’s the oldest of six, his father the son of Finnish immigrants, his mother Mexican American. At the time, no one in his family was in the military.

He joined the Marines.

He’s a good guy, said the Marines in his platoon, a good lieutenant. He called them gents. They called him the L. T. He walked with a slouching lope. One Marine thought the L. T. had grown up a California surfer. Another corrected him, said that was just the L. T.’s personality, the laid-back philosopher type. They said he laughed at himself, and that’s why they liked him.

But the battalion surgeon, Commander James [L.] Hancock, called him a hunter. “Lieutenant Karell,” Hancock said, “is just as liable to be running down a hall shooting at bad guys as any of the rest of them.”

As the Marines in the trench neared the wall, Marine support vehicles, armed with heavy machine guns, began to growl into view to the rear. Suddenly, a rocket-propelled grenade, an RPG, flared

out from the wall. It whooshed over the heads of the Marines concealed in the trench and on toward the vehicles. The Marines later recalled the vehicles' guns erupting with roaring bursts. To the front, enemy PKM machine guns chattered back, the muzzle flashes along the wall's base revealing that the bunkers had been dug into the wall, not the trench.

The Marines said the fear disappeared as their training took over. They began to bound—Karell and the platoon's 1st Squad running forward under fire while 2d Squad fired back to cover them, then 1st Squad firing back while 2d Squad leapfrogged them. Over and over they did this, bounding alongside the wall to outflank the bunkers.

Incoming rounds snapped past them. It was their first big firefight—they went through a great deal of ammunition. Through the smoke and noise, Karell remembered seeing Staff Sergeant Guest, 6-foot-3 and as light on his feet as he was big, dashing out from cover to bring more ammunition. The machine gun chatter from the other side of the wall sputtered out as the insurgents began to run.

Karell brought forward the Marine combat engineers, who fired mine-clearing devices so that he and an engineer could climb out of the trench to blow a hole in the wall. The platoon poured through.

It was like passing through a portal into another world. As the sun came up, they stepped out of the dusty desert town and into paradise. They heard birds singing and the burble of flowing water. Pomegranates and apples hung from the trees. All at once, Karell understood why so many people used to live there.

They started destroying the bunkers in the wall. Then Karell led the platoon deeper into the forest's lush undergrowth. They were headed for the Mound. Seen from the air, the Mound rose

out of the treetops, a huge, round, chalk-white monolith 40 feet high. It was hewn by nature but mysterious nonetheless—and a likely command bunker. *This is where Osama is*, Coalition forces had joked as they'd bombed it over the years.

On the ground, the Mound emerged through the thick vegetation like a stone fortress. The Marines started up, climbing beneath the weight of weapons, ammunition, and body armor. The summer sun beat down on them. They were looking for that command bunker. They were looking for caves. They were expecting resistance. They reached the cratered top; they looked around. Then they looked at each other and laughed. They'd just climbed a big pile of solid rock.

Three weeks before that first assault, at the tail end of the spring poppy harvest, Karell and the 3d Platoon of Foxtrot Company had arrived in Now Zad after a 12-hour convoy. A few Afghan interpreters and a retired San Diego police officer named Frank Carson rode in with them. Carson was along for the ride because the Marines' official mission was to train police. So, naturally, they'd been equipped with a police trainer . . . and little of what they would really need for the major combat they were about to undertake.

Rolling into Now Zad, the platoon drew up in an open square next to a tiny, beleaguered encampment of British and Estonian soldiers. They parked Humvees at the corners as guard posts, strung concertina wire in between, and hunkered down for the night. Karell lay down with both his M9 9mm Beretta pistol and his rifle at hand. He doesn't remember sleeping much. No one did. Third Platoon was in Taliban country.

The Taliban's Islamic extremists had been driven from power more than six years earlier, but the threadbare effort to secure and rebuild Afghanistan had opened the door to a metastasizing insur-

gency. In the southwest, opium poppy production exploded—drug money bankrolling the violence. The United Nations estimates Afghanistan now produces more than 90 percent of the world’s illicit opium, the raw ingredient in heroin. Half comes from Helmand, one of Afghanistan’s biggest and most fertile provinces. Helmand should be this hungry country’s breadbasket. Instead it’s a battleground. Now Zad is a stark example.

During the early post-Taliban years, the town thrived. People came for miles to its bazaar; the UN started building a school. But by the time Karell’s platoon arrived, Now Zad’s dirt streets rustled only with shadows carrying weapons. The people of Now Zad had been driven out by threats and violence, maybe from returning Taliban, maybe from narcotics traffickers. Back then, there was no one to protect them. There weren’t enough Coalition or Afghan soldiers to station there, and the local police weren’t trained to do anything—not policing and certainly not soldiering. They fled with the people.

Hall, Task Force 2/7’s commander, had gotten a hint of all this a few months before the task force arrived in Afghanistan last year. He and his staff did what higher-ups apparently hadn’t—they went to Helmand and talked with Special Operations forces. “Once we started talking to people on the ground,” he said, “it became very obvious that we were going to do more fighting than training.” In Now Zad, that was an understatement.

During those first few weeks before the trench assault, Karell’s platoon started patrolling and building a forward operating base, an FOB. No Afghan contractor had been willing to risk coming out there to construct it for them. So the Marines piled up sand-filled barriers around the UN’s half-built, dirt-floored, roofless school and called it an FOB.

Within a couple of weeks, most of the rest of

Fox Company arrived in Now Zad, along with a new mission: make it possible for the people and their police to move back to town. How they were to accomplish that wasn’t spelled out. They were just told to get in, do what they could for six months, and get out because, Hall said, “We came over here thinking we weren’t going to be replaced” with more Marines. Ultimately, the goal was for the Afghan National Army to take over.

So, Carson, the police trainer, was packed off to a town that actually had police to train, and the Marines began clearing the insurgents out of Now Zad. However, while their mission had changed, their equipment and support structure had not. They had access to a police trainer they didn’t need, but had to get by without things such as dedicated close air support.

They weren’t alone. Helicopters are in short supply across Afghanistan. NATO’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was usually generous with its jets whenever the Marines needed bombs dropped. And the Army was pretty good about sending helicopters to pick up the wounded—though the shortage meant evacuations could take two hours in Afghanistan, compared with under an hour in Iraq.

But during operations, the Marines had no attack helicopters continually overhead to do reconnaissance or swoop in on short notice with rockets, missiles, and cannon fire. Marine infantrymen call the pilots of Cobra attack helicopters “angels on our shoulders.” For most of their deployment, the Marines in Now Zad had no angels.

Lance Corporal John [J.] Schrey Jr. was 27. He built walls and blew holes in them and swept for mines and improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, with a long-handled piece of equipment that looked like a beachcomber’s metal detector. One night in July, Karell and 3d Platoon’s 3d Squad

put on their night-vision goggles and followed Schrey and another engineer outside the wire, scrambling single file over rubble north of town.

A week after the surreal adrenaline rush of the trench assault, 3d Platoon had supported Fox Company's 1st Platoon as they fought in what turned out to be a minefield of IEDs. Twenty-six Marines were wounded, most of them in 1st Platoon. Some lost legs, an arm. Two days after that, Staff Sergeant Christopher [D.] Strickland was crouched over an IED a patrol had found, disarming it, when it blew up. He was killed instantly. He was 25, an ordnance disposal expert. That was especially sobering, Fox Company commander Captain [Richard] "Ross" Schellhaas said, because "if it can happen to an expert, it can happen to anyone."

Now, a month later, Schrey had put on his mine-sweeper's headset. As always, his steps slowed and his head bowed to concentrate on the dirt ahead and what lay beneath. He was tattooed with a pair of praying hands and John 3:16, the bible verse his grandfather had taught him. Each time he heard a metallic hit, he led the way around it. Karell and the 3d Squad followed him like silent ducklings.

Just north of the IED minefield, they hid in a sparse, bony orchard within sight of their target: an empty compound with an adobe building. The insurgents used it as a rallying point, a place to stage equipment before going out to man fighting positions or lay more IEDs.

North of the rally point, a swath of trees hid a one-kilometer strip of closely packed, walled compounds where farming families had once tended orchards and gardens. Only heavily armed men lived there now. They used it the way they'd used the town, as a safe haven. Sometimes, when the Marines heard their voices, they didn't hear Pashtu or Dari, the local languages. They heard Urdu, the language of Pakistan, where many foreign fighters in Afghanistan come from. "Pakistani Alley," the

Marines called it, and they knew that before they left Afghanistan, they were going to have to clear it out, too. But first they had to clear the territory between Pakistani Alley and Now Zad. It was only a kilometer and a half, but clearing it would take months of step-by-step fighting. Today's step was to destroy the rally point.

At dawn, Karell heard the Muslim call to prayer, rising and falling from Pakistani Alley through the trees to the north. Then, from the southwest came the surging groans of armored vehicles, bringing up the rest of 3d Platoon. Shouting erupted from the trees. Two insurgents, one of them carrying an RPG, dashed across an open wadi—a dry riverbed—unaware of 3d Squad in the orchard.

Karell listened to the insurgents moving around inside the rally point, eerily close. In the distance, the whoosh and roar of RPGs and machine-gun fire began. It was aimed at the Marines' armored bulldozer as it plowed through the minefield, clearing a lane toward the rally point. A massive seven-ton truck followed it, the Kevlar-helmeted heads of 2d Squad just visible over the armored sides of the open back.

Second Squad had a new leader, a tall, big-shouldered, sunburned corporal named Aaron [W.] Tombleson, 23 years old, just married and, for the first time, responsible for a dozen other Marines during an operation. By now, Karell and Guest had started to step back on operations like this, leaving it to young leaders, such as Tombleson, to kick in the doors while Guest managed logistics and casualty evacuations and Karell concentrated on maneuvering the squads and calling for fire support.

Tombleson was like an old[er] brother, sometimes hooting and roughhousing with his squad in their plywood hooch, sometimes sober with the weight of steering them through each day. His point man was Private First Class Ivan [I.]

Wilson, who wasn't good with words, but when he said, *Roger that, I'll get it done*, he always did. He was short and solid. He wanted to be called Juggernaut. But he smiled too much for that, so everyone just called him Willie. Mortars began to explode near their seven-ton.

Over in the orchard, Karell heard a boom. He watched something small and round arc up from the west. It was a wheel off the seven-ton, the tire shredded away, growing bigger and bigger, definitely headed in 3d Squad's direction. It slammed into the ground among the orchard's stunted trees. The bulldozer had taken a wrong turn, and while it was getting back on track, the seven-ton hit an IED. The wheel was the only casualty. But it was a mobility kill for the truck.

Tombleson transferred 2d Squad to another seven-ton.

It was the first of four IEDs the platoon hit that day.

They hit the next one after voices on the radio told Karell that the bulldozer had knocked a hole in a compound wall, then gotten itself stuck on the rubble pile. A four-man fireteam climbed down from the seven-ton to provide security. Willie, the point man, led the way alongside the seven-ton toward the back of the bulldozer, where they knew the ground was clear. But then incoming rounds began to hammer the side of the seven-ton.

The fireteam did what had been drilled into them: when you're under fire, you return fire, take cover, then return accurate fire. They ran to the compound wall to take cover, point man first, and Willie knelt to return accurate fire. He knelt on an IED.

Waiting in the orchard, 3d Squad heard the explosion. Karell heard Guest's voice shouting on the radio to arrange casualty evacuation, others shouting orders and offers of support. Karell strained to keep them from shouting over each

other. They shouted that 2d Squad had four or five casualties and one KIA, killed in action.

Hospitalman Anthony [S.] Ameen, 3d Squad's Navy medical corpsman, requested permission to go help. Third Squad had a secure position, and Marines trained as combat lifesavers. Karell was under the impression that 2d's corpsmen had been overwhelmed.

"You can go," he told Ameen, "as long as you take the engineer with you so he can sweep for you."

So Schrey set out again at the head of a line of Marines. Another corpsman, Hospitalman Jack Driscoll, was right behind him, then a few Marines providing security, one wearing a helmet-mounted camera, then Ameen farther back in the line. Cameras were now everywhere on the battlefield—from the noses of aircraft to the helmets of infantrymen, who sometimes strapped them on as personal video diaries.

On the video recorded that morning in July, the helmet-cam catches glimpses of Schrey's detector at the head of the line as it reaches each end of its arc—a pendulum sweeping back and forth just above the ground, ticking off the seconds it's taking to reach the injured Marines. Slowly, steadily, the seconds turn into minutes. The men cross a dirt field, pass through a wall, cross another field. They come around the seven-ton and turn, and there, in the lee of another wall, is a huddled cluster of Marines.

That's where Willie is. He isn't dead. He's lost both legs and an arm, and at first he had no pulse, but a corpsman revived him. Schrey's ticking pendulum leads the line of rescuers along the wall toward Willie. Then, somewhere, there's an explosion. The Kevlar helmets in the line turn quickly left, the helmet-cam swiveling left, too. A plume of dark smoke rises beyond the trees.

The camera's view swivels back to the line, but everyone is distracted now—the explosion, plus the

Marines huddled around Willie are directly ahead, only yards away. The pendulum is still sweeping, but for some reason the line has slowed; it isn't moving forward.

There's motion off to the right. A figure blurs past the helmet-cam between the line and the wall. It's Ameen. He has stepped out of the line because it's drilled into corpsmen that when one of your Marines is hurt, *corpsman up!*, you run. Willie's right there, just ahead, needing him, *corpsman up!* Ameen steps out of the stalled line and runs. He's passing Driscoll and Schrey when he steps on the next IED.

The boom knocks Schrey down, his feet flying in the air. Ameen's down, too, rolling on the ground, moaning. Driscoll is up. Schrey sees him wandering around in a daze, bleeding from his ears.

"Driscoll!" Schrey shouts, but Driscoll can't hear him. Schrey is desperate for Driscoll to stop walking around before he hits another IED. "Driscoll! Driscoll!"

With that, the video ends.

Driscoll finally stopped and was medevaced along with Ameen, who would lose a foot. Tombleson and all of 2d Squad carried Willie to the seven-ton, and as they struggled to lift him into the tall truck, he came to. He tried to help the Marines helping him. He reached out to pull himself up and realized he had only one arm.

In the back of the seven-ton, Willie slipped into unconsciousness again, unaware of the Estonian soldiers, who charged up in one of their fast, heavily armored personnel carriers. The Estonians are known for their fearless charges. They hauled him to the helicopter landing zone on the far side of Now Zad faster than the Marines' vehicles could have.

Tombleson pulled 2d Squad back together. Karell moved the assault forward, ordered rocket shots, called in mortars and airstrikes. They destroyed

the insurgent's rally point that day. That afternoon, during the retrograde to Now Zad, another vehicle hit the fourth IED. No one was hurt, just a mobility kill, but it slowed their return to the FOB, where the news waited that in the medevac helicopter thundering over the desert, Willie had died.

Karell called 3d Platoon together. They were exhausted and dirty, and he could see in their eyes they were shaken. He knew they'd be asking themselves what they were doing here, why was this happening. He tried to give them a solid, factual context for their sacrifice and loss. He heard himself speak in clichés. He didn't used to. As someone who appreciates the English language, he sometimes wondered why everyone in the military, including now himself, always spoke in clichés. But clichés are efficient. Use a cliché to express emotion, and you can quickly get back to the mission and the business of staying alive.

Karell remembered talking about how they'd been sent around the world to a place they'd never been, to help bring justice and development to a people they'd never met. No matter what happened, he told them, they should always be proud of what they were doing and what Willie had died for. Hospitalman Eddie Daniel, a slight 20-year-old sailor and 1st Squad's corpsman, wore a big pack of medical gear on his back when he went out on missions, and a prayer to St. Michael inside his Kevlar. He listened and struggled to hide his frustration, anger, and tears.

Eight months before, while training for this deployment, Karell had asked his new platoon a question. They were out on a field exercise on a warm Southern California day, sprawled across broken-down bleachers for a class. "When you were in Iraq," he asked them, "how many of you felt like you were just driving around waiting to get blown up?" Almost all of them raised their hands.

After that, he focused their training on changing that mind-set. “You’re not just a target,” he’d tell them, “you’re hunters. You fight back. You go after the enemy.”

The day Willie died, that same night, Karell walked eight members of 1st Squad, including Daniel, back up near the bombed-out rally point. By now, the Marines knew the insurgents often returned to the scene of a fight to do assessments and plant more IEDs. Sure enough, no sooner did 1st Squad get up there, than they received a report of movement just out of sight. *I want to get these guys*, Karell thought. But the grass was dry, and every step made noise. Whoever was out there heard the Marines coming and ran back to the north. “At least it showed them that we’re out there, it’s not safe for them at all,” he told his Marines. “We disrupted whatever they were trying to do tonight.”

But after a long, heartbreaking day, there was another reason for that hard night’s walk: morale. Looking back, Karell said quietly, “That’s what it takes for the guys, psychologically, to stay in the fight.”

The summer wore on. When the Marines fought during the day, they did it in temperatures of 120 degrees Fahrenheit. The supply convoys kept getting blown up. They were eating the same three prepackaged meals over and over again. There was no running water, no A/C, and clouds of dust blew through their hooches. Contact with the outside world was limited to a shared satellite phone and intermittent Internet access. But what bothered them most: they knew they weren’t going to be replaced. The day when there would be enough Afghan police and soldiers to take over was still a long way off.

The Afghan National Police alone needed 2,300 trainers. The European Union Police Mission had

promised to provide them, but as of last summer, fewer than 200 were on the job, as reported by the congressionally established United States Institute of Peace [USIP]. Enabling a government to protect its people is a crucial part of counterinsurgency strategy. That’s why Task Force 2/7 had been sent—to help fill the gap and try to make up for lost time.

But the effort was still undermanned and the Marines underprepared. “If my Marines are going to do this,” police trainer Frank Carson told a Marine interviewer, “they need more training back in the States.” Plus, in Helmand, the Marines were simultaneously fighting a war.

As a result, Afghan police and soldiers were spread very, very thin. When the Fox Company Marines left Now Zad, there would be no one to hold the territory some of them had died to clear, and the people and their police would probably never move back. Staff Sergeant Kevin [A.] Buegel, the no-nonsense 27-year-old who took over as platoon sergeant after Guest was wounded, said bluntly, “For a while, it felt like it was for nothing.”

One day, Schellhaas gathered Fox Company together. The commander’s family had served in the U.S. military for generations. He was enlisted before he became an officer. He stood like a man carrying a heavy load. He climbed halfway up a ladder, looked out over the crowd of dusty young men. He was as dusty as they were.

He remembered telling them: “You’re Marines; you live in an austere environment. We’re here to extend Afghan governance. The only way we’re going to win this thing is if we can get the Afghan police up here.” At the very least, he said, they were making a difference for other towns, drawing insurgents away from those battlegrounds to fight in Now Zad instead.

Then, in September, they learned that four Cobras and four CH-53 heavy-lift helicopters were



Photo courtesy of Sgt Alfredo G. Cantu

PO3 Edwin L. Daniel, USN, of Fox Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, provides cover on a rooftop during a clearing operation in Now Zad, Afghanistan.

being pulled out of Iraq and sent to Helmand. But there was still bigger news: when Fox Company left Now Zad, another company of Marines would be taking their place after all. Earlier this year, when the Obama administration announced plans to send thousands of additional troops and trainers, the whole undermanned effort received a similar morale boost. “That was huge,” Karell remembered, “that someone would be coming in to finish the work that we had started.”

Karell squinted through a small window down into a smoke-filled basement. Between the gunpowder from the grenades his Marines had thrown in and the dust the explosions had kicked up from the dirt floor, Karell recalled that he couldn't see a thing. He couldn't see whether the insurgent with the AK-47 rifle was still a threat.

It was late October, and 3d Platoon, backed up by the better part of Fox Company, had finally plunged into Pakistani Alley to take on the insurgents holed

up there. After months of unrelenting combat, they had cleared the insurgents out of Now Zad and even a kilometer or two of the valley around it. For this last big assault, with only weeks to go before Fox Company headed home, Karell hadn't bothered with an order to fix bayonets. By now, no one needed help getting into a combat mind-set.

Squinting into the basement inside a compound in Pakistani Alley, Karell knew he was silhouetted, an easy target. So he aimed his M9 pistol at the spot where they'd heard the shooter with the AK moving around and unloaded the rest of a 15-round clip into the smoke.

Corporal Joseph [S.] Culliver listened to the M9 bang away. He was second in the line of Marines waiting to go in. He was 23, flat-voiced, prone to ironic commentary. Back when Culliver was still in classes at George Mason University, he partied with his fraternity brothers and played a lot of paintball with his housemates, hours of *pow, pow, ha-ha*.

There was nothing *ha-ha* about this. Talking about it the next day, Culliver and the other Marines said they thought the basement had already been cleared. Then one of their team walked in, got shot at, and jumped back. Several of the Marines had picked up some Pashtu and shouted to the shooter to give himself up.

Culliver was Fox Company's intelligence analyst. He would have liked to talk to the shooter, who actually did come out with his hands up. But when the shooter saw four Marines pointing rifles, he ran back into the basement. The team of Marines all said they had the same thought: *damn, now we have to go after him.*

So they kept throwing in grenades and lining up to go in. Culliver had been on the receiving end of grenades before, and he knew how you couldn't hear afterward. But still, each time they went in, they shouted in Pashtu for the shooter to surrender. They kept getting shot at for their trouble. Never one to mess around, Buegel, the platoon sergeant, applied some C4 explosives, but even that got them nowhere. The shooter just kept shooting. He wasn't going down despite being hit repeatedly.

Meanwhile, the rest of 3d Platoon was pushing on through Pakistani Alley, clearing it compound by compound. They were fighting their way forward against mortar blasts that knocked them off their feet, grenades that came soaring over walls, and heavy machine-gun fire from tunnels that riddled the compounds.

Karell made his way over to the basement. "It only takes one guy shooting at you to hold you up," he said later, and they couldn't afford to get held up. They had a lot of compounds to clear and too few Marines to clear them.

Daniel took aim through the basement window. In the months since Willie had died, Daniel had earned a Purple Heart and gotten very good with his M4. He fired into the basement.

That made the shooter pop his head out the door, but the Marines were still there, and he ducked back inside.

Finally, the smoke-filled basement went still. Culliver heard Karell empty his M9 through the window as a final precaution, and then the Marines went in. Culliver was second through the doorway. Through the smoke, he saw the mortally wounded shooter. He saw him reach for his AK-47.

The Marine in front of Culliver fired two rounds. Both hit the shooter in the head, according to Culliver. After the smoke cleared, Culliver wasn't surprised to find syringes. He had guessed the shooter, like others, had been amped up on something—despite all his wounds, the man never cried out.

Many of the leaders of Afghanistan's insurgency may be Taliban, fanatically religious men. Others are old-school warlords. But the front-line fighters are often malnourished addicts or drug traffickers or hard-case farmers who've never been subject to any form of government and don't intend to start now. Some are Afghan. Some aren't. Referring to all the insurgents as "Taliban" is a form of shorthand, agree Afghan and Coalition personnel.

Then one of the other two squads spotted more insurgents moving toward them. Karell hurried through an alleyway and clambered up onto a roof. A rocket failed to push back the insurgents, so he got on the radio to call in a mortar. The fight ground on.

From the air, the Cobra pilots could see Karell's three small squads of Marines spread out and pushing west through the compounds—essentially an urban area, the worst kind of place to be spread out. In that environment, it took 3d Platoon seven hours, including pauses for airstrikes, to fight their way past what Karell guesses were

only half a dozen insurgents. That was nothing compared to what the pilots could see lay ahead. From the western end of Pakistani Alley, insurgents were swarming east toward the scattered Marines. Only bombs from above drove the fighters back.

Before 3d Platoon ran low on water, ammunition, and daylight, they did succeed in capturing their first detainee in combat—held their fire after getting shot at, used their Pashtu to talk him through surrendering. Unlike in the basement, it worked. They also found a building full of materials for making IEDs and destroyed it.

But they only cleared halfway through the compounds, and Culliver said there were more IED factories up ahead that they just didn't have the manpower to get to. Schrey said they weren't able to destroy all the bunkers and fighting positions they found, either, because they ran out of explosives. There were more back in the vehicles waiting at the entrance to Pakistani Alley, but the alley was too narrow to drive in the explosives, and that manpower problem made it impossible to carry it all in.

"To clear an area that size, that's a company-sized operation," Karell explained. "We had a platoon." That's just a few dozen Marines, one-third of a company.

Without enough troops, they also couldn't corner the insurgents and force them into a fight where more could be captured or killed. "Unless you can block the enemy's avenue of egress, you can't get them to engage," said Schellhaas. "They run away."

There weren't enough Marines to hold the compounds they did clear, either. When 3d Platoon left Pakistani Alley, the insurgents filtered back in.

The day after the Pakistani Alley operation, Karell

loaded a squad into a few Humvees and a seven-ton. Culliver climbed in, too. Today they drove south. Heralded by a plume of dust, they bounced three kilometers across the valley's broken ground to the hamlet of Khwaja Jamal.

The Marines used to get shot at when they drove near. Lately they'd been able to start walking foot patrols and talk with the villagers. The squad dismounted and followed a footpath walled in by mud-brick compounds. Village men drifted out to peer at them.

Rural Afghans have been living in hardscrabble villages like this for generations. The Marines weren't living much differently, and that suited Culliver fine. He'd walked away from a scholarship at George Mason to enlist in the Marine Corps because he felt like his whole life had been handed to him. He and his college housemates had a pool table in their rented house. He'd been a Senate page; it bored him. He'd joined a fraternity and taken a heavy class load and wound up distracted and burned out at the same time. "It wasn't a big enough challenge," was how he explained it. "I hadn't shown what I could do."

In the Marines, after his intel training, he chose to go with the infantry because, he said, "the infantry way of life is hard. And you're treated pretty crappy." The spartan FOB in Now Zad had lived down to all his expectations.

The Afghans Culliver had met out here seemed to have similar expectations. As an intel analyst, it was his job to handle tactical questioning whenever a patrol encountered civilians or suspected combatants. He said flatly, "There's no strive toward modernization. They just want to live in their homes in peace, grow their poppy, live, die, rinse, repeat." His assessment was seconded by others in the military and civilian efforts here: more than anything, the average Afghan just wants the fighting to stop.

The peering villagers grew into a crowd, more than Karell had seen in a while. Apparently the Pakistani Alley operation hadn't soured them on the Marines.

Culliver and an Afghan interpreter stepped in under the thatched roof of a small shop. The shopkeeper stocked marijuana, hashish, and powdered narcotics. He tried to sell Culliver some weed. Villagers pressed in around them. A man told Culliver that at night, after the Marines left, the Taliban usually came. The shopkeeper kept trying to sell him some weed.

One of the villagers insisted that the Afghan government worked for the United States. Culliver reported dryly, "I tried to correct that impression," by explaining his take on it: that America was just helping the Afghan government take care of the Afghan people.

The shopkeeper kept pushing the weed.

A few men continued to loudly question American motives until the Marines' young Afghan interpreter lost his cool and yelled at the villagers, "You guys are crazy! These guys are trying to help you!"

The rest of the Marines hung back, one eye on the crowd around Karell and Culliver, one on the pathways that wound out of sight.

As the sun set, the Marines walked out of Khwaja Jamal and climbed into their vehicles. Rocking in the back of the seven-ton, Karell raised his voice over the groaning engine. "Half the questions were about farming and water!" he shouted. "And for the first time, they started asking when they can move back into Now Zad!"

"Yeah!" Culliver shouted back. "And half the questions were, 'How many Marines live on your base? How far can your guns shoot?'" All the Marines laughed, but quickly fell silent. They gazed out at the sunset. It was soft and pink above a starkly beautiful moonscape hemmed in on both sides by mountains jagged as crocodile teeth.

By November, Fox Company was making way for their replacements. Karell and Buegel walked slowly through Now Zad's empty streets, clouds of moon dust poofing up around their boots. In the past six months, one-third of their platoon had been wounded, including Buegel, blown out the door of a Humvee by an IED.

"It's going to be weird leaving this place," Buegel murmured, "after everything . . ."

"It'll be weird," Karell agreed, "for about five seconds."

A couple of weeks later, they were back in California, driving to work on Camp Pendleton every day, shopping in grocery stores, flushing toilets. For Karell, the weird part was that being back didn't feel weird at all, not even for five seconds. He settled in with less than a month left on his active-duty obligation. Just before Christmas, he was back in Arlington.

On Wilson Boulevard, in the crowded back-room bar of Ireland's Four Courts pub, Karell was talking to Martin Weinstein, his old boss at the law firm. Karell had to shout to be heard over the welcome home party going on around them, introducing Weinstein to his parents.

"His office is waiting for him!" Weinstein shouted to the Karells. "He's got a job when he's ready to come back! He's a hero around our office!" Karell looked embarrassed.

On the TV over the bar, the Ravens were kicking a—s down in Texas Stadium. Karell was shouting to Weinstein, "I got in a gunfight my last day in Now Zad!" It happened a month after the Pakistani Alley operation, just south of Khwaja Jamal. One day they were handing out blankets. The next day they were ambushed. Karell looked heavenward, laughing with disbelief. "And I'm like, 'This is my last day! This is not happening!'"

In a quieter moment that night, Karell admitted to Weinstein, “Every day, I question the decisions I made, how we could have done better.” His instructors had told him that, in combat, the 70 or 80 percent solution now is better than the 100 percent solution a week from now. Still, the second-guessing would always start immediately, even as he went on pressing the fight, and it continued now—everything from the operation that killed Willie to the struggle to get the insurgent out of the basement. About both situations, Karell said, “Knowing what I knew at the time, I think I made the right call.” His face was somber. “I’m not saying I regret any of the decisions I made. It’s just, because of the consequences, you obviously think about it.”

Despite the second-guessing, his takeaway from Afghanistan reflects a quintessential American optimism. “It’s easy to write that place off,” he said. “There are Taliban everywhere. But just seeing what one infantry company is able to do, it’s not a lost cause.” Then he added, “Just think what doubling the troops could do. That’s not going to win the war; guys like USAID are going

to win the war. But . . .” He let the thought hang. The civilian side of the U.S. effort is even more undermanned than the military side.

The Marines of 2/7 will deploy again next fall. In the meantime, there’s always some turnover when a unit comes home—Marines are promoted, rotated, their enlistments run out. Karell’s active-duty obligation ended five days before this homecoming party. Without him, that left Buegel as Fox Company’s only leader with Afghanistan experience, experience they’ll need for the next deployment.

Which is why Karell has signed on for another tour.

Note

The Washington Post Magazine, 21 June 2009, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/12/AR2009061202123_pf.html. Reprinted by permission of the author.

About the Author

Kristin Henderson was embedded with 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, in Afghanistan.



SN Benjamin Thiel (left), USN, assigned to Golf Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, provides security while patrolling through a village outside of Bala Baluk's forward operating base in Farah Province.

Photo courtesy of Cpl Jason T. Guiliano



Counterinsurgency on the Ground in Afghanistan: How Different Units Adapted to Local Conditions

A U.S. Marine Platoon in Gulistan, Farah, 2008

*by Jerry Meyerle, Megan Katt,
and James A. Gavrilis*

From May to November 2008, a platoon of U.S. Marines from 2d Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment (2/7), operated in the isolated and dangerous Gulistan Valley in Farah Province in southwest Afghanistan. Gulistan District was an enemy sanctuary that had never been pacified. The insurgents had a firm hold on the population, and on the district government and police. By November, the platoon of Marines had pushed the Taliban out of the district's main villages and had built a base of support for the government.

The 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, was the first U.S. Marine battalion to establish a permanent presence in southern Afghanistan. Its mission was to train the Afghan police in eight districts in northern Helmand and Farah—a vast, mostly ungoverned area where insurgents moved freely. After arriving in theater, the battalion learned that

there were few functioning police forces in these districts, and that the area was almost entirely controlled by the Taliban.

Gulistan was the most remote district in 2/7's area of operations. The platoon's outpost in Gulistan was located more than a day's drive from the nearest U.S. base. A few U.S. and NATO units had been in and out of Gulistan, but none had established a permanent presence. These forces had achieved little and built few relationships with the locals.

Establishing the Marines' Footprint in Gulistan

In April 2008, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines (2/7), was sent to southwest Afghanistan to train the local police. The battalion was spread across eight districts in two provinces straddling two regional commands. In Helmand Province, the battalion was responsible for the districts of Musa Qala, Sangin, Now Zad, and Washir. In Farah Province, the battalion had Bala Baluk, Bakwa, Delaram, and Gulistan Districts.¹

In this vast area, there were large numbers of highly proficient Taliban fighters and virtually no competent police. British forces in Sangin, Musa Qala, and Now Zad were under constant siege. In six of these districts, the Marines were the only significant military force (there were British forces in Sangin and Musa Qala); it was up to them to hold these districts against the Taliban while building police forces from scratch. [The] 2/7's deployment was meant to be a one-shot deal with no plan for follow-on forces. Yet the battalion ended up establishing what would become a long-term U.S. Marine presence in Farah and northern Helmand.

Within weeks of arriving in theater, the battalion was ordered to disperse its three rifle companies across this vast area. One company was sent to Sangin, another to Musa Qala and Now Zad. The third went to Delaram, a notorious truck stop

along the Ring Road between Helmand and Farah Provinces. This third company was responsible for four districts in Farah, all Taliban sanctuary areas.

In late May, a platoon of Marines left Delaram and drove north into the remote Gulistan Valley. The platoon set up a makeshift combat outpost at the district center next to the local boys' school, and met with local officials. Armed only with some basic maps, many of them dating back to the 1950s, the Marines knew almost nothing about the area.

The Marines did not know before they arrived that Gulistan District was entirely under the control of the insurgents. The insurgents collected taxes and operated a parallel shadow government. It was common knowledge in the valley that the district governor and police chief were actively collaborating with the Taliban, which ruled through a combination of political alliances and intimidation. Militants from Helmand and other areas of Afghanistan used Gulistan as a safe haven—a place to rest, train, and plan operations.

The platoon's combat outpost, located at the district center, was a day's drive from the company headquarters in Delaram—through mountain passes controlled by the insurgents. In October 2007, [more than] 100 insurgents from Helmand had launched a catastrophic ambush on a U.S.-Afghan convoy attempting to regain control over the valley. Before the Marines arrived, the small district police garrison had been repeatedly over-run.

As soon as the Marines arrived, the Taliban stepped up its campaign of intimidation. Within days of the platoon's arrival, the Marines observed a car driving through the village. As the vehicle passed down the main road in the village, people turned off their lights and generators. The Marines learned the next morning that the car was that of a Taliban commander threatening people with beatings or death if they played music, allowed

women to leave the home, sent their girls to school, or interacted with the Marines.

The Taliban delivered night letters (written threats delivered under the cover of darkness) to a nearby girls' school, forcing it to shut down. The Marines countered with security patrols and a mobile defense of the schoolhouse during the school day. Within two weeks, the school was running again. The insurgents also threatened the police, most of whom were local men with families living in the valley. There were daily reports that insurgents were organizing to attack the platoon's combat outpost.

The district governor and police chief actively collaborated with the Taliban. Although they were from different clans, they were close allies. These officials fed the Marines false information and sold weapons and ammunition to the insurgents.

The Taliban continued to control the only route into and out of the valley, through the Buji Bast pass south of the district center. In mid-June, the Marines surrounded a village near the pass known to harbor insurgents attacking traffic on the road. Despite exaggerated claims about the strength of the enemy force, the insurgents fled before the Marines arrived. When the Taliban tried to return several days later, the village leadership fought them off. The villagers were no longer afraid after seeing how quickly the insurgents were defeated at the hands of the Marines.

From the day the Marines arrived, they executed a deliberate campaign plan developed by the platoon commander to influence the area. The platoon did two to three foot patrols a day to nearby villages, plus one mounted patrol to an outlying village. After several weeks of continuous patrolling and relationship building, the townspeople—especially the shopkeepers and teachers—began cooperating with the Marines. During their patrols, the Marines noticed that in some villages people

appeared supportive or at least indifferent, while in other areas the population was openly hostile.

The platoon commander insisted that every patrol have a specific mission other than just presence—to speak with a local shopkeeper, hold a small *shura*, or gather specific information about the area. The Marines learned to come to every meeting with an agenda, but to be patient and engage in casual conversation first. It was not part of local Afghan culture to get to the point quickly. In every meeting, the Marines repeated the same message: that they were there to provide security, train the police, and stop anyone who threatened the villagers or Marines.

The Marines demonstrated understanding and compassion without displaying timidity or weakness. They engaged and pursued anyone who shot at them on patrol, and never hesitated to dismount and close with the enemy when it made tactical sense. They were ready to engage the population or the enemy as the situation required.

In early July, [more than] 100 insurgents armed with rockets and other heavy weapons attacked the platoon's outpost at the district center. Their plan was to over-run the position, and if that failed, force the Marines to call in air strikes on civilian compounds the insurgents were using as firing positions. The fighting raged for over two hours. The platoon did not call in air strikes. The Marines exercised restraint, and no civilians were harmed. The Taliban lost at least 13 men before they withdrew.

After the attack, the Marines noticed a change in attitude among the people living around the district center. The Marines heard villagers saying that “there is something different about Marines”—that they were stronger than the insurgents. People began cooperating with the Marines, telling them about the valley's tribes and political dynamics.

The Marines eventually learned that there were two dominant Noorzai Pashtun clans in the val-



Photo courtesy of Cpl Pete Thibodeau

U.S. Marines with India Company, 3d Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, and an interpreter speak with villagers at a bazaar in Farah Province, Afghanistan, on 15 February 2009. The Marines are talking with civilians at the bazaar to better understand local needs and concerns, a key element in conducting successful counterinsurgency operations.

ley—the Jimalzai and the Khojizai. The Jimalzai, many of whom were teachers and businessmen with some education, were more supportive of the U.S. presence. The Taliban enjoyed strong support in many Khojizai villages. The Marines also learned that the district governor was the senior-most leader among the Khojizai, and that he had deliberately misled the Marines about his tribal affiliation.

Rolling the Taliban Back and Rebuilding the Police

In July, 75 local men from the Afghan National Police (ANP) returned from the regional training

academy in Shouz in Herat Province in the west. Despite their extra training, the police still lacked basic infantry and marksmanship skills. Corruption and drug abuse were rampant. The main source of income for individual police was bribes and extortion. They were not trusted by the population. The platoon struggled just to keep the police from using drugs while on patrol and standing guard.

The district police chief was widely known for incompetence, treachery, and vindictiveness. Police officers complained of beatings and rape, and of fears that they might be murdered in their sleep. By mid-July, 10 police had deserted. Another 30

went on leave and never returned. By the end of July, only 21 police were left. The Marines later learned that the police chief's plan was to purge the police of all men not personally loyal to him, then reconstitute the force with his own people.

The police chief tried several times to lead the Marines into areas where they would be vulnerable to attack. The platoon commander tried repeatedly to have him removed, but to no avail. The police chief had been appointed by the district governor, who had connections in Kabul. According to the platoon commander, "We had to keep eyes in the back of our head. All we could do was mitigate his ability to threaten us, by keeping at least two Marines for every one police, in order to keep the police from becoming a liability in a gunfight."

Immediately after the return of the newly minted police, the Taliban threatened the police and kidnapped their relatives. Insurgents kidnapped an engineer from Kabul who was in charge of building a forward operating base for the platoon near the district center. The Taliban also stepped up its campaign of intimidation against the population, including sending night letters to the teachers at the local boys' school, as well as villagers suspected of cooperating with the Marines. The platoon split into three rifle squads and conducted four weeks of continuous patrolling in the district center. The idea was to prevent the insurgents from intimidating the police, so that the police could train with the Marines. The insurgents backed off and focused on outlying villages.

In late July, eight kilometers north of the district center, insurgents kidnapped, tortured, and killed three Tajik policemen returning home on leave. The district police chief—who viewed the Tajiks in his force as a threat to his power in the valley—had reportedly told insurgents that the policemen would be traveling that way. When the Marines tried to recover the bodies of the three

slain policemen, insurgents trapped the convoy in a well-laid, L-shaped ambush. As the joint Marines and police moved south toward their base, they were hit again.

In early August, 40 to 50 Taliban ambushed a squad of Marines in vehicles as they tried to establish a cordon around a village believed to be harboring insurgents. An eight-hour firefight ensued in which the Marines drove the insurgents out of the village. The next day, the village elders came to the district center and held a shura with the platoon commander. The elders expressed gratitude to the Marines for sparing innocent lives in the house-to-house assault through the village, and indicated that more than 20 insurgents had been killed. These engagements took a heavy toll on the local Taliban and improved the stature of the Marines. Yet, the security situation remained precarious in most of the district's villages. The insurgents continued to control much of the valley. More police deserted in August. The police chief let them go "on leave," knowing that they would not come back. By the end of the month, only 9 police were left out of the original 75.

The Marines decided that the situation in the police force had become intolerable. They pushed the district governor and police chief to reconstitute the force with local recruits and send them away for training. According to the platoon commander, "They [the district governor and police chief] said, 'we've got this cousin and that cousin, and we will give them a weapon and a uniform.'" The Marines had serious misgivings, but believed they had no choice except to leave recruitment to the district government. The police chief got what he wanted—the dissolution of the existing force, which represented various ethnic and tribal groups in the district, and its replacement by a force personally loyal to him and drawn largely from a single clan.

In mid-August, the Marines faced another crisis related to the construction of the forward operating base near the district center. The Kabul-based contractor in charge of the project had not paid the workers in more than two months. People had come from all over the valley to work on the project—many of them farmers who had left their fields uncultivated for the summer. Many of the workers had borrowed against their promised wages, and had fallen into debt with local moneylenders. The workers trusted the Marines, believing they would eventually be paid. By fall, the workers still had not been paid and, although work was nearly complete, most men returned to their fields. The Marines attempted to repay the villagers through various means of barter, such as food and fuel, but the debt was simply too great.

In late August, the Taliban began leaving the district and regrouping in more remote areas to the east. Local people began telling the Marines that the insurgents had left the northern part of the district—though there continued to be attacks around the Buji Bast pass along the southern edge of the valley. In October, the district governor began cooperating openly with the Marines for the first time.

Reports of Taliban intimidation ceased, and children returned to school. Farther south near the Buji Bast pass, villagers stood up to the Taliban—telling them to leave and never return. In November, many local officials who had been victims of intimidation returned to work in the bazaar and at the forward operating base. They dealt openly with the Marines.

During the last week of November, the Marines turned over command to a platoon from 3d Battalion, 8th Marines. There continued to be attacks in the southern part of the valley and reports of insurgent movement on routes between Helmand and Farah. Yet, the Taliban was no longer

in control in most of the valley, and security was much improved. These gains endured through 2009 and into 2010.

Conclusion

The Marines in Gulistan operated on their own in one of the most remote areas of Afghanistan—far from higher headquarters, reinforcements, and resupply. The platoon had little time to prepare and knew almost nothing about the area going in. The Marines were surrounded by Taliban-controlled territory, and forced to work with local officials who were actively collaborating with the enemy.

Such conditions put considerable pressure on the Marines. In order to operate effectively—perhaps even to survive—they had to be creative, flexible, and aggressive.

The platoon commander had to become an expert on the politics of the area, sift through the deceitful claims of treacherous officials, identify potential supporters and detractors, and fight off large groups of proficient enemy fighters—all in an environment of persistent Taliban intimidation of the local population. These tasks went far beyond the unit's original mission to simply train the local police.

Dealing with the police proved to be the platoon's greatest challenge. Corruption and drug abuse were rampant; morale was terrible. Worst of all, the district police chief worked for the Taliban. The police chief systematically abused the men under his command, with the express intention of forcing them to desert. There was no way to build a viable police force with such a man at the helm. Yet, he could not be removed. The Marines had no choice but to work with him.

Despite these obstacles, the Marine platoon managed to push back the Taliban, regain control over the Gulistan Valley, and secure the support of much of the population.

According to the platoon commander, the key to his unit's success was managing to be flexible, to be able to accept and deal with a certain level of corruption and treachery—and above all else, to demonstrate superior strength and will. The platoon had considerable autonomy to adapt its tactics and operations to the unique conditions it faced.

The unit succeeded due to a disciplined adherence to basic infantry principles and a thorough pre- and post-combat action process. A basic understanding of the concepts of counterinsurgency, coupled with a solid grasp of infantry tactics (with a bias toward speed and maneuver), ensured the platoon's ability to tackle the complexity of tribal networks, while enabling it to prevail in every tactical engagement.

Notes

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1. Unless otherwise noted, information in this vignette comes from interviews with the platoon commander on 13 May 2010.

About the Authors

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Marines march past the Marine Corps War Memorial in Arlington, Virginia, during a Navy Cross medal award ceremony honoring GySgt Brian M. Blonder for his actions while serving in Afghanistan with 2d Battalion, 7th Marines.

Photo courtesy of PO2 Kevin S. O'Brien, USN.





Belated Honors for Marines in Fierce Battle

by Jeanette Steele

The San Diego Union-Tribune,
10 July 2011

Ambushed and outmanned, a 30-member Marine platoon fought back and, before the long day was over, almost half had earned major military medals for valor—perhaps a measure of just how fierce the 2008 Battle of Shewan was.

The Camp Pendleton [California] force-reconnaissance platoon is finally getting public recognition for that battle on 8 August 2008, when they stumbled into a nest of 250 seasoned Taliban fighters while trying to secure a village in southwestern Afghanistan.

In the end, the Marines routed the enemy without a single U.S. fatality. But possibly the bigger victory, according to observers, was showing the local residents that American forces could dig in and beat the Taliban, despite the distraction of the Iraq war.

It was a precursor to later hard-won battles in Afghanistan after major U.S. troop surges in 2009 and 2010.

“The situation in Afghanistan at that time was really pretty dire. The south of the country was as bad as you can imagine,” said Jeffrey Dressler, a senior analyst at the Institute for the Study of War in Washington, DC.

“It was one of the first tastes of what the Marines were going to bring to bear.” Captain Byron [J.]

Owen and his Marines were ordered to take Shewan, a Taliban stronghold astride a key transportation route.

Owen, now 30 [years old], was the commander of 2d Platoon, a force-reconnaissance unit from Camp Pendleton, working with the 2d Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, from Twentynine Palms, [California].

The captain grew up in City Heights and then graduated from La Jolla High in 1998. An Eagle Scout, he always wanted to join the military but wasn't sure he was cut out for officer's bars until nearly the end of high school, said his father, James Owen. Beefing up his grades, he was admitted to the U.S. Naval Academy, class of 2003.

Owen was leading a seasoned 30-man platoon that morning, with several gunnery sergeants and staff sergeants. They would need all that experience before the eight-hour battle ended.

"The battle of Shewan was the most intense fighting I have seen in four combat deployments. The enemy was some of the best I have ever seen," said Owen, interviewed by email from his current post in Afghanistan.

"Every shot they fired was well-aimed. At one point in the battle, they pinned us down with machine-gun fire and hit us with air-bursting mortars, after we took cover. I remember seeing them adjust the height of burst on us to be more effective and thinking, 'Who the hell are these guys?'"

Owen received a Silver Star on 1 July [2011] for his role in skillfully marshalling Marines once the shooting started. His platoon sergeant, Gunnery Sergeant Brian [M.] Blonder, had received the top medal for the battle, the Navy Cross, in May [2011]. It is the second-highest military award for bravery against an enemy.

A platoon sniper, Sergeant Franklin [M.] Simmons, was honored with a Silver Star for exposing himself to bullets while heading for high ground

with his MK11 [sniper] rifle. He got his medal on 4 July [2011].

In all, five Bronze Stars with V for valor and six Navy-Marine Corps Commendations with V were approved for Marines and Navy hospital corpsmen serving with the Camp Pendleton platoon.

The medals came nearly three years after the fact because of their sheer number for a one-day battle, a Marine personnel command official said.

It "required the development of a very detailed and indepth analysis of the contributions of each member involved, to ensure that the proper actions were credited to the correct Marine or sailor," said spokeswoman Major Shawn [D.] Haney.

Also, military rules say that awards for the same event must move up the chain of command together. And the Navy Cross requires the signature of the Navy Secretary. Owen, who recommended his men for the honors, said so many medals were appropriate because "a lot of Marines had to do some extraordinary things."

The battle could have easily gone the other way, he admits. It was an abusively hot day. Temperatures of greater than 120 degrees eventually led to some Marines dropping with heatstroke.

In the morning, they trooped toward Shewan on foot and with Humvees. Just before noon, rocket-propelled grenades and machine-gun fire began to hit.

What the Marines hadn't known was that high-level Taliban commanders were meeting in the village that day, and 100 well-trained fighters were also present. Once bullets were in the air, the commanders coordinated their troops and called in more forces.

But Owen had Gunnery Sergeant Blonder, a Florida native with 13 years in the field. "We all hit the deck except for Blonder. Gunny just stands there like a gunslinger for the longest two or three seconds in my life, as the enemy is spraying



Photo courtesy of PO2 Kevin O'Brien
Secretary of the Navy Raymond E. Mabus presents GySgt
Blonder with the Navy Cross medal on 10 May 2011.

machine-gun fire everywhere. He takes aim as cool as can be and drops a guy with a single shot to the forehead from 100 yards,” Owen said, recounting the first moments of the battle.

“He never hits the deck. I have never seen anything like it. He doesn’t skip a beat and starts after the rest of the enemy. There was a guy aiming in with his (rocket-propelled grenade), and he put it down when he saw his buddy’s head explode. That one shot changed the tempo of the battle.”

As for Simmons, his platoon captain said the young sniper from Oregon, now 27 [years old], was an amazing clutch shot that day.

“He crawls up on a berm, totally exposing himself to enemy machine-gun fire, and starts taking guys out left and right,” Owen said. “The official Marine Corps count is 18 kills, 2 possible kills, with 21 shots in 20 minutes. Incredible.”

The battle went on and on, with attacks and counterattacks by the Marines. Strafing fire from Air Force F-15s helped relieve pressure at crucial moments.

As for Owen, the action summary with his Silver Star citation says the captain calmly directed the fire of the Marines, despite the chaos of being ambushed and outnumbered eight to one.

At one point, Owen needed to focus his gunners on the enemy’s positions. But his radio was fried.

So, with bullets landing on his Humvee, Owen stood up and waved his arms overhead to catch a gunner’s attention. Using hand and arm signals and his own tracer bullets, he successfully relayed the target positions.

More than that, however, according to the summary: “Captain Owen’s comprehensive precombat preparation and planning, rapid decision making and bold decisive leadership not only allowed the platoon to recover from a devastating ambush and turn the tide of battle, his decision to decisively defeat the Taliban and prevent them from claiming . . . a victory undermined Taliban dominion and achieved a major victory.”

That win, it concluded, was felt long afterward. The Taliban didn’t attack the area for months.

Owen still remembers the period vividly, and the contributions of each of his men.

“People write books about guys like that,” he said.

Note:

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About the Author:

Jeanette Steele is a reporter for *The San Diego Union-Tribune* and was an embedded reporter with the Marines in Afghanistan.

Marines of Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 269
prepare AH-1W Super Cobra helicopters for a mission at
Camp Bastion, Helmand Province.

Photo courtesy of LCpl Brian D. Jones





Cobras Strike in Afghanistan

Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force–Afghanistan

by Captain Justin M. Welan

Defense Video and Imagery Distribution System

CAMP BASTION, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan—The shriek of the air horn breaks the silence of the day, the peaceful calm of the flight line violently interrupted. In seconds, papers fly, chairs are knocked out of the way, and shouts fill the air as maintainers and aircrew sprint to the aircraft.

To the casual observer, it seems nothing more than chaos erupting. But for Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 269 [HMLA-269], Detachment B, Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force–Afghanistan, this is an intricate and rehearsed reaction, as each member moves with the rapid precision reminiscent of a NASCAR pit stop.

One hundred meters and 30 seconds later, pilots are already donning their flight gear. Just minutes later, the aircraft are already started, armed, and pilots are grabbing last-minute details for the troops in contact from the battalion air officer. As they pull in collective, clawing into the air, the aircraft momentarily shudder as every single ounce of lift



Photo courtesy of LCpl Chad J. Pulliam

The Afghan National Police Commander for Musa Qala (left) talks with an interpreter as he greets LtCol Richard D. Hall, commanding officer, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, on 9 June 2008 at Camp Bastion, Helmand Province.

is allocated to getting a full load of fuel, rockets, rounds, and missiles airborne. As the Cobras disappear on the horizon, silence again fills the air along with the nervous anticipation among the mix of airframers, avionics technicians, and ordnance men. They turn-to in preparation for hot reloading, troubleshooting, and battle damage assessment, as the next evolution of managed chaos is about to begin.

The Marine Corps' 2d Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment [2/7], originally scheduled to deploy to Iraq, was redirected a month prior to deployment

and by April found itself operating in the Helmand Province of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Tasked with the mission of training and mentoring the Afghan national police, 2/7 was baptized under the full assault of Taliban and insurgent forces.

They faced rocket and mortar indirect fire, or IDF attacks, direct-fire engagements from small arms, rocket-propelled grenades, and heavy machine guns, as well as a vast network of improvised explosive device manufacturers and emplacers.

The mission of 2/7 was to establish, train, and mentor local ANP [Afghan National Police]

units in order to build confidence in their ability to deter and interdict the insurgency. Reinforcements assigned to assist 2/7 with its mission included a combat engineer platoon, a shock trauma platoon, a radio battalion detachment, reconnaissance Marines, DynCorp civilian contractors, and personnel specializing in civil-military operations.

No deployment is complete, however, without the presence of “Mr. Murphy” [Murphy’s Law]. The Marines of 2/7 rapidly found themselves deeply engaged in combat operations and quickly realized that their training and mentoring mission would have to be complemented by significant counterinsurgency and combat operations. The mission for 2/7 formally changed and the wheels at Headquarters Marine Corps were set in motion to reconfigure the Marines in Afghanistan for full combat support. Among the shortfalls identified immediately were rotary wing close air support assets.

“Be prepared to leave for Afghanistan as early as this weekend.” Those were the words of our executive officer, as he spoke to us on a Tuesday morning in early August in our ready room aboard Marine Corps Air Station New River, Jacksonville, North Carolina. Even though the squadron had spent the previous months preparing for its fifth deployment to Iraq, rumors had been swirling around about an alternate tasking to provide a detachment in support of 2/7.

In the end, the decision was made to deploy HMLA-269, Detachment B, to Afghanistan to support Task Force 2/7. The detachment, comprised of four AH-1W Super Cobra attack helicopters, 10 pilots, and approximately 40 aircraft maintainers, ordnance men, and support Marines, arrived at Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan, in mid-August 2008.

Upon its arrival to Kandahar, HMLA-269, Detachment B, was initially placed under

operational control to the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit’s [24th MEU] air combat element formed from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365 [HMM-365], also stationed out of MCAS New River.

That first week in-country was filled with a variety of briefs with topics ranging from rules of engagement to first aid. In addition to theater in-briefs and acclimatization, pilots began their orientation flights while the maintainers quickly got acquainted with the aircraft. Frequent IDF [indirect fire] attacks reminded everyone that even though Kandahar Airfield was a sprawling multinational base hosting thousands of service members and civilian contractors with a steady flow of U.S. and international heavy-lift aircraft, foreign attack jets, and a wide array of transport helicopters, both civilian contractor and military, it was located in the middle of a dangerous combat zone.

The advantages of Marine Corps rotary wing close air support became readily apparent to the operational forces in Regional Command–South. HMLA-269, Detachment B, was comprised of experienced pilots and maintainers, most with two previous combat deployments under their belts.

Within one week of arrival, HMLA-269, Detachment B, repositioned from Kandahar to its present home at Camp Bastion and began conducting flight operations in support of 2/7. The mission was simple: provide close air support in direct support of 2/7, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. With no end date established, the Marines of HMLA-269, Detachment B, were ready to get to work.

On several early flights in 2/7’s area of operations, surface-to-air fire was encountered and dealt with appropriately and effectively. The mission of forward air control (airborne) was also frequently executed to control aviation and surface fires at the outposts. Much like 2/7, HMLA-269,

Detachment B, quickly found itself immersed in a kinetic fight on a regular basis. The move to Camp Bastion was a step back in time to the days of the Corps' combined arms exercises at Marine Corps Air-Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms [California]. A single airstrip, with a small contingent of general purpose medium-size tents represented the entire Marine air-ground task force footprint. Looking off to the north, Hildago was replaced by Kuh'e Khvajeh Ultat Baba, and at about the same distance to Gay's Pass was Forward Operating Base Cafferetta, on the edge of a town called Now Zad, a war-torn village that conjures images of no-man's land from World War I. Thankfully, the offensive smell of the waste-water treatment pond, also know as Lake Bandini, was left back at Kandahar.

Built in early 2006, Camp Bastion is the largest British overseas military camp built since World War II and the main British military base in Afghanistan. It is situated northwest of Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand Province. Originally quartering only British Forces and a small number of U.S. Special Forces and civilian contractors, Camp Bastion became the home of 2/7 and, after a brief stay in Kandahar, home to HMLA-269, Detachment B.

In spite of its small size, Camp Bastion revealed itself to be a busy place. HMLA-269, Detachment B, shared the airfield with British Apaches, [Boeing] CH-47s [Chinook], H3s, and Lynx. U.S. Army Black Hawks flew out of Camp Bastion, filling the medevac role for the area of operations. In addition to these aircraft that called Camp Bastion home, the airspace was continuously transited by Marine [Sikorsky] CH-53s [Sea Stallion] and [Lockheed] C-130s [Hercules], Air Force [Boeing] C-17s [Globemaster], Coalition unmanned aerial systems, and a wide variety of Coalition and civilian cargo aircraft.

Task Force 2/7's area of operations [AO] was greater than 35,000 square kilometers (more than twice the size of Connecticut), with terrain that varied from flat, open desert to rugged 9,000-foot mountain peaks. Population centers ranged in size from small groups of tents erected by shepherders to cities with populations in the thousands.

Nowhere in their AO was there a safe haven for the Marines that was free from the constant threat of enemy attack. Such attacks were, at times, as simple as pressure plate IEDs or as complex as coordinated small-arms and mortar attacks complete with support-by-fire positions and maneuver elements.

Using the theater call sign "Abusive," HMLA-269, Detachment B, immediately got to work for 2/7 by focusing on a core mission set that centered around close air support, surface and rotary wing escort, and armed reconnaissance. Previous training and experience allowed HMLA-269, Detachment B, to quickly get the[ir] birds in the air and support the ground troops needing the firepower they had to offer. The detachment quickly established a battle rhythm. In addition to preplanned missions, HMLA-269, Detachment B, was ready at a moment's notice to respond to mission supporting troops in contact. Within the first week after their arrival, the pilots on both shifts became intimately familiar with the various towns and widely varying terrain as a result of supporting tasking and responding to missions throughout all 35,000 square kilometers of 2/7's AO.

Word of HMLA-269, Detachment B's arrival at Camp Bastion spread fast throughout the AO and support requests from a wide array of Combined Joint Special Operation Task Force units, Estonian forces, and British ground forces started flooding in. The task for the HMLA-269, Detachment B, operations officer was to liaise with the MEU operations section in order to balance all of



Photo courtesy of LCpl Brian Jones

Sgt Joshua E. Stone (right), Cpl Jason E. Beatie (left), and LCpl Patrick D. Ausley (front) align the gun sights on an AH-1W Super Cobra helicopter prior to a mission on the flight deck at Camp Bastion, Helmand Province.

the various requests. HMLA-269, Detachment B's primary mission was to support 2/7, however, great effort was put forth to provide support to other units as asset allocation would allow.

The months of September and October found the Marines of HMLA-269, Detachment B, heavily engaged with the Taliban and insurgents. Little by little, however, the insurgent fighters learned that shooting while "the skinny gray helicopters" (Taliban description of the [Bell] AH-1W [Super Cobra]) were overhead was not a bright idea. Soon, the distinctive sound of the AH-1Ws flying overhead was enough to quell attacks on friendly

forces. The pilots of the detachment were faced with the feeling, familiar to any attack helicopter pilot, that the "bad guys" were getting away. However, the security that the presence of AH-1Ws overhead provided was often enough for mission accomplishment, even if a round was never fired.

After an initial honeymoon period of relatively little surface-to-air fire as the insurgents reacted to the presence of AH-1Ws in the AO, the situation gradually evolved and surface-to-air fires became more frequent. Along with radio intercepts discussing their attempts to hide from the helicopters, enemy fighters' discussions turned fre-

quently to shooting at those same helos, with airburst RPG's being the weapon of choice. As the threat evolved, the pilots of HMLA-269, Detachment B, continually reexamined their tactics so as to best accomplish the mission while reducing the enemy's effectiveness.

Cowardly one moment, brazen another, the insurgent fighters proved to be a resilient and ever-present threat. They were knowledgeable on the alliance forces' rules of engagement and were quick to adapt and change their own tactics, techniques, and procedures to exploit the limits of the alliance's ROE. They gave little to no thought to using innocent civilians as human shields. One of the obvious advantages they had was an intimate knowledge of the terrain and population centers. They used this familiarity to mask their movements and to blend in with the local populace.

During the early part of November, the squadron detachment gained a new headquarters element. The 24th MEU departed and was replaced by SPMAGTF-A. Headquartered out of Kandahar, SPMAGTF-A picked up where the 24th MEU left off, taking over command of HMLA-269, Detachment B, as well as 2/7.

In late November, after eight intense months of daily combat operations, 2/7 was replaced by 3d Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment (Reinforced). Since HMLA-269 and 3/8 are both stationed in Jacksonville, North Carolina, the arrival of 3/8 brought a number of familiar faces to Camp Bastion, to include two Cobra pilots from HMLA-269 who were on one-year FAC [forward air control] tours. With their relief-in-place with 2/7 complete, 3/8 rapidly got to work, picking up where their predecessors left off.

In addition to a change in higher headquarters and supported units, November brought another undeniable change—cold weather. Sitting at roughly 3,000 feet mean sea level, Camp Bastion's

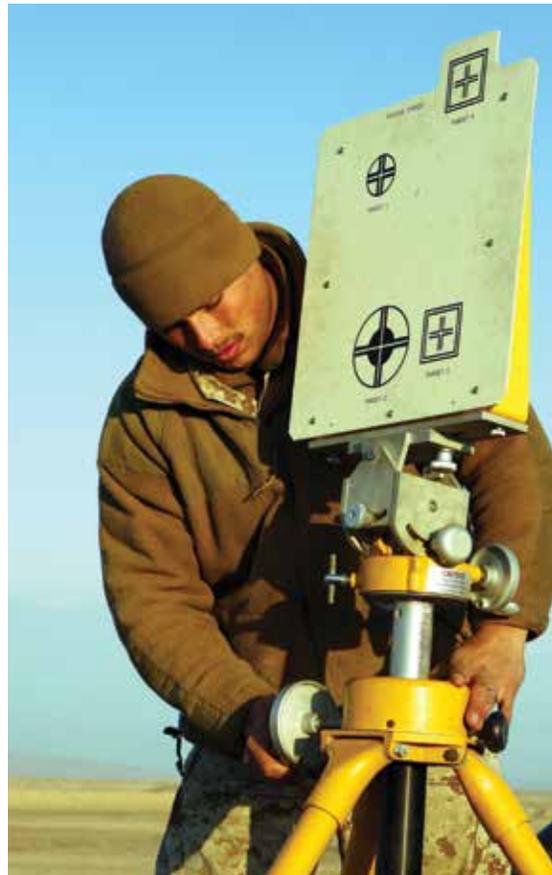


Photo courtesy of LCpl Brian Jones

Sgt Joshua E. Stone establishes a targeting point to realign weapons systems on an AH-1W Super Cobra helicopter prior to a flight mission at Camp Bastion, Helmand Province, on 12 January 2009. The Marines of HMLA-269 provide support to 3d Battalion, 8th Marines (Rein), the ground combat element of SPMAGTF-A.

temperatures regularly dropped below freezing at night and struggled to break the mid-40s during the day. This presented increasing challenges to the maintenance Marines. With no hangar facilities, all maintenance, from the routine “daily and turnarounds” to indepth phase inspections, was conducted while exposed to the deteriorating weather. Mid-December also marked the official beginning of the Afghan rainy season, which complicated the situation even further. Camp Bastion's dirt roads, combined with the influx of rain and heavy vehicle traffic, created a quagmire.

In spite of the worsening weather, the mission and operational tempo did not change. The expected slow-down in insurgent activity that normally arrives with the Afghanistan winter never materialized. In fact, through the first half of December, the squadron detachment flew nearly as many hours as it had in any previous full month. HMLA-269, Detachment B, found itself being requested by external agencies and multinational forces even more than usual during periods of degraded weather, when fixed-wing aircraft couldn't fly. The detachment's capabilities and training allowed it to operate in conditions considered unworkable for any other rotary wing asset in theater.

The AH-1W Super Cobra's all-weather capabilities make it absolutely vital to the fight in Afghanistan, especially during the winter months when the weather traditionally takes a turn for the worse. The pilots of HMLA-269, Detachment B, realized that their enemies were bound and determined to hold onto any and all tactical and geographical advantages they had secured throughout the recent months.

Looking back on the time that HMLA-269, Detachment B, spent in Afghanistan, it is impossible

to ignore the improvements made by U.S. and alliance ground forces. Their efforts have assisted the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in weakening the grip of terror to which Taliban and insurgent fighters had been subjecting the people of Afghanistan. The combination of kinetic operations and civil-military interactions to include the training of local forces and in-depth counterinsurgency operations has made significant strides toward pacifying the strongholds of the insurgents. The balanced use of the full range of mission capabilities of the MAGTF once again demonstrated why the Marine Corps is the force of choice when combating an insurgency.

Note

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About the Author

Captain Justin M. Welan was a public affairs correspondent for the Special Purpose MAGTF-Afghanistan at the time this story was written.



Marines with 1st Platoon, Charlie Battery, 1st Battalion, 12th Marines, prepare an M777A2 howitzer after receiving a call for artillery fire. The platoon was supporting a unit in the area that had positive identification of an insurgent emplacing an improvised explosive device (IED).

Photo courtesy of Cpl Thomas E. Bellegarde



Combined Arms in Afghanistan

by Major Samuel L. Meyer

Marine Corps Gazette, August 2009

CAX [combined arms exercise] was not that bad.

Let's take a look at Marine air-ground task force (MAGTF) fire support integration through an examination of a Marine expeditionary unit's (MEU's) experience in Afghanistan. It will provide valuable learning points for units preparing for their deployments.

Situation

In early 2008, 24th MEU was directed to deploy to Afghanistan in support of NATO and the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF). In the following months, the MAGTF was envisioned to operate as a theater task force in response to troubled areas in the nation. Arriving in March, the Marines would soon utilize the critical MAGTF concept of combined arms in support of the ground combat element (GCE) scheme of maneuver. MEU fire support integration would be greatly tested as U.S. Marines brought desperately needed help to those supporting Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).

Enemy

The enemy in Afghanistan was not unlike the enemies seen in Operation Iraqi Freedom I (OIF I),

albeit on a smaller scale. Insurgents still fought with guerrilla tactics—shoot and move, use the terrain and local populace to hide, and attempt to demoralize ground forces with harassing fires and homemade bombs—however, this enemy seemed to learn more quickly than those in Iraq. Lessons learned were available through discussions with ISAF counterparts; the enemy was utterly fearless, expectedly tenacious, and very adaptive.

They used the lineal terrain features like the canals, things they know we have a hard time crossing, to engage us from the other side. They thought we would not come at them, or if we did, we would have to [assault] into the teeth of their fire.¹

Despite attempting to mass in greater numbers and reinforcing their fighters, the enemy would prove unable to repel the speed, strength, and agility of the MAGTF. “The enemy was completely overwhelmed by us and not used to the way we fought. . . .”²

Mission

As part of its first assigned mission, Operation Azada Wosa (Stay Free), 24th MEU would enter the southern Helmand Province town of Garmsir, a central point for the flow of personnel, weapons, and opium supporting the Afghan insurgents and terrorists. The Marines would establish ground lines of communications for subsequent tasking. Routes would be secured by Battalion Landing Team 1st Battalion, 6th Marines (BLT 1/6), with one company moving via convoy from the northwest, while two reinforced companies would be inserted by helicopter inside the eastern portion of the town. The BLT would secure the route and the surrounding area in conjunction with organic artillery and aviation fires.

Once the convoy and artillery support by fire were in position on the west side of Garmsir, the

battalion (minus) heliborne insert could begin within the eastern sector. ISAF could not assist, as they were previously tasked or unable to fly in low ambient light levels. In the early morning hours, waves of [Sikorsky] CH-53E [Super Stallion] and [Boeing Vertol] CH-46E [Sea Knight] assault helicopters inserted two reinforced companies into the town. Harriers, Cobras, and Hueys waited overhead, providing close air support (CAS) and initial terminal guidance (ITG), while KC-BOs provided battlefield illumination and command and control. All assets provided crucial radio relay and pushed information back to the respective BLT and MEU combat operations centers (COCs). With the exception of minor injuries due to heavy pack loads and soft terrain, the insert was uneventful, and no enemy fire was received.

In the following days, the BLT maneuvered through Garmsir, a village full of Afghanistan’s primary cash crop—the opium poppy. While the MAGTF fought to expel a well-organized enemy from a trench system likened to those of World War I, it took equal care not to target civilians or the plants they grew. Throughout the battle, fire support integration was essential. Marine aviation provided CAS and urgent casualty evacuation (casevac) support; artillery provided destruction and suppression of enemy troops. MAGTF fires kept the enemy off balance as the BLT swept through the town. Combined arms were instrumental as the Marines took an enemy stronghold that had plagued ISAF and NATO for years. Imbedded reporters witnessing the operations generated media clips that often resembled trailers for war movies; however, the actions of the MEU simply demonstrated the execution of a well-conditioned MAGTF. Through combined arms and maneuver warfare, the Marines fixed, surrounded, and overwhelmed the enemy.

Combined Arms Support

“Our center of gravity is our combined arms.” “We overwhelmed them with all the vehicles, air, and arty [artillery].” These quotes did not come from strategic planners or dusty publications. They came from a sergeant and a lieutenant who served in BLT 1/6. As proven in the past, and again in Garmsir, what sets the Marine Corps apart is our ability to train and fight as the “air-ground” team. CAS and supporting fires were in short supply and high demand for all of OEF, but the MAGTF possessed organic fire support. While retaining control of its aviation assets was difficult at times in this multinational arena, commanders made it clear that the MEU was not a “shopping cart of toys” to be disbanded or piecemealed; it was a team that trained, planned, and operated as a single unit. Organic fire support and fire support integration were critical to mission success.³

Aviation Fires and FAC(A)

Aviation was a vital part of the plan for the MAGTF, providing logistical mobility and fire support. Rotary-wing (RW) and fixed-wing (FW) CAS assets combined to deliver aviation fires as well as contingency battlefield illumination; nontraditional intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR); and casevac escort. With MEU KC-130 support, Harriers extended on-station times and increased ordnance loads, allowing multiple targets to be serviced in single sorties. Using a forward arming and refueling point collocated with the BLT COC, Hueys and Cobras provided maximum time overhead with continuous CAS coverage and minimal response time. “Every time we got shot at, the helicopters [and jets] would be right there ready . . . just looking for something to shoot.”⁴

Equally as vital for fires integration was the presence of a forward air controller (airborne) (FAC[A]). The MEU possessed the only certified

FAC(A)s in the entire country. MEU FAC(A)s received more extensive ISAF training in rules of engagement and were well versed in BLT tactics, techniques, and procedures and its scheme of maneuver (SOM). FAC(A)s served to extend the tactical air control party by conducting terminal controls, but equally important were their abilities to provide radio relay, reconnaissance, asset coordination and deconfliction, coordinate generation, etcetera.⁵ While in positive contact with the ground FAC, air officer (AirO), fire support coordination center (FSCC), and other ISAF aviation assets, RW FAC(A)s coordinated target generation, developed nine-lines [procedure form] (required by ISAF), controlled artillery fires, and refined friendly positions. The GCE often moved with such speed that ground leaders’ knowledge of forward units was difficult at best. RW FAC(A)s were ideal to coordinate friendly and enemy positions. They were close enough to see both friend and foe with the human eye, either directly or on night-vision goggles, while out of the current threat envelope.

All RW CAS platforms were FAC(A) qualified; this unique capability proved essential to fires integration and mitigated risk of fratricide in numerous cases. Through practiced procedures via MAGTF workups and predeployment training (PTP), missions were approved by the FSCC in seconds, not minutes. The speed resulted from extensive practice, trust, and experience with detailed planning and integration between FAC(A)s, the FSCC, and GCE. The Harrier community recently instituted a single-seat FAC(A) program. The single-seat qualified FW FAC(A) was instrumental in similar coordination and provided unique capabilities with sensors that were superior to those of legacy AH-IWs [Bell Super Cobra]. He was able to coordinate suspected improvised explosive device sites to the ground FACs. He also coordinated airspace,

provided ITG and ISR as required, and then rapidly coordinated CAS and artillery fires with the FSCC. As the FSCC monitored the terminal attack direction net, attack briefs and enemy locations were relayed and missions were approved almost immediately. Targets were addressed most rapidly with aviation, allowing the Marines to maneuver in conjunction with those fires.⁶

Awesome isn't even the word. The air was really, really on target . . . you knew you could bring in a 500-pound bomb 190 meters away from you and you weren't going to get anyone hurt because [the pilots] were that good.⁷

The MAGTF trained together, which facilitated accurate ordnance impacts, at times within danger-close distances, with minimal risk of fratricide and in harmony with GCE SOM. FAC(A) integration served as a battlefield multiplier and played critical roles in integration of timely and accurate supporting fires, to include artillery. MEU aviation dropped over 60 tons of ordnance during operations in OEF.⁸

Artillery Fires

Artillery fires with the M777 provided effects on targets and "suppression" of threats as the BLT pressed forward in Garmsir. The enemy possessed little air defense artillery and only "possible" man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS), so traditional suppression of enemy air defense was not applicable. Enemy compounds or positions that could affect RW CAS were addressed using sequential timelines with aviation and artillery. These "packages" were strikingly similar to those taught at combined arms exercises (CAXs) and were used to facilitate deliberate assaults on major objectives; they required extensive, detailed coordination between artillery, aviation, the GCE, and the FSCC. "When the grid to suppress or the grid to mark changes [is] five minutes before the TOT [time

on target], that's when the pressure is really on."⁹

As S-2 (intelligence) reports of possible MANPADS increased, artillery was used in situations that were deemed prohibitive to aviation. Marine artillery proved vital to cover gaps that aviation could not fill due to the threat or limitations with time on station. Artillery fire support required meticulous coordination, essential to assist Marines fighting an enemy only meters away. "Nearly all missions were fired danger close." Artillery also provided critical fires that diverted enemy attention at night, allowing the BLT to refit and rearm for follow-on offensive operations. Marine artillery fired over 1,200 rounds in support of the BLT.¹⁰

FSCC

The FSCC functioned as advertised to integrate all MEU fires into a synergistic effort. Located in a Hesco bunker, the BLT S-3 (operations), the fire support coordinator (FSC), the AirO, and the direct air support center (DASC) sat shoulder to shoulder. Friendly positions were reported by ground units, refined by aviation and unmanned aircraft system (UAS) assets, and plotted by hand on a simple board with pins and strings representing MEU units and gun target lines. The artillery battery commander, serving as the FSC, and the AirO worked to approve fire missions as they coordinated with the BLT operations officer. RW CAS and casevac crews standing alert were also present in the COC and FSCC. Alert aircrews followed all developments via radio, mIRC (Internet relay chat client), and Scan Eagle. UAS and remotely operated video enhanced receiver feeds were critical as the COC and RW pilots gained higher situational awareness. With information influx to the COC, instructions for CAS and casevac crews were received directly from the FSCC prior to launch. This data allowed pilots better positive target identification and better weapons standoff.

DASC

The DASC performed its vital role in the Marine air command-and-control system, integrating aviation assets and deconflicting airspace. It provided control of MEU airspace through a high-density airspace control zone and owned the airspace covering 38 by 50 nautical miles and from the surface to 28,000 feet surrounding Garmsir.¹¹ Although normally using solely procedural control and not equipped with radar, they were able to tie into radar pictures from other ISAF agencies for higher situational awareness.

[The DASC] was very helpful throughout operations . . . having a direct air support center right there next to us. . . . We were really set up for success with the stuff we had.¹²

Marines additionally controlled numerous NATO and U.S. Army aircraft in support of Operation Azada Wosa. The DASC provided up-to-date information flow as it coordinated airspace and maximized communications regarding the friendly and enemy situation to Marine aviation. During Operation Azada Wosa, the DASC controlled 3,631 sorties and supported 20 casevacs and medical evacuations and 76 troops incontact.¹³

As the BLT continued to move throughout the town during the month of May, supporting fires were constantly available to the infantry to address enemy fire and support friendly maneuver. Integrated fire support was essential to destroy, neutralize, and suppress enemy positions in conjunction with ground SOM. These efforts required quick thinking and detailed planning and were only possible after months of MAGTF training. "The [enemy] only left, I think, when they couldn't deal with the combined arms anymore."¹⁴

Lessons Learned and Future Training

According to ISAF, 24th MEU was "catastrophically successful." Simply stated, the MAGTF executed as trained. The proficiency with which the

MEU integrated organic fire support with ground scheme of maneuver separates the MAGTF from any other force on the modern battlefield. MAGTF fires allowed 24th MEU to clear the most hotly contested southern Helmand Province enemy stronghold in roughly one month, a feat ISAF had been unable to accomplish in nearly five years. Even with the success in Garmsir, if the Marine Corps expects continued success with combined arms and fire support integration, we must refocus MAGTF training that has been lacking in past years. MAGTF training in combined arms integration has declined since OIF began. While the decline was arguably inevitable for a time, effective training in fire support coordination for the MAGTF has fallen short in the past few years. The answer may not be the CAX of old, but the current training to bring the MAGTF together to plan, rehearse, and execute fires should be addressed Marine Corps-wide.

General training will continue to be a challenge for the entire Marine Corps as we battle operational tempo versus dwell time; finite training days are indeed treasures. However, more fire support coordination exercises must be executed to facilitate air-ground team and FSCC proficiency during PTP. In Operation Azada Wosa, pilots and artillerymen often relied on previous experiences that dated back as early as CAX in 2002. Other Marine infantrymen and artillerymen had never trained to integrated fires or had seen them with much lower integration at revised CAX or Exercise Mojave Viper.

The MAGTF was nothing more than MCDP-1 [Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1] Warfighting, a concept in my head until I got here. I've been with the battalion for going on four years now, and this is the first time I've seen everything combined. It's pretty awesome.^{15, 16}

Make no mistake; BLT 1/6 was not inexpe-

rienced. They were a seasoned and tested group that had, only months before, returned from operations in Ramadi, Iraq.

Current training exercises do not address combined arms and integration with ground maneuver to a sufficient level. The lack of “sponsored” training has forced units to seek local solutions and train themselves. Marine Aircraft Group 39 (MAG-39) hosts its own fire support coordination exercise called Scorpion Fire. [The] 24th MEU conducted similar “homegrown” training exercises. Lowland Fury, conceptualized by a 24th MEU Harrier pilot, provided focused training in ISR, FAC(A), and CAS between the BLT and the aviation combat element (ACE).

The MEU also conducted its own integrated fires exercises focusing on combined arms integration and recertification of joint terminal attack controllers (JTACs) with evaluators organic to the MEU. FAC(A) training and proficiency were critical for ACE and BLT fires and should be considered mission essential. The Marine air control group detachment never trained to DASC operations during MEU PTP with Special Operations Training Group, yet they controlled and coordinated more than 4,000 aircraft in a complex theater with U.S. and NATO aviation assets in support of combat operations. Increased training in fire support coordination must be incorporated in PTP requirements.

If this critical training is not provided, accomplishment of proficiency falls on individual units amidst a storm of ever-increasing PTP requirements. If everything is important, nothing is important. PTP must be continuously reevaluated to guarantee that training is the absolute best use of the limited time to train. [Marine Air-Ground Task Force Training Command] Twentynine Palms and CAX venues are ideal, but with strains in time and logistics on certain units, some solu-

tions might involve alternative venues with MAG and regimental planners who are supervised by division, wing, the Marine expeditionary force, or other qualified Marine Corps representatives. The Marine Corps possesses agencies dedicated to MAGTF fires integration; we must continue to engage them, on some level, and guarantee fires standardization and training across the operating forces. In these areas, we can do better to ensure that the MAGTF remains proficient with supporting arms coordination, still a part of full-spectrum operations, as we prepare our deploying forces.

Summary

Aviation, artillery, and infantry units may be experts individually, but the MAGTF demands integration to overwhelm the enemy. The advantages of coordinating, planning, and executing as a MAGTF have not changed; success is still directly proportional to training. Our challenge is to continue to undertake tough training and to be flexible as we face high operational tempo and deployment rates. The answer must be agreed upon by the Marine Corps to ensure standardized and supervised training of the MAGTF in kinetic, integrated fires. The first time units experience combined arms and fire support integration should not be on the battlefield.

Notes

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1. 24th MEU, BLT 1-6 lessons learned, After Action Report, 2008.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
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 7. 24th MEU GCE lessons learned.
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About the Author

Major Samuel L. Meyer is an AH-1W Cobra pilot, forward air controller (FAC), FAC(A), and joint terminal air controller (JTAC) evaluator. He served as the primary tactics officer and S-3A with 24th MEU aviation combat element, HMM-365 (Rein) in OEF.



LCpl Sean D. Kunis, a rifleman with Company I, 3d Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, maintains security during a patrol in the Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

Photo courtesy of Sgt Pete Thibodeau



Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force–Afghanistan:

Bridge to Marine Corps’ Future in Afghanistan

by Sergeant Scott A. Whittington
Defense Video and Imagery
Distribution System

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan—Called to action with only a couple months notice, a unit was needed to fill an important and time-critical role.

A task force of about 2,200 Marines and sailors was summoned by the Pentagon and pieced together from various units around the globe—from North Carolina to Okinawa, Japan—to create a bridge for a future, larger Marine Corps presence in Afghanistan. This group of warriors composed Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force–Afghanistan [SPMAGTF–A].

For the past seven months, SPMAGTF–A has been conducting counterinsurgency operations with a focus on training and mentoring the Afghan national police. The purpose: to provide security for the Afghan people, set the conditions required for successful future assumptions of authority by the ANP [Afghan National Police], and extend the authority of government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan [GIROA] by increasing its influence over security, stability, and regional development.



Photo courtesy of CWO3 Philippe E. Chasse

LtCol David L. Odom, commanding officer for 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, talks to Afghan local nationals about their concerns in Delaram, Farah Province, Afghanistan, who have been the victim of insurgent suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices.

Colonel Duffy W. White, commanding officer of SPMAGTF–A, made his intent clear before his force arrived in their area of operations. The commander’s desired end state was to increase security in assigned district centers, contribute to the legitimacy of the GIRoA, and be prepared for follow-on missions when directed. His command experienced progress in each one of these areas, but it took every part of the MAGTF to meet the mission.

In the Beginning

In August 2008, a notification of a potential mission came to the headquarters of 3d Marine Regiment, 3d Marine Division—to lead and form the command element of a special purpose MAGTF that would head into southern Afghanistan to relieve the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit and Task Force 2/7 (a task force built around 2d Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment).

SPMAGTF–A deployed in early November

2008 and assumed control of the area of operations previously held by Task Force 2/7 [or TF 2/7]. TF 2/7 was heavily engaged in intense fighting with insurgents since they deployed in April 2008, and their Marines successfully established a strong foothold. It would be the job of SPMAGTF–A to hold the ground gained by TF 2/7, sustain the momentum they established, and prepare the way for a larger force—a Marine expeditionary brigade.

In addition to the importance of the SPMAGTF–A mission, this deployment had a special significance for 3d Marines, according to Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey C. Holt, SPMAGTF–A operations officer.

“It marked the first time we entered a combat zone as a regiment since the Gulf War,” Holt said. “It was our time.”

Forming the task force in theater, 3d Marines expediently gathered the units that would serve under the command element. Without having

time for predeployment training, the Marines and sailors of the task force came together and adapted to the situation. The ground combat element of SPMAGTF–A was identified as 3d Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, from Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel David L. Odom.

Combat Logistics Battalion 3 [CLB-3] was tapped to serve as the logistics combat element of SPMAGTF–A. The unit from Marine Corps Base Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Michael [J.] Jernigan, is the newest battalion in the entire Marine Corps, and this deployment was the unit’s first. The battalion was also augmented by its Okinawa-based parent command, Combat Logistics Regiment 3.

The aviation combat element encompassed several different units from various locations across the Marine Corps and represented all three Marine expeditionary forces. The ACE [air combat element] was initially commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Richard T. Ostermeyer from Marine Wing Headquarters, Squadron 3, and command was transferred [on] 1 February to Lieutenant Colonel Michael E. Watkins of Marine Wing Headquarters, Squadron 2.

Doing More with Less

Some of the significant challenges facing the task force stemmed from its small size relative to its landlocked area of operations [AO] roughly the size of Vermont, which spreads across two provinces and encompasses extremely rough terrain. The AO includes very mountainous regions, a desert plagued by regular sandstorms and high winds, cold temperatures in the winter and extreme heat in the summer, and a near nonexistent infrastructure with only two paved roads.

These unique conditions may have posed the most considerable obstacles for the logistical

efforts. The single biggest factor in logistics operations was the ACE, according to Major George W. Markert, SPMAGTF–A logistics officer.

“Many of the ground convoys were contested by the enemy . . . they took time,” Markert said. The use of aerial delivery into the forward operating bases was critical in enabling battlespace distribution.”

Another logistical challenge facing SPMAGTF–A was its initial table of equipment, which was not up to the level required. The task force’s supply, fiscal, and contracting Marines aggressively pursued the equipment and administrative supplies needed.

“The biggest accomplishment logistically was the rapid build-up of the SPMAGTF–A table of equipment, and thus the combat capability,” Markert said.

The task force’s communications Marines also experienced some unique challenges.

“We had to learn quickly,” said Corporal Kristoffer R. Lang, SPMAGTF–A network administrator, who went from on-the-job training during the beginning of the deployment to becoming a duty expert in less than seven months.

The communications Marines started with a small number of personnel and then spread them out across numerous forward operating bases, according to Corporal Crag T. Tauyan, SPMAGTF–A network administrator. “We were stretched pretty thin, but we worked double to meet the mission,” he said.

Significant Operations and Achievements

Prior to the arrival of Task Force 2/7 and SPMAGTF–A, the insurgent presence was more active in assigned district centers. The Marines helped to improve the conditions in the towns by conducting frequent dismounted patrols, training and mentoring the ANP, and developing positive relationships with the local elders and government leaders.

SPMAGTF–A has seen progress in the districts of Bakwa, Golestan, and Delaram. In the district of Now Zad, which has been abandoned by its former civilian populace, Marines have fought the enemy using more conventional tactics.

SPMAGTF–A conducted a major combat operation in the insurgent-infested district of Now Zad [on] 3 April. Marines struck well-known enemy locations identified within and near the insurgent-infested Now Zad district center without harming any civilians during the operation.

“The Marines in Now Zad conducted deliberate targeting of enemy positions . . . to prevent the enemy’s ability to maneuver on our forces,” Holt said. “We still look to the future when the enemy is completely [defeated in] Now Zad, and the displaced civilians feel safe to return home.”

As the SPMAGTF–A LCE [logistics combat element], CLB-3 supplied essential gear, provisions and rations, as well as mechanics, maintenance, and engineering capabilities across a vast area of operations through rough and unforgiving terrain.

Venturing throughout southern Afghanistan, they conducted 51 combat logistics patrols, covered more than 7,300 miles, and delivered more than 11 million pounds of cargo to SPMAGTF–A forces.

Another significant success of SPMAGTF–A was the LCE’s aid station, which provided medical care to U.S. service members and the local Afghan populace. Nearly 700 surgeries and other lifesaving procedures were conducted for patients with bullet wounds, head injuries, and numerous other serious conditions.

One of SPMAGTF–A’s more significant operations was Operation Gateway, where Marines cleared 43 kilometers of the improvised explosive device-ridden Route 515 connecting the two vital district centers of Delaram and Bakwa. Before the

Marines cleared it, the route was so dangerous that the local Afghans would not even use it.

Also under the watch of SPMAGTF–A, Marine Wing Support Squadron 371 constructed the world’s largest aircraft parking expansion adjacent to the airfield aboard Camp Bastion in Helmand Province. The expansion totals 1.9 million square feet and is 4,846 feet in length.

SPMAGTF–A was also the first U.S. Marine Corps unit to integrate a High Mobility Artillery Rocket System [HIMARS] into operations in Afghanistan. Compared to traditional artillery, HIMARS has greater accuracy and mobility, according to Major Frankie P. Delgado, 2d Battalion, 14th Marine Regiment, Battery D commander.

Due to the landlocked nature of the AO, the Marines of the SPMAGTF–A ACE have additional pressure to conduct logistics, refueling, troop movement, close air and assault support missions.

The ACE provided airlift for millions of pounds of cargo and more than 5,000 passengers, and provided battlefield illumination to Marines and NATO’s International Security Assistance Forces on the ground.

“Our Marines have done very well despite the environmental challenges,” said Captain Jason E. Mitchell, a CH-53E pilot with 361. “We have done everything the MAGTF and the ACE have asked of us, and our Marines are some of the most professional and technically proficient Marines I have ever encountered.”

During the past seven months, SPMAGTF–A had the honor of hosting more than 40 distinguished visitors that came to speak to its Marines and sailors in Afghanistan. Some of which included Secretary of Defense Robert [M.] Gates, Vice President [Joseph R.] “Joe” Biden Jr., Senator John [S.] McCain [III], Admiral Michael [G.] Mullen, General David [H.] Petraeus [USA], General David [D.] McKiernan [USA], General James [T.]

Conway, General James [F.] Amos, Lieutenant General Richard [C.] Zilmer, Lieutenant General [Dennis J.] Hejlik, Lieutenant General [Samuel T.] Helland, and Lieutenant General [Gary L.] North, [USAF].

Developing Relationships with the Afghan People

A major part of a successful counterinsurgency operation is winning the “the hearts and minds” of the population. SPMAGTF–A, with the help of 3d Civil Affairs Group [3d CAG], remained focused on this goal throughout their deployment. One of the primary focuses was conducting key leader and general population engagements.

“Mitigation of friction between the military and the civilian populace in a combat environment is the really purpose of civil affairs,” said Lieutenant Colonel Andrew T. Roberto, 3d CAG, Detachment G, commanding officer.

SPMAGTF–A completed six civil affairs projects, which included such improvements as the construction of new wells and public restrooms. Although these projects were simple in nature, they had an immediate impact on the economic and social development of these communities.

“The important thing to remember is that there is progress in Afghanistan,” Roberto said. One Afghan leader in Golestan shared his feelings about the Marines operating in his district. “Without you, I cannot live and work in this area I am in,” said Qasim Khan, the district sub-governor, as translated by an interpreter. “One of the first things you created here was safety, and that is the biggest thing.”

Khan meets with the Marines often to discuss local issues, and his sentiments are echoed by other community leaders who have worked with SPMAGTF–A.

“We all understand you left your children, you

left your wives and have left them to come to a far-away land for me, for our country,” Khan said. “We pray every day that you all make it home safely.”

Civilians in some areas were initially reluctant to interact with the Marines, but the people now trust them and will even shake their hands in public, according to Corporal Christopher L. Parra, a civil affairs Marine who was attached to 3/8 [3d Battalion, 8th Marines]. “It is completely different now,” he said.

Training and Mentoring Afghan National Police

Marines from the SPMAGTF–A GCE [ground control element] worked closely with the ANP and its recruits, assisting in mentoring and instructing. Their goal was to help the Afghan government develop a sustainable police force.

“I actually feel like we are making a difference out here,” said Sergeant Nicholas [W.] Fagerquist, one of the U.S. Marine instructors assisting the ANP. “[The policemen] have great military discipline, they’re eager to learn, they’re motivated and they’re being proactive.”

American civilian law enforcement instructors with SPMAGTF–A directed some of the ANP training programs, while empowering Afghan police instructors to train the ANP recruits. At the same time, Marines invoke leadership qualities among the students by doing what Marines do best: teaching the ANP recruits how to step up and take a leadership role among their peers.

“We make them realize that [being a policeman] is more than a [paycheck]; it’s a big responsibility,” said Corporal Thomas A. Moss, a U.S. Marine instructor assisting the ANP.

The training for the new policemen includes instruction in areas such as weapons handling with AK-47 assault rifles, marksmanship, advanced first aid, and nonlethal weapons



Photo courtesy of Cpl Pete Thibodeau

LCpl Kevin Gonzalez Sierra with the 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, maintains security on a patrol during Operation Gateway III in Farah Province, Afghanistan, on 7 January 2009.

techniques with an emphasis on human rights.

“I am very happy to have learned from [the] Marines,” said policeman Abdulgaber Farhay, a course graduate. “I will [go] back to my home and use what I learned to help my country.”

Team Players

The SPMAGTF–A command element also conducted coordination for operations through four major commands: Regional Command-South [RC-South], Regional Command-West [RC-West], U.S. Forces Afghanistan, and Marine Corps Central Command [MARCENT]. SPMAGTF

–A was one of the smaller units in Afghanistan conducting direct coordinating with such senior commands.

SPMAGTF–A not only served under a NATO command, RC-South, it provided direct support to allied forces on numerous occasions. The task force supplied aviation, explosive ordnance disposal, and signals intelligence capabilities to more than 12 major commands under International Security Assistance Forces-Afghanistan.

“We worked daily with the British, Dutch, Romanian, Canadian, Belgian, and Australian Forces,” said Captain Nathan O. Morales,

SPMAGTF–A fires liaison officer to RC-South. “We all have the same goal but have different ways of doing things; learning from our differences has been beneficial to all us.”

There have been several occasions where SPMAGTF–A has been asked to support NATO missions, and the Marines have not had a problem meeting the task, according to Morales. “The ability of SPMAGTF–A to plan and employ assets rapidly has been of great benefit to our NATO partners,” he said.

“You set the example in Afghanistan with your close coordination with the joint, coalition, and Afghan forces, which resulted in tactical and operational successes throughout your area of operations,” said Lieutenant General Samuel T. Helland, commander of MARCENT, in a message to SPMAGTF–A.

MEB Enabling and the Transfer of Authority

One of the SPMAGTF–A tasks was “MEB enabling,” laying the groundwork for a larger force to enter the country and continue the fight on a greater scale. SPMAGTF–A did exactly that—improving security in the AO, securing lines of communication, overseeing the expansion of existing camps, and establishing additional forward operating bases—essentially providing a bridge for an MEB to enter the country and begin operations as quickly as possible.

Deployment of an MEB meant an increase of about 8,000 Marines in Afghanistan. When SPMAGTF–A first arrived, there were no bases that could hold this amount of personnel, according to Captain Louis B. Lecher, SPMAGTF–A Headquarters Company commanding officer. “Therefore, we established a ‘mayor cell’ to coordinate the construction and buildup of a new base—Camp Leatherneck.”

“A crucial part of MEB enabling was identifying their initial requirements,” Markert said. “We had to think about what equipment we could get for the MEB ahead of time—tents, refrigerators, air-conditioning units—anything we knew they would need.” In order to lay accurate expectations for the MEB, SPMAGTF–A analyzed the challenges associated with the force and equipment flows and estimated the impact on a unit five times the size, according to Markert.

The MEB has arrived in Afghanistan, and the transfer of authority took place 29 May as the 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade assumed command and control of all U.S. Marine Corps Forces previously under SPMAGTF–A.

“As you continue the fight as [Regimental Combat Team 3], take pride in knowing that you have displayed all that is best in the Marine Corps and military services,” said Helland. “The respect and admiration of a grateful nation is well-placed, hard-earned, and well-deserved . . . [you] have paved the way for the Afghan people to commence enjoying freedoms in their communities once again.”

The command element of the SPMAGTF–A will now transition into that of RCT-3 and serve as the MEB’s ground combat element.

Notes

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About the Author

Sergeant Scott A. Whittington was a journalist for Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force-Afghanistan at the time this article was written.



A Marine Sikorsky CH-53E Super Stallion with Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 361 conducts external lift operations to transport one of several up-armored Humvees in southern Afghanistan.

Photo courtesy of Cpl Juan D. Alfonso



Afghanistan Deployed Aviation Combat Element Performs Above, Beyond Expectations

by Sergeant Juan D. Alfonso
Defense Video and Imagery
Distribution System

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan—Twelve hours on, 12 hours off. Grease covers their uniforms. Their arms and legs [are] sore from turning wrenches, climbing their aircraft, or the eight-hour mission they just completed. Exhausted, dirty—happy to wake up the next morning and do it again.

For the past seven months, Marines and sailors with Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force–Afghanistan’s [SPMAGTF–A] aviation combat element [ACE] have worked around the clock to support the unit’s mission of conducting counterinsurgency operations with a focus on training and mentoring the Afghan National Police.

Rain or shine, these Marines have successfully conducted logistics, refueling, troop movement, close air and assault support missions around the clock in one of the most challenging environments on the planet. When they weren’t flying, they were fixing their birds. Never tiring, never complaining despite the challenges of working in an austere

landlocked country, these service members have pushed themselves and their equipment to ensure the Marines on the ground in southern Afghanistan never had to say, “where’s my air support?”

Fixed Wing

The SPMAGTF–A’s ACE is a composite unit with squadron detachments representing the three active Marine expeditionary forces.

The mission of the ACE’s fixed-wing units is to support the SPMAGTF–A commander by providing air-to-air refueling and assault support, day or night, under all weather conditions during expeditionary, joint, or combined operations.

Included were the aircrew and maintainers of Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 252 from Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, North Carolina. Its Marines performed combat operations from Kandahar Airfield, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, from 23 October 2008 to 12 April 2009.

During their stint as the ACE’s fixed-wing squadron, they carried more than 1.7 million pounds of cargo, 3,000 passengers, delivered more than 60,000 pounds of supplies via aerial delivery, and provided battlefield illumination to Marines and NATO’s International Security Assistance Forces on the ground.

“Aerial delivery is probably the most important [support] we can provide ground troops due to the poor weather and a lack of road structure,” said Captain Kevin M. Shiels, a [Lockheed Martin] KC-130J aircraft commander.

Delivering essential items such as water, rations, fuel, and ammo via parachute allowed the operating forces, whether they were U.S. Marines, British Royal Marine commandos, or Special Forces, to continue to operate in the battlespace, extending their presence within a specific area, according to Shiels.

After nearly seven months in Afghanistan, the time came for a new refueling squadron to take the reigns.

[Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 352] VMGR-352, from MCAS Miramar, California, took charge of the ACE’s fixed-wing needs [on] 13 April.

Since their arrival, 352’s Marines have transported more than 2,000 passengers and 2 million pounds of fuel, water, rations, and ammunition in addition to providing battlefield illumination, aerial refueling, and aerial deliveries to 3d Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment (Reinforced), SPMAGTF–A’s ground combat element, and its supporting U.S. and NATO allies.

One Marine officer attributed the operational successes to the “outstanding Marines” in 352’s command.

“The guys in our maintenance section have been working extremely hard to keep the aircraft ready to go 24/7, and our load masters have just done a phenomenal job,” said Captain Mike M. Proctor, 352’s safety officer. “Without our maintainers, crew chiefs, and load masters, we wouldn’t have been able to do the job we have.”

Despite the limited amount of personnel and supplies, neither unit has ever failed to accomplish their mission.

“It’s pretty incredible and says a lot about the leadership in our maintenance sections and the caliber of Marines serving in VMGRs today,” Proctor said. “These Marines are flexible and have really proven that Marines are ready for any mission they’re given at any time.”

Heavy Lift

Since 3d Marine Regiment, SPMAGTF–A’s command element, arrived in early November, the ACE has seen three heavy-lift helicopter squadrons provide assault, logistics, and troop movement support

in a country where the roads may be littered with mines from previous wars or improvised explosive devices [IED] from the current one.

Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 466 [HMH-466], from MCAS Miramar, [California,] hit the ground running during its stint as the ACE's only heavy-lift squadron. On one occasion, HMH-466 delivered more than 95,000 pounds, via CH-53E Super Stallions, of forward operating base materials in support of Operation Gateway III, a clearing mission to help create freedom of movement for the Afghan people along what used to be the IED-ridden Route 515 [main road in Bakwa District].

The operation was a heavily organized event, which required several hours of maintenance from helicopter mechanics as well as coordination with all the elements of SPMAGTF-A, from the Marines on the ground to the Marines in the air.

With the dust-filled environment to which the aircraft are constantly exposed, the aircraft often couldn't produce the engine power required to lift the 20,000-pound shipping containers used during the operation, but the Marines were up to the task.

"Our maintainers got the engines back up to specification power," said Major Stuart [H.] Howell, a [Sikorsky] CH-53E [Super Stallion] pilot and 466's weapons and tactics instructor. "The Marines just worked it back into shape, cleaning out the engines and in some cases replacing them. We couldn't have accomplished this mission without them."

After a job well done, HMH-466 turned over the mission to HMH-361, another CH-53E unit.

The MCAS Miramar-based unit picked up right where 466 left off, conducting more than 260 flight hours a month of assault, logistics, and troop movement.

"Our Marines have done very well despite the environmental challenges," said Captain Jason E.

Mitchell, a CH-53E pilot with 361. "We have done everything the MAGTF and the ACE have asked of us, and our Marines are some of the most professional and technically proficient Marines I have ever encountered."

Today, HMH-361's flight hours have become more manageable due to the recent arrival of HMH-362.

The unit from Marine Corps Base Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, arrived with [Sikorsky] CH-53D Sea Stallions ready to take its share of the loads from its heavily tasked sister unit, despite the unique circumstances surrounding its deployment to Afghanistan.

Originally deployed to al-Asad, Iraq, [on] 23 January 2009, to conduct assault support, logistics, and movement of personnel missions, the unit's leaders redirected 362 to Afghanistan due to President Barack [H.] Obama's announced troop build up.

"Afghanistan is where the fight is now," said Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey A. Hagan, HMH-362's commander. "There was a planned drawdown in Iraq and an increasing need for medium-lift capabilities in Afghanistan. So we began making arrangements to move from al-Asad to Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan."

Though the unit was motivated and prepared for its new mission, environmental differences between the two theaters coupled with operational requirements called for major modifications to their CH-53Ds.

The unit's maintenance Marines began working around the clock to exchange the T64-GE-413 engines, typically found in CH-53Ds, to hotter burning T64-GE-416 engines used in CH-53Es, according to Master Sergeant Robert Webb, 362's maintenance section chief.

In addition to the modifications, the Marines had to partially dismantle their aircraft for trans-

portation to Afghanistan. Each bird was sent one at a time. But despite their daunting task, the Marines pulled together, rolled up their sleeves and went to work.

“Our maintenance Marines are the best in the Marine Corps,” said Major Gary W. Thomason, 362’s aircraft maintenance officer. “On their backs is how we made this happen. I think I speak for everyone involved when I say, fantastic job.”

Cobras

No aviation combat element can truly be prepared to take on their full scope of duties without rotary-wing fire power. For that reason, the Corps’ deployed Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 269 [HMLA-269] from MCAS New River, North Carolina.

Originally under the command of the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit [24th MEU] to provide close air support to Task Force 2d Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 269’s Marines soon found themselves providing close air support to a unit spread over an area twice the size of Connecticut. They began to immerse themselves in combat operations on a regular basis, giving 2/7 the added help needed to suppress enemy insurgency in southern Afghanistan.

After the 24th MEU transferred authority to SPMAGTF–A in November 2008, 2/7 pulled out and the familiar faces of 3d Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment (Reinforced), also from North Carolina, pulled in quickly, picking up where 2/7 left off. The squadron continued to provide close air support throughout the harsh winter months, resulting in added maintenance to 269’s already hectic around-the-clock maintenance schedule. But 269’s maintainers pitched in and pulled through.

HMLA-167 replaced 269 in late February. HMLA-169 took over combat operations, 1 May.

Support

During the ACE’s existence, it has seen two Marine Aviation Logistics Squadrons—first was MALS-16 from MCAS Miramar, [San Diego, California,] and later MALS-26 from MCAS New River, North Carolina.

Aviation logistics units work behind the scenes, diligently repairing damaged engines and mechanical components too far damaged for the maintainers and crew chiefs of individual squadron and detachments to handle—a job they have happily done and have never failed.

But during their time on Kandahar, MALS-16 performed a skillset outside of the regular scope of duties in an aviation unit, proving that every Marine is a rifleman first.

The Marines conduct bimonthly convoys to transport their squadron’s flight surgeon and medical personnel to a women’s medical clinic on Camp Hero [Kandahar Province]. There, Navy Lieutenant Christine [R.] Stehman, the ACE’s former flight surgeon, started an ongoing mission, training and mentoring an Afghan midwife to help curb the mortality rate of women and children in a country with one of the highest rates of maternal and infant deaths in the world.

Despite the discovery of several improvised explosive devices along their routes during the past year, these Marines embraced the opportunity to conduct convoy operations on the ground.

“We really don’t get to do these kinds of operations in the wing,” said Staff Sergeant Jason R. Rochefort, a dynamic component mechanic with MALS-16, who also served as the aviation combat element’s convoy commander. “These convoys are a good opportunity to put down our wrenches and pick up our rifles.”

To prepare for their task, the MALS Marines received extensive ground operations training prior to their first convoy mission.

According to Corporal Clintt F. Hazlet, a flight equipment mechanic with MALS-16, he and the team of Marines conducted basic fireteam, squad, and vehicle formation training, in addition to several escalations of force and Afghan culture briefs. Drivers and vehicle commanders received even more advanced training.

The MALS-26 Detachment was later redesignated as MALS-40 and is currently operating in Afghanistan.

Commander

As the SPMAGTF–A ACE prepares to be absorbed into the 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade’s Marine Aircraft Group 40, it can look back on what its commander said is a job well done.

“We all came from different areas, representing three active duty and one reserve, air wings and have been focused on the SPMAGTF–A mission from the moment we landed in Afghanistan,” said Lieutenant Colonel Michael E. Watkins, the ACE commanding officer. “There have been many limitations to accomplishing our mission, but I have been very impressed with how quickly the Marines adapted and the support they gave especially considering the size of the area we covered.

“My Marines had a very aggressive mindset and were excited to take on the mission. During our time here, we have been proud to support not

only U.S. forces, but we were able to provide battlefield illumination, troop transportation, and close air support to many of our NATO allies. We are all excited about taking the fight to the enemy and helping out in any way we can.

“I’ve been extremely impressed to watch these Marines work so hard to provide support for every service member on the ground. It’s the kind of hard work and dedication that makes you proud to be a Marine.”

An aviation combat element was formed from bits and pieces of the whole Marine Corps almost a year ago and, despite the dust, the blistering cold of the Afghan winter months, and the sweltering heat of the Afghan summer, they pulled together to function as one unit and accomplished the Corps’ mission in Afghanistan.

Note

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About the Author

Sergeant Juan D. Alfonso was a public affairs correspondent for Special Purpose MAGTF–Afghanistan at the time this article was written.

Mine-resistant, ambush-protected vehicles (MRAP) operated by 2d Platoon, Motor Transportation Company, Combat Logistics Battalion 3 (CLB-3), line up to depart from Combat Outpost Puller in Farah Province, Afghanistan, during Operation Gateway III. Gateway III relied on CLB-3 as the combat logistics element and 3d Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment (Reinforced), as the ground combat element to place combat outposts along southern Afghanistan's Route 515 through the Bakwa District, improving security and travel for U.S. military convoys and local Afghans.

Photo courtesy of LCpl Ronald W. Stauffer





Interview: Captain Robert G. Barber

by Marine Corps History Division

Marine Corps oral historian Lieutenant Colonel Melissa D. Mihocko interviewed Captain Robert G. Barber, Combat Logistics Battalion 3 (CLB-3), operations officer for the Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force–Afghanistan (SPMAGTF–A) in 2008–9. The following has been edited from the original transcript for space constraints in this work.

Mihocko: Did you have any idea . . . that it was going to become CLB-3?

Barber: We did. . . . We had known that for almost a year, year and a half. We knew that there was a reorganization that it would be CLB, and we knew that there would be a separate CLC (Combat Logistics Company) at the time that was not a part of us. The naming convention I don't think had been worked out, what it would be called, but we knew that we would be a DS [direct support] CLB.

Mihocko: And in terms of the reorganization, what was your role as the OPSO [operations officer]?

Barber: The commanding officer of CSSG [Combat Services Support Group] at the time had already



Photo courtesy of Cpl Daniel Woodall

Marines with CLB-3, 1st Marine Logistics Group (Forward), finished construction of a bridge and guard post in Marjah, Afghanistan, on 5 December 2008. Combat engineers with CLB-3 conducted operations in direct support of Marine units operating in the area.

reorganized CSSG to look like Combat Logistics Battalion 3 with Combat Logistics Company 35 so that when we did the deactivation there wasn't a huge shuffling of people.

Mihocko: And what about the deployment to Afghanistan? Did you know at that point when you took over as OPSO that you would be deploying?

Barber: When we did the redesignation or activation, I think 27 June 2008 . . . in August, we were told that 3d Marines was going to do a site survey for a Special Purpose MAGTF [Marine Air-Ground Task Force] potentially in Afghanistan. [The] 3d Marines asked us to go as logistics

planners for the SPMAGTF. The LCE [Logistics Combat Element] at the time had not been identified. That was the second week in August, so Colonel [Michael] Jernigan and I went to Afghanistan for about three and a half weeks. We came back the first week in September and immediately started planning that CLB-3 would go just because 3d Marine Regiment was going. With the new MLG [Marine Logistics Group] reorganization, it put a direct support combat logistics battalion with an infantry regiment. Hence, our naming convention of CLB-3 and in direct support, 3d Marine Regiment. About two weeks later, we were about Twentynine Palms, [California,] with 3d Marines for a mission rehearsal exercise and were told by

the MARCENT [U.S. Marine Forces, Central Command] that we had been tagged to go. That was 27 September, and literally four days later our advance party and quartering party left. About 35 days later, the whole battalion had deployed.

Mihocko: What, from your perspective, is the mission of CLB-3?

Barber: Our formal mission statement is to provide direct support [DS] combat logistics to 3d Marine Regiment and general support [GS] logistics to other Marine units. So for our mission in here, it's GS and DS to the base and the 3d Marine Regiments.

Mihocko: When you then were tagged to support the SPMAGTF, how did that change the mission?

Barber: It was direct support to an infantry battalion not a regimental-size unit so 3/8 [3d Battalion, 8th Marines] was our main customer. We were direct support to them for all their logistical needs and then we were also general support to the MAGTF and, again, essentially every Coalition unit in southern Afghanistan. We fixed and repaired and did logistics for the British, the Dutch, the CJSOTF guys [Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force], Army, Navy, Seabees [Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (NMCB)]. We did support for all those guys, but primarily our focus was direct support for 3/8.

Mihocko: As an operations officer in the battalion . . . once you found out you could be deployed to Afghanistan, what were your specific goals in terms of you now running the operations?

Barber: One goal . . . was to make sure all the Marines had some level of training so that when

we got there it wasn't just taking a Marine out [of] his unit and sending him to Afghanistan. So we were able to divert an IED [improvised explosive device] lane training team that was on its way back to the schoolhouse and we got a week of training with them.

Mihocko: Training the Marines to what? Be familiar with IEDs or recognizing them?

Barber: Recognizing them mainly, that was really an after action from 2/7. Their convoy drive times were, you know. . . . That was a hardball road. Our longest trip was about 50 hours and that was two and a half days. So it's hard for us to do that here in Hawaii, to even simulate a six-hour convoy. But immediate actions [IAs] for convoys since we knew that convoys and distribution operations would be our biggest challenge. If anyone was current, we kind of set up they were current but we didn't slack on the training for weapons, marksmanship training, the immediate action drills, motor transport driving familiarity. Our goal before we left was to get everybody as much and as thorough training as possible. We didn't want to do it just to check our PTP [predeployment training phase] continuum sheet and say we did it, but with the time-frame so crunched it was tough.

Mihocko: What were some of the other challenges that you faced [in the predeployment phase]?

Barber: Not having the entire battalion here. We didn't meet 103 of our 305 Marines until we landed in Manas, Kyrgyzstan, the Air Force base that does the in-processing going to Afghanistan. That's where we first met one third of the battalion.

Mihocko: And those 103, were they just across all MOSs [military occupational specialties], all ranks?

Barber: One of them turned out to be a company commander, we had a first sergeant come from Okinawa, and then we had all of our EOD (explosive ordinance disposal) guys and then almost all of the other special skills, postal, services, exchange services, disbursing spread out. We had a company executive officer that came, our senior watch officer and Lieutenant [Johanna] Schaffer led the female engagement team (FET). We had a lot of key personnel that came from Okinawa.

Mihocko: So how did you overcome that you're not able to train basically as a battalion? Once you finally did [train] in-country or in-theater, how did you overcome that challenge?

Barber: At the time, we got lucky. Not that we wanted it, but when we landed in Kandahar [Afghanistan] we had intended to go straight to Camp Bastion [northwest of Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand Province] and start setting up for the arrival of 3/8 into Camp Bastion. Because of bed space, we weren't allow[ed] to go to Camp Bastion because of 2/7 and 3/8 both being there, there wasn't enough bed space. That allowed us about three weeks at Kandahar to continue our blocks three and blocks four training. And in that three to four weeks, we were able to finish . . . increase our weapon shoots, we were able to hone some immediate action drills, we were able to run some COC [combat operations center] battle drills and some CPX [command post exercise] type stuff. And we were able to really pull the team together so that we had all 305 of us or all 340 of us there for three weeks solid. We continued to do mission analysis, we continued to do OPTs [operational planning team] on how to move to Bastion and what to do once we got there. So that three weeks paid dividends for us in hindsight.

Mihocko: So by the end of the three weeks, did you feel like the whole battalion was well integrated and felt comfortable at that point [that] everyone was well trained?

Barber: I don't know, at some point in the deployment—the first months, six weeks, eight weeks—I had a feeling that the battalion was well integrated.

Mihocko: Not necessarily the first three weeks though?

Barber: Right. And I did learn, even after Christmas, I mean five months into the deployment, I did hear—one of the Marines that worked for me was a senior watch officer—came up and said, “Have you heard anything about Okinawa Marines not being treated fairly or Marines that have been integrated not being treated fairly?” And I had not, but I wasn't in the group that was integrated into the Hawaii group, so I don't know if their perception was different than ours, but I know no one I know ever held any animosity nor did they not accept the integration of these Marines. We were excited to have them and work[ed] to integrate them as quickly as possible.

Mihocko: Right, I mean because that is quite a large percentage of your unit in total. So when you moved down to Camp Bastion at that time, talk a little bit about your perceptions about arriving there. I assume [that] even when you were at Kandahar you were having to provide support to 3/8, even though you weren't colocated but once you were actually on the ground with 3/8, talk a little bit about the operations down there.

Barber: Before we moved to Camp Bastion as a battalion, we sent guys down there every day. In addition to that, we sent guys out to the FOBs

[forward operating base] from Kandahar to provide maintenance teams and support as much as we could . . . When we did move down, it was very similar to OIF-1 [Operation Iraqi Freedom I]. We showed up and they [were like] here's your lot, here's your dirt, no tents, no power, you know, no infrastructure. They did have some building tents, but we couldn't get a handle on moving into those until everybody left from 2/7 and some contractors were there and nobody really had a solid plan on how the camp was to be set up. So that took some time at the beginning—two weeks, three weeks—I think I probably slept in six or seven different tents, including my own office, until finally they said here's where you're going to sleep. Support-wise, Colonel Jernigan had a guidance that when we get there the first thing we're going to do is start helping 3/8 and the MAGTF. If we need stuff for us, like building benches and morale and welfare stuff, that can wait. We'll dish out all the support we can as soon as we get there. And we did that, and we worked incredibly long, I'd say 24 hours every day for the whole deployment, but initially it was getting a handle on what our mission was, what we had to do. We inherited about \$60 million dollars in supplies that were not inventoried, and we had about four Marines allocated in the supply section to do that inventory. They just couldn't do it all; it would have taken them years. So that piece, realizing roles and responsibilities from what MAGTF and what 3/8 wanted us to do, and their S-4 section looked at us as an extension of their S-4 section whereas we looked at 3/8 as willing to support their operations. Their CO would come over and ask us to order chairs, to order things that they can all do stuff internally. And I don't think the roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, we kind of use the MEU [Marine expeditionary unit] model as a baseline. You think of us as an MSSG

[MEU Service Support Group], we can do all the stuff that's above your capability, but they bring a lot if not more capability. They have more auto mechanics than we have.

Mihocko: Did that eventually get resolved?

Barber: There's always friction. Their S-4 asked us to do things that he could have very easily done himself. I think it was the easy way out, we were happy to do them and we told him we'd support and do that overflow maintenance or whatever the piece was. But on some occasions, you just couldn't do it because we just didn't have the people or the capability. So there's always friction, they'd want us to drive somewhere when we could easily fly the stuff there by helicopter a day later rather than put 60 guys and 10 trucks on the road. So there was always some level of friction, but it wasn't enough to stop the mission or stop support.

Mihocko: How did you prepare your Marines, in particular, for living on base in Afghanistan?

Barber: There was a lot of discussion in this room before we left with the commanders and the staff. My Marines at the time were staff guys, COC watch officers, and EOD guys that I didn't meet until we got there, but preparation was the training packages that were put together. We did do some COC operations out at the Marine Corps training area at Bellows [Air Force Station, Waimanalo, Hawaii,] and some out here in our backyard to get caught up on the command and control systems and the logistics operations centers and things like that. But I think everybody here, going into it, assumed that it would be OIF-1 or Fallujah, OIF-2 or 3 in Fallujah all over again where you carry what's on your back, you got to sleep in a tent, which we did for the whole deployment. Specific preparation



Photo courtesy of LCpl Ronald Stauffer

LCpl Robert Burgos (left) and Jesus A. Chavez inventory gear in the supply lot at Camp Barber, Helmand Province, Afghanistan, on 19 January 2009.

was nothing more than what normal Marines do for quick deployment training.

Mihocko: This is your third deployment. [For] most of the Marines in your section, [was this] their first deployment?

Barber: My S-3A, my assistance operations officer, this is his third deployment in four years. He did one to Iraq and this was his second to Afghanistan. My ops chief did not have any combat deployments, but he was with [the] MEU for a ton of those so he deployed, just not to Iraq or Afghanistan. Most of the Marines, this was their second or third deployment. We really had very few that this was their first deployment unless they were

really young Marines. We actually briefed the staff, the Commandant, when he came through, that we had 50 percent of the Marines in the battalion had deployed, this was their second deployment. And [for] 50 percent of those, this was their third or more. So it was quite substantial.

Mihocko: And do you think, [that with] this being your third deployment, that makes a big difference in terms of the way the Marines perform?

Barber: I do, I think it's huge. I mean, the first time you go, you don't know what to expect. So going back this time, I didn't have any reservations about what I was getting into. I went there for the site survey so I had a feeling of it anyway.

But most of the guys got there and literally within three or four days you would always hear, “Do it this way, this is how we did it in Iraq last year, and it worked, still works.” So those lessons, those techniques that they used in Iraq, at a certain level still worked. The overarching tactics in Iraq are beneficial to know but don’t always apply to Afghanistan.

Mihocko: Talk a little bit about Operation Gateway III.

Barber: Gateway III was an operation to open a route in Afghanistan, Route 515. The route went from Delaram [western Afghanistan] to Bakwa [Farah Province]. Two COPs (combat outposts) of FOBs (forward operating base) that the MAGTF had a presence at. Before the MAGTF got there, 2/7 had traveled down [Route] 515. They had tremendous loss of life, and it was deemed by most people in southern Afghanistan as the most dangerous road in southern Afghanistan. I think when we started Gateway III there were two or three IEDs marked on our map for 515 and when we finished there were over 60 IEDs.

Mihocko: Marking them where you had found them?

Barber: Found and cleared or struck.

Mihocko: Had 2/7 or any other unit before you tried to take this proactive approach to clearing?

Barber: Not that I’m aware of. [The] 2/7 did go down at one time and then, because of the loss that they had, they decided to go around it through open desert. And that was the normal friendly tactic in southern Afghanistan. You just don’t travel on the roads if you don’t have to. It’s all open desert, so

you just shoot an azimuth [measuring an arc of the horizon] or use your BFT [blue force tracker] and cut across the desert. But Gateway III was to open that route, and the big picture of Gateway III was typical COIN [counterinsurgency]. They were going to establish combat outposts every eight or nine klicks [kilometers] on 515 with overwatch. They were going to establish a presence, they were going to conduct counterinsurgency operations with securing the populace, holding the road, and building infrastructure on 515. They wanted to get it paved, they wanted to improve it so that it could open up traffic and eventually secure the population through very typical counterinsurgency strategy.

Mihocko: And how long of a distance did you say that this road was?

Barber: It was about 30 or 40 kilometers.

Mihocko: And what was the duration of this operation?

Barber: It was originally supposed to last less than 30 days, I don’t remember the specifics. And then we built three combat outposts along 515, so we followed in [the] trail of 3/8 and their route clearance platoon. I think they had a weapons company and route clearance embedded with them. They would go in and clear the spot, we would move in right behind them and build a combat outpost, literally within hours.

Mihocko: For them?

Barber: For them. And it was the platoon-size combat outpost billeted [for] 40 to 50 Marines. It was about a football field in size, 90 meters by 80 meters or so square, with an ECP [entry control point]

in one of the corners. We used 20-foot ISO containers in three of the corners with a guard tower on top, and then we just used berms and pushed dirt with a bulldozer in concertina wire. Force protection was there, it was just a really rudimentary combat outpost. We built three of those, and we built each one literally in less than 12 hours. It was phenomenal that we would go to sleep at night and we would wake up the next morning our Marines had been working all night and there was this football-field-size, enclosed eight-foot-tall dirt berm pushed all around you with concertina and Hesco and mortar pit in the middle.

Mihocko: Any idea that the platoon would remain at the combat outpost and provide a presence along the route?

Barber: Yes ma'am.

Mihocko: And how long were they intended to stay there?

Barber: Their intention was to stay there for 30 days to continue patrolling once the three outposts were established to secure the road, and then they were going to turn that over to the Afghan National Army [ANA] . . . Force levels for that and [the] national army failed to produce enough Afghan soldiers to fill those COPs. So by the time we left, 3/8 was still heavily embedded in those three combat outposts on 515.

Mihocko: By the time CLB-3 left?

Barber: Yes ma'am, and 3/8 turned those over in the entirety to 2d Battalion, 3d Marines.

Mihocko: So a new Marine unit came in and filled it.

Barber: But the original plan was to turn those over to the Afghans and then pull 3/8 out and move to the next objective, but I don't think there were ever enough Afghan National Army to fill those combat outposts.

Mihocko: Before we move on, is there anything else you want to say about Operation Gateway?

Barber: Gateway was our first major operation. Our engineers were out there for three weeks building these things. Again, it was phenomenal to see the UAV [unmanned aerial vehicle] footage, a picture of it, the next day when you woke up. Afghans would go to sleep at night and there would be nothing but dirt and they'd wake up and see a platoon of Marines next to them with a combat outpost.

Mihocko: Did any of the Marines stay out there?

Barber: They did. Our Marines stayed out there and then we would send guys out that were recovery teams, or a wrecker with a recovery team, and they would stay out there as well as our M88 [armored] tank recovery vehicle that we had. They stayed out in the middle COP to do recovery operations for the route clearance team and for 3/8 Marines.

Mihocko: Can you talk a little bit about the female engagement teams?

Barber: They used those during Operations Gateway III and Pathfinder, and they wanted to model it after the Lioness Program in Iraq. So 3/8 [did] not hav[e] female Marines and CLB-3 did. Lieutenant Joanna [R.] Schaffer, our senior watch officer in the COC, put together a team and went to Delaram, which was the opening of [Route] 515 as you moved east to west. Did some preliminary

training there with our intel officer, Matthew [F.] Lottinger, who's a human intel (HUMINT) officer by trade. He gave them some talking [points], not interrogation techniques, but just how to talk to Afghan people. We had a military police on our staff as a first sergeant. He gave them some search techniques and what they need to do if they ever had to search female Afghans. And then they just did some cultural classes and some other objective-based classes, [like] site exploitation, what to look for, and they went out on patrols with 3/8.

Mihocko: And what was 3/8's intention? What was their request in terms of not asking for this engagement team?

Barber: They wanted to engage the other 50 percent of the population; the women in the Afghan villages. Because they would speak to the men, but they wanted to also engage the women of the Afghan villages. So they requested a Lioness Team similar to Iraq. Our Marines came back and said, "Whatever I do the rest of this deployment, nothing will make up for that." It was the greatest thing they [FETs] had done. They visited villages and they were invited into homes by the women and they were given food and they were asked to sing. They gave [out] candy; the kids loved them. And talking to one of the [Afghani] women led to an IED emplacer being captured and being detained because the women felt free to talk to our women. Whereas, they don't feel that free talking to male Marines.

Mihocko: Is this something that is going to be implemented in the future?

Barber: I would hope so. I think in Iraq they showed that it was remarkably successful. I wish they would do it on a larger scale in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan, as you may know, is much more oppressive [for] women than Iraq is. It is not, and there's no similarity of modern society in Afghanistan like there is in Iraq; no TV, no cell phone, no running water. At least where we were. I think that's the only way you are going to engage the women in the village, and I think you have to do that to successfully conduct COIN in southern Afghanistan.

Mihocko: Can you briefly talk about honesty traces?

Barber: [It] is a way to plot your route on a map overlay—your actual route versus your planned route. So what we found is when we would do our planned route, we would vary it every time, even in our planning. When we started doing honesty traces, which is a British technique that we picked up, we found that we were crossing some of the *wadis* [valleys] and the crossings at the same point every time, even though we know we planned to go different routes. The enemy doesn't see what your planned route is. They only see what your actual route is. So they were putting things in our actual routes where we were saying, "Well we went that way last time. We'll go back another way." And then just because of the canalization of the wadi, we would have to cross at the same spot. We were able to get information from the British and we were also able to plot our own information and it had some pretty significant patterns. Yes, we would always start off in different directions, but there were some really unique places where you'd have to cross and it showed all the routes running through there.

Mihocko: Right, and the risk being?

Barber: That's where they are going to put the

IED. Now what that did for us [is] it identified more than any other platform we had—more than human intel, more than UAVs [unmanned aerial vehicles] overhead, more than witnesses spotting somebody putting it in the road. It identified where our guys needed to get out of the vehicles and use their metal detectors to sweep for IEDs. That technique alone found and cleared more IEDs than any other technique.

Mihocko: So it was really that predictable.

Barber: We used mine rollers extensively over there.

Mihocko: Was that in your support company? Who used those?

Barber: Motor T Company used them on the trucks, but our EOD guys and our S-2 did a pretty thorough study on mine roller effectiveness.

Mihocko: What is a mine roller?

Barber: It's like the beam that sits out in front of the truck—the MTVR [medium tactical vehicle replacement], the HMMWV [Humvee], or MRAP [mine resistant ambush protected]—that has wheels on it that is intended to strike the IED before it hits the vehicle. Now if it hits the mine roller, it completely destroys the mine roller in most cases.

Mihocko: But not the vehicle?

Barber: But not the vehicle. There's about 12 to 16 feet of stand-off from the vehicle itself. So what we found was these mine rollers [was] that we were not detonating the IEDs. The IEDs would strike the second or third or sometimes the

eleventh or thirteenth vehicle in the convoy. We didn't know if that meant that it was command activated or what was wrong with it. We finally figured out that they weren't command activated; that they were just, by design, poorly made and it took a few [times to set them off]. So [the result] was unintentional by the enemy, but it had significant effects, because the mine roller was less effective. I think at one point, we were recording 11 percent effectiveness for our mine roller. Now 11 percent is better than zero, but we expected it to be higher. After extensive testing on the mine roller, using actual recovered IEDs, our EOD guys [took] various steps to increase that effectiveness by adding weight to the mine rollers. Almost 50 percent! So significant improvement for the mine rollers and now, since we have made those improvements, the people who make the mine roller have gone back, redesigned the mine roller using our technique, and classified it as the next generation mine roller. So it is pretty phenomenal that our EOD guys can get out there, change a mine roller a little bit, make it more effective, and then that gets implemented Marine Corps-wide.

Mihocko: Were there other challenges or difficulties that you faced during this deployment?

Barber: The flow of equipment and supplies. Just, for example, our SORTS [status of resources and training system] report, and our rating was the lowest [it] can be up until about three or four months into the deployment, and then it jumped up one notch.

Mihocko: Now explain that in laymen's terms, SORTS reporting.

Barber: We rate our equipment readiness and our personnel readiness on a scale of one to four—four

being the lowest and one being the best. Ours was four for equipment. Not because we couldn't repair it, because we didn't have it. We only had about 50 percent of our mission essential equipment up until about three or four months in, and then we started getting more equipment in the spring-time, until eventually I think we were at about a SORTS rating of two when we left. But it's just hard to get some of that equipment into Afghanistan without a seaport. They come into Pakistan and they drive up a road into Kandahar and from Kandahar they pushed it over to us. But when you are moving a 50-ton crane, you can't just fly this thing straight into Bastion.

Mihocko: And what was the majority [of the] equipment you had?

Barber: Recovery vehicles was one. Vehicle recovery wreckers both for the LVS [Logistics Vehicle System] and the MTVR variants that we used. Our initial Headquarters Marine Corps approved allocation was, I think it was five or seven, and the most we ever had was three. You know a lot of things like that. Metal detectors for our sweep team so they could identify IEDs.

Mihocko: Where was most of this equipment coming from?

Barber: We identified it in our mission analysis brief during the site survey. It was eventually approved by Headquarters Marine Corps in October or November timeframe. I'm not sure of the sourcing. I imagine it was globally sourced or direct units were directed to send it. But we did not take anything with us of that size. We didn't take any MTVRs. We didn't take any LVSs. We did take some smaller things. We took our command operation's center suite of computers and screens.

We took some specific stuff for our maintenance guys that we knew they would need.

Mihocko: Did you expect that?

Barber: We were told that it was either there waiting on us or it would be there before us and come in. Eventually, we started getting stuff in, but when we left we were still at only about 75 percent of our mission essential equipment.

Mihocko: How do you think it would have changed your operations as a battalion had you had all the equipment, because it sounds like you were quite successful at accomplishing the mission?

Barber: What we were doing without motor T vehicles, for example, and our MTVRs and our MRAPs is [that] we only ever had enough equipment [for] one platoon [to] go out at a time. I could keep a general support element back that could do a quick reaction force [QRF] mission of 13–15 Marines and six vehicles. But if I wanted to run full simultaneous convoy operations to the east and to the west, I didn't have enough equipment to do that. [Or] a platoon would return from a convoy that lasted three days and we would have scheduled another platoon to leave two days later or the next day later. But they were using the same trucks as the platoon that just got back; same wrecker, same trucks, same MRAPs, and if those things broke or got blown up we now have less than 36 hours to repair this stuff so that we can get it back out. That was the most challenging. Yes, we had two platoons, but we could only operate one at a time because of the equipment stuff. Same for the maintenance guys. There were a lot of maintenance guys . . . I think we had an 11 or 12 and, in some reports, I saw was up to 17 that was their single MOS. For example, communications and



Photo courtesy of Sgt Pete Thibodeau

LCpl Christopher Hudson, with 3d Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment (Reinforced), maintains security on a patrol during Operation Gateway III in the Farah Province, Afghanistan, on 7 January 2009. Third Battalion was the ground combat element of SPMAGTF-A.

electronics repair or the guy that repairs optics on the .50-cal. We had one guy and if he went out to the FOB to fix it [.50-cal] because they couldn't afford to bring that weapon system back and they couldn't fix it a Camp Bastion.

Mihocko: Right.

Barber: So a lot of these guys bounced all over the FOBs, repairing their specialized equipment, and they would continuously rotate and they were a one-man show. They had one 2112 [MOS], which is a small arms repairman, that could fix the sniper rifles and some of the other specialized weapons that we have, but he was a one-man show. So, for the maintenance piece, it was a personnel limitation. For the transportation piece, it was an equipment limitation.

Mihocko: Any other challenges that you want to mention?

Barber: The only difference, and it was a challenge for us, was the fires support piece. There was no central fire direction control center in Iraq. For example, if you are in a convoy out on the road, help's only about 30 minutes away in any direction. Whether it's air, whether it's a ground QRF. Our first convoy took 54 hours, and the closest help was about 10 hours away. So for us to coordinate artillery air support, British rockets, we did that all on our own through the assistant operations officer, Captain [Andrew S.] Johnson, who was an 0302 [MOS] by trade.

Barber: Our COC was not set up like a typical logistics operations center or combat service

support operations center. It was a combat operations center. We coordinated fires, we did medevacs, we tracked movement, and we didn't realize this until the first troops in contact we got into. Traditionally, the logistics operations center had all the logistics functions inside. So in the middle of a TIC [troops in contact] that lasted about 90 minutes of troops in contact, we're trying to get Cobras there. We're trying to get a QRF. We're trying to make sure nobody is hurt. Trying to see if we need medevac. The phone rings and they say, "Hey, you have mail at the flight line, could you come pick it up?" So we immediately shifted all the logistics stuff out of our COC and ran a combat operations center.

Mihocko: Right.

Barber: That was a challenge for us because, not only did we have new team, we didn't have appropriate combat operations center training. And then we had to discount all of the logistics functions that we were responsible for out of the S-3 and give them a backup role. So while we still did logistics, distribution, transportation, and maintenance, we didn't track those in the S-3 COC like it's normally done. I think we'll probably do it similar next time, but we would keep it closer to the S-3 so we would have better control of it. We gave those functions to the S-4 and the S-4 did a lot of our UMCC [unit movement control center] stuff and some other things that are done traditionally by the S-3 and the CLBs.

Mihocko: Do you think future combat logistics battalions that go to Afghanistan will have a similar setup or was that sort of an exception to your specific situation?

Barber: I think it was an exception because we

didn't have anyone above us that could coordinate support for us. MAGTF was the next echelon above and they were in Kandahar. So I couldn't call the MAGTF and ask them for a quick reaction force or to call in fire. The CLB that replaced us has a regiment CLR [combat logistics regiment] over them that also has a COC that is right next door to the MEB [Marine expeditionary brigade] so they would report things to the regiment and I think you will see that as they build up forces in Afghanistan like they did in Iraq where CLBs will work for the CLR who will have that capability directly with the MEB or the MEF [Marine expeditionary force] forward that we didn't have. I'd like to think that other CLBs could operate that way, but it was extremely challenging.

Mihocko: What are some of your most memorable moments from this operation?

Barber: First convoy [and] within 90 minutes [we had] troops in contact . . .

Mihocko: Were you in the COC or were you in the convoy?

Barber: I was in the COC. But that's one memorable moment because it was the first major engagement with MAGTF. And all of our Marines did phenomenal. We made it through unscathed. Prior to that, they had hit an IED with this mine roller and we were able to externally sling load it on a British CH-47 [Chinook helicopter] with the mine roller. It all happened in about an hour, got it coordinated, and we watched it on the Scan Eagle of the UAV feed, which is pretty phenomenal seeing what took off on land. That was memorable. It was really unique in that once Gateway started, and once we moved from establishing the base and then Camp Bastion and Camp Barber and moving

into Operation Gateway III, it really got to steady state operations after Operation Gateway III. We just mellowed it into, “We’re going to Now Zad tomorrow,” and, “Okay. Got it. We’re going to Golestan in three weeks.” Each one of those convoys had significant events that happened. I think 90 percent of the time we either found or struck an IED or had some form of enemy contact. Mortars would land 300 meters away. But each convoy going out was a significant event and we just waited for it to happen.

Mihocko: As the deployment progressed, [did] those convoys or the events they encountered just become more routine?

Barber: Yeah, we had to fight that, the complacency. It was about 90 days out and you could get that sense. I mean, we went to Now Zad, which was traditionally one of our hardest routes, twice without a single incident. And of course, then all the Marines want to jump on that run and go to Now Zad because it’s outside the wire and seems to be a fairly easy one. And the next time we went, we had a vehicle get blown up and some pretty significant increase in the activity. I remember us discussing that it’s been pretty quiet and we’ve all gotten pretty complacent and we just try and fight this as we can.

Mihocko: Can you talk a little bit about the Marines, specifically, anything that stands out in terms of their performance?

Barber: The [biggest] thing that stands out is that these Marines, over a wide swath of MOSs from different bases—Okinawa, Camp Pendleton, Camp Lejeune, we had a Marine from Quantico, we had doctors from Bremerton, Washington, and all over—all came together and these guys

did things out on the convoys, sweep teams, and security teams searching for IEDs, immediate action drills and they would take fire . . . that was absolutely phenomenal. With, I don’t want to say very little training, but they didn’t receive the six or nine months workup package like the infantry guys get or other guys get by going through Mohave Viper and doing immediate action drills and reacting to fire . . . these guys all did it and they did it phenomenally. I went out on convoy for Gateway III and specifically remember coming back with a brand new second lieutenant platoon commander who had been in CLB-3 about four months before we deployed to Afghanistan. It was the most professionally run convoy I had ever been on. Radio chatter was minimal and we had no instances [of trouble] on the convoy. It was remarkable that they had come from fixing stuff in Hawaii and doing normal Hawaiian operations to doing combat operations in Afghanistan with what looked like with relative ease.

Mihocko: What do you feel the battalion’s biggest accomplishments were?

Barber: I think we had a few. First, we brought everybody back home. No one was killed. We had two Marines injured about two weeks before we were redeployed. Both of them are from Okinawa, EOD Marines. Their vehicle hit an IED. It wasn’t [that] they were working on it as EOD guys, they just happened to be riding in the vehicle that got hit. I think one guy had some torn ligaments in his knee and the other guy broke his arm, but they are both going to be fine. We left with 37 days notice. . . . We had PTP Training but no substantial workup to go and we threw this group together and, Marines being Marines, it was remarkable that we all went out there and we all came home.

Mihocko: Can you think of any historical firsts on this deployment?

Barber: Airlifting the mine rollers. We have a field service rep from mine rollers [who] told us that was a first, and he asked us to document it and say[ing] that it'd never been done before. I think the way we set up our COC wasn't a first for the Marine Corps, but it was a first for a CLB to run combat operations like that. We had B-1 bombers overhead on our convoys talking directly to our joint terminal air controller [JTAC] that was embedded with CLB-3. This [JTAC] was an F-18 pilot; he was assigned to us from the MAGTF and he talked to all the air that flew over. Normally JTACs are not integrated in convoys, they reside at the battalion [level]. We pushed this guy on the road and he went on every trip with us. So I think using a JTAC in that capacity was a first, and there were a ton of firsts. I'm sure Colonel Jernigan has a list. We set up the first Marine Corps

Exchange in Afghanistan. That little exchange did about \$15,000 a day. I mean, it was remarkable how much stuff came in and how many people would buy.

Mihocko: What do you think in 10 years will be remembered about CLB-3 and this deployment in particular?

Barber: It was enough to do what the MAGTF needed to do to support 3/8 and us and [act as] a bridging force for the MEB to hold what 2/7 had done, but we joke about it over there. We're going back there in three years and it'll be overcome by a larger force. I would like to think that CLB-8 would set up like we did, but if I had to go in there now, I wouldn't set up the same way because I would rely on established infrastructure . . . so I could concentrate more on providing logistics support to the MAGTF.

Part IV
Marineistan, 2009

Shortly after his inauguration in February 2009, President Barack H. Obama announced that an additional 17,000 troops would be sent to Afghanistan. The deployment, including an 8,000-strong Marine expeditionary brigade, came in response to then Commander of International Security Assistance (ComISAF) General David D. McKiernan's, USA, request for troops to check the Taliban's resurgence. The announcement also signaled the shift in Marine Corps operations from Iraq to Afghanistan that then Marine Corps Commandant General James T. Conway had been advocating for over a year.

The president later replaced McKiernan with General Stanley A. McChrystal, USA. To implement President Obama's goal to disrupt, dismantle, and eventually defeat al-Qaeda and prevent their return to Afghanistan, McChrystal saw swaying the population away from insurgent elements and improving the stability of Afghanistan as critical to success. In response, the new COMISAF revamped the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan to focus on a population-centric counterinsurgency (COIN) effort based on U.S. lessons and experiences in Iraq. By the fall, McChrystal presented the president with options for a surge to bring Afghanistan back from the brink. In early December 2009, President Obama announced the deployment of another 30,000 troops, the bulk of which were Marines.

The gains made by Special Purpose MAGTF-Afghanistan between fall 2008 and spring 2009 laid the foundation for 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade (2d MEB) to begin operations soon after Brigadier General Lawrence D. Nicholson took command of Marines in southern Afghanistan. Nicholson's brand of COIN kicked off with Operation Khanjar on 2 July 2009. The operation rapidly introduced approximately 4,000 Marines and hundreds of Afghan National Army troops into

major population centers of the Helmand River valley previously dominated by the Taliban prior to national elections in August. The MEB continued to follow up on its success with Operations Eastern Resolve and Cobra's Anger in fall 2009. In February 2010, the MEB closed in on Marjah, what then COMISAF General McChrystal called "the bleeding ulcer" of Helmand Province during Operation Mostarak.



Photo courtesy of LCpl Caleb Gomez

U.S. Army Gen Stanley A. McChrystal (left), commander of the International Security Assistance Force and U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, visits with BGen Lawrence D. Nicholson, commanding general of 2d MEB-Afghanistan, at Camp Leatherneck, Helmand Province, on 2 September 2009.



Photo courtesy of LCpl Walter D. Marino II

Marines from 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, conduct combat operations in Now Zad, Afghanistan, during Operation Cobra's Anger on 4 December 2009.

The MEB's deployment allowed Marines to introduce an Afghan governmental and Coalition presence into areas previously dominated by the Taliban. The MEB also had to contend with the vast poppy fields growing in Helmand that helped financially support the insurgency. Nicholson's approach to COIN featured both kinetic operations along with some nontraditional operations such as Mullah engagement, female engagement

teams, and Joint Security Academy Shorabak—a Marine Corps-led Afghan police training facility. However, the Marine approach and some of its methods were considered controversial by some senior Army officers and senior State Department officials. Marine insistence on autonomy and doctrinal reliance on the MAGTF prompted detractors to label the Marine operational area as "Marineistan."



BGen Lawrence D. Nicholson, commanding general of 2d MEB–Afghanistan, speaks at the transfer of authority ceremony at Camp Leatherneck, Helmand Province, Afghanistan, on 29 May 2009. Nicholson assumed authority of Marine battlespace and forces in the province from Col Duffy W. White, commanding officer of SPMAGTF–Afghanistan.

Photo courtesy of Sgt Christopher R. Rye



Interview: Brigadier General Lawrence D. Nicholson

by Marine Corps History Division

Marine Corps oral historian Lieutenant Colonel Michael I. Moffett interviewed the commanding general of 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade. The following has been edited from the original transcript for space constraints in this work.

Moffett: This is Lieutenant Colonel Michael Moffett. This is an oral history interview with Brigadier General Lawrence [D.] Nicholson. Brigadier General Nicholson was the commanding officer for the Marine expeditionary brigade in Afghanistan from May 2009 until 12 April 2010. General Nicholson, thanks for your time.

Nicholson: I spent 12 months in Fallujah and was selected for brigadier general. I did a year at Quantico [Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia] and then was sent to II Marine Expeditionary Force-Forward [II MEF] to be the ground combat element [GCE] commander for Major General Richard T. Tryon, and I was going to replace General Richard P. Mills. So I went to turn over with General Mills as the GCE commander in Iraq. While there, Major General John F. Kelly called me in the office and said, “You better get back to [Marine Corps Base Camp] Lejeune, [Jacksonville, North Carolina]. I think you’ve got a change of orders.” So I did. I got back and asked Lieutenant General Dennis J. Hejlik, the MEF commander, “Sir, is

there anything I should know?” The answer was, “No, keep preparing. You’re going to Iraq. I don’t know what Kelly’s talking about. You’re going to Iraq.” That went [on] until 17 December. On 17 December, General Hejlik put his finger in my chest and said, “Start forming the [2d] MEB.”

The joke I tell everyone is, if you look around Camp Lejeune on 17 December, there’s not a lot of guys you’d like to form a MEB with. I think we started in earnest putting the team together in January, and the interesting thing was [that] unlike a MEU, where you can look at other MEUs and figure out what they’re doing, there’s not a real bright template to putting a MEB together. It is the proverbial blank sheet of paper that you’re staring at—where the forces are coming from, where the equipment is coming from, what the mission is. You’re really starting from scratch, so there was a lot of great help. General [Richard T.] Tryon, of course, he’s preparing to take the MEF (Forward) over to Iraq, understanding that he would probably be the last MEF (Forward) to go, and now all of a sudden he’s being asked to cut forces, to cut staff, to cut equipment, to give birth to the MEB, both of which are coming out of Camp Lejeune. There was a lot of consternation in the Marine Corps that maybe the West Coast should take the MEB. The East Coast can do the MEF into Iraq, [and] the West Coast will take the MEB to Afghanistan.

General Hejlik kind of raised his hand and said, “I can do both.” I MEF had just gotten home, so they had their own series of problems trying to generate a force from a MEF that had just returned from a year [deployed], so you had a lot of dwell time issues. General Hejlik surprised a lot of people, and he said, “I can do it. We’ll figure it out. I can do it.” So we built about a 250-man staff. We identified very quickly the battalions we would be taking over, as 1/5 [1st Battalion,

5th Marines], 2/8 [2d Battalion, 8th Marines], 2d LAR [2d Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion]. We would inherit 3/8 [3d Battalion, 8th Marines] that was already in there as part of Colonel Duffy [W.] White’s Special Purpose MAGTF that was operating in country. The next part was the gear. That was the harder piece.

Moffett: It sounds like a lot of your gear and equipment was behind you, or you got there ahead of a lot of it. Is that fair to say?

Nicholson: Well, I think the president made the decision to plus up [17,000 troops in February 2009]. The first 10,000 they wanted to get in there, of course, was the MEB, so there was a rush to determine where the gear was going to come from. The infantry battalions didn’t come with their gear. They came with very small portions of their gear. They brought their personal weapons, but crew-served weapons, radios, COCs [combat operations centers], trucks, MRAPs [mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles], those things were generated ecumenically, if you will, from throughout the Marine Corps. We joked that even 8th and I gave up their machine guns for this thing.

Everyone gave people, everyone gave gear, so there was a taxation on the Marine Corps. It took a lot for the Marine Corps to put a MEF over there continuously, year after year, so now to put a MEB on top of that really was difficult, but they did it. They figured it out. But the need to get this done quickly was obviously very important [for] the Marine expeditionary mindset: “We are the expeditionary force in readiness.” So we couldn’t take a hell of a lot of time to get that gear there.

So we started loading ships, literally, as we were forming it up in January. By late January, we’re loading ships in Blount Island [Jacksonville, Florida]. Gear is coming from all over, and I sent a

team down there. The guys at Blount Island did a great job, but we're loading ships. "Hey, we'll sort it out later." . . . Much of the gear came directly from the factories and at MARCORSYSCOM [Marine Corps Systems Command]. The orders went in, so a lot of brand-new gear [was] coming in, and a lot of it coming by FedEx and DHL . . . "Hey, what is it?" "I don't know. Load it. We'll sort it out later." That was very much the plan of the day, but we had about five ships that had to get loaded and get sailing very, very quickly, because there's no straight shot to Afghanistan. You can't just pull into Kuwait and drive it in like we could for Iraq. The ships had to leave Blount Island, and they weren't allowed to go to Karachi, in Pakistan. They had to go to Fujairah, UAE [United Arab Emirates], offload there, where they were cross-decked into Pakistani freighters, and then the Pakistani freighters would take the gear into Karachi.

Moffett: At great peril to some of the gear, it sounds like.

Nicholson: Well, there have been a lot of pictures in the media about convoys being burned and hit, so there was a lot of apprehension, and we went in with the assessment that 10 percent of the gear that we shipped would never make it, and that was a very optimistic assessment. I got over there in—I guess February is when I did my site survey. I sought out General David [D.] McKiernan, USA, in Kabul, who was commander ISAF [International Security Assistance Force] at the time, and I remember the discussion. Marjah [Nad Ali District, Helmand Province] had been talked about extensively as being the worst place and, for all intents and purposes, Marjah had seceded from the union is the best way I can say it.

They were no longer part of Afghanistan.

They were their own little autonomous republic, run by the Taliban, very, very proudly. We were very careful while we were there not to use the F-word—the Fallujah word. We didn't want to draw unfair and just not-sound comparisons between Fallujah and Marjah. But, at the end of the day, what we found was there were a lot of similarities in the sense that, like Fallujah pre-al-Fajr, it had become no-go terrain for us. It had become sort of an isolated area, where at one point, al-Qaeda in Fallujah and the Taliban in Afghanistan had taken refuge, had taken sanctuary, and had run the area. They had their own government, they had their own jurists. They arbitrated civil disputes. They had their own defense. They had their own police. There were people in uniform running around in Marjah. Previous Taliban had started setting up their own government so, for all intents and purposes, it was an autonomous republic, and nobody from the government of Afghanistan or the Coalition ever went in there.

So, I'm sitting with General McKiernan, and he was very generous with his time, and I said, "Boss, if this is the worst place in Afghanistan, why don't you let us go there?"

Moffett: You mentioned Marjah, which is a question I'll jump to because you just mentioned it. [The] 3/6 [3d Battalion, 6th Marines] is in the process of coming back. I know they were there for quite a while—seven months. But, as you know, there's been a lot of press about the Marjah situation—Operation Moshtarak. A lot of the theme that I pick up on in the media is that Marjah somewhat stalled.

Nicholson: Stalled, backsliding. If it's the first big test of the new policy, it has not manifested itself into a great victory.

Moffett: I suspect that you might have been reading some of this material, sir. So what is your reaction to this narrative on Marjah not working out so well?

Nicholson: To me, it's fairly simple. I use the analogy that I was the regimental commander of Fallujah in 2006 and Christmas 2006, we were under pretty good fire Christmas day, two years after Operation al-Fajr. Two years after al-Fajr, we had gunfights every day in the city of Fallujah. Did that mean that al-Fajr was not worth it or was a failure or didn't work? No. It served its intended purpose of taking that city away from the insurgency in Iraq, and it opened up what had previously been no-go terrain, what had previously been an area that the enemy dominated as their hub and their sanctuary. . .

This was an area that we could not go into—unlike any other areas in Helmand [Province], this was an area that we could not get into. This was an area where the enemy was in great numbers and in great strength. Geographically, also, I think what's intriguing about Marjah that the media really just doesn't even consider is that it's not a homogenous population. And even my buddy, Rajiv Chandrasekaran, from *The Washington Post*, who wrote an article about Nawa versus Marjah, they're only 10 kilometers apart . . . he failed to grasp one of the most essential and obvious facts about Marjah, and that's that it's not a homogenous population. Marjah was settled by 40 different tribes. There's a Wardak area, [or] neighborhood. There's an area of people from Kunduz. There's Tajiks, there's Uzbeks, there's Hazaras, there's Pashtuns, there's everything and every mix imaginable. But when Marjah was built in the '50s and '60s, it attracted people, and they sought people from all over Afghanistan to come down there. So unlike Nawa, which is very homogenous and

has one or two tribes to deal with, there is no real natural leadership from Marjah.

There is no traditional, longstanding "My family has been in Marjah for five centuries." It is sort of a mosaic of newcomers and, frankly, not a lot of deep roots of tribal leadership exist there. There are factions, and there was a lot of conflict between rival factions between tribes, and there was a lot of tribalism there. I think that's what makes Marjah so unique among any other place in Helmand is that it's not a natural evolution of tribal dynamics. It is an artificial mosaic. So, number one, you have that tribal dynamic. Number two, no one had been in Marjah for many years. Certainly no Coalition forces. Afghan forces were forced out in '06, and I think we talked a lot about the people choosing. One day, the people will choose, and they will—well, in Marjah they did it, and they chose the Taliban, purposefully. They chose the Taliban and kicked out the government. They killed whatever police were left, kicked them out, and told the government to leave.

We couldn't even fly. For nine months, we couldn't fly anywhere near Marjah, or we'd take fire. We had a platoon, a unit that shall go unnamed . . . get disoriented as they were traveling in the south, and they got a little too close to Marjah, and they got the hell shot out of them and took some casualties. Not a good day. No one killed, but we had some vehicles blown up, and we had some Marines wounded because the lieutenant got a little disoriented and got too close to Marjah. This is months before Operation Moshtarak in Marjah in February 2010.

So Marjah had been no-go terrain for us and it belonged to the Brits. It was in the British battlespace until two weeks before the op. . . . The Brits never had enough manpower to go in there, nor did we, until the arrival of 1/6 and 3/6. I think our job was relatively straightforward: kick

in the door and go in and take away this sanctuary. I asked General McKiernan when I was on my site survey in February/March of '09, "If the worst place you've got, boss, is Marjah, let us go to Marjah first." And the answer was no.

Moffett: Because of the elections.

Nicholson: Because of the elections. But that haunted us a little bit for the first nine months, because whatever success we had in Nawa [District, Ghazni Province] and Garmsir [District, Helmand Province], and even Rajiv . . . Now Zad [Helmand Province], Delaram [District, Nimruz Province], Golestan [Farah Province]. Wherever we went, we had relative success, in some cases dramatic success. But during that entire time, people would say, "Hey, Nicholson, boy, your Marines are really doing well here." Afghans, they would say, "The Marines are doing well here and here, here, and here, but, jeez, the enemy's in Marjah. When are you going to Marjah?" It was almost as if . . . as Bing West [Francis J. "Bing" West, former assistant secretary of defense for International Security Affairs] says, if you guys are really that strong, why aren't you going there? Because that's where all the really bad actors are, and that's where a lot of the nexus targets were and a lot of the opium facilitators and financiers. We knew it, they knew it, and based on the fact of where we went and where the lay down was, we had to operate in the areas we went to.

You couldn't take a company and put them in Marjah. Apparently now, we were right. That wouldn't work. You had to go big into Marjah, and you had to take that away, and that's what the operation in February was designed to do—Moshtarak. So our job was really to kick in the door, and I think in talking to General Mills and Brigadier General Joseph L. Osterman, our job was

that first 60 days that we were there, was to kick in the door, bring the Afghan Security Forces in, try to establish the government-in-a-box thing, which we talked about a lot. As best we can get started, and I think our mission was to get started and take away what was an open and existing sanctuary away from the Taliban. I think that was accomplished. Is it pretty? No. Every day there are IEDs.

Every day there's probably gunfire, but it is dramatically changed, I think, from the pre-Moshtarak days, where it was a safe haven for them. That safe haven is gone. It doesn't mean that it's a great neighborhood. Certainly, there's some progress. There's some schools open, the markets are open, the population in many cases—large portions of the population are existing pretty well there, I guess. One of the things that troubled us early on was the assignment of Hajji [Abdul] Zahir [Qadir] to the governor. Nice guy, 15 years in Germany as a cab driver, but not the right guy. It would take a very special person to coalesce the efforts and try to build unity among the 40 tribes that are resident in here. I think what has been underreported, too, is the amount of work done by the provincial reconstruction team and by a lot of great folks in terms of trying to set conditions prior to Moshtarak, the advance force ops, or the shaping operations that occurred there and the level of engagement that was done, reaching out to all 40 of the tribes, in many cases very successfully meeting elders that lived in Marjah, elders that lived outside of Marjah. Many of them couldn't go back in because they were not the right tribe. Over 200 engagements with people from Marjah of all walks of life, businessmen, educators, tribal chieftains, trying to get a better feel for that human terrain. And I think one of the greatest challenges for us was understanding the human terrain of Marjah prior to crossing the LD [line of departure], and trying to gain some allies before we even went in there,

trying to gain some cooperation, and trying to explain to a lot of the locals what we were trying to do before we went in and enlist their support, at least in supporting the government.

In some cases, we had some success there. In some cases, obviously, there are some areas that are not particularly calmed down. I think opening Marjah up and the introduction of forces there was a natural progression of what we had to do. If you look at a map from [Camp] Leatherneck to get to Nawa or to Garmsir, we had to fly around. It was a very cumbersome, circuitous route to go anywhere, and it was the elephant in the room. Marjah was the elephant in the room for the first 9 or 10 months, so we had to kick that door open. And I am very confident, and I talk with [Colonel Randall P. Newman], the regimental commander [RCT-7] who will be there until November. I am very confident that progress is occurring. Everybody wanted this thing wrapped up with a bow in 30 days, and I think we were very cautious early on. And I think if you look back to what we said early on was that this was going to take some time, and the enemy was going to contest this. They weren't going to just let us have it without a fight, and I think while Marjah is probably mostly in control of the Coalition and the security forces, there are incidents that will continue to go on for another couple of months, I'm sure.

Moffett: But the question goes back to Rajiv's article about the "Marineistan" issue.

Nicholson: I think one of the things we tried to preach and imbue into our leaders, and Sergeant Major [Ernest K. Hoopii] and I talked with every unit coming in, but we didn't talk to them at the battalion level. We talked to them at the company level, because when you talk to a battalion you kind of lose the effect. It's 1,200 guys sitting in a circle.

You just don't connect. But talking to a company, one at a time, with the company commander and the first sergeant standing next to you, one of the things we tried to do is agility at the point of friction, innovation at the point of friction. One of the things we endeavored to do early on, from the very beginning, was experimentation.

I think we tried to get that down to the squad/platoon level. As I would tell our guys, I could send you to 10 Mojave Vipers [30 days of training at Twentynine Palms, California], I could give every one of you a PhD in the cultural anthropology of Afghanistan, and you're still not going to be ready for some of the scenarios that will unfold. You're not going to be ready for all those things. But it's the agility. It's your ability to improvise as a leader, as a squad leader, as a platoon commander, as a company commander, your ability to improvise at the decisive time and place. General [Charles C.] Krulak, with the strategic corporal—hell, we had strategic privates.

We had guys making fundamentally strategic decisions every day by their actions, by their conduct, by the manner in which they carried out their mission, by the way they interacted with the Afghan Security Forces. A lot of the things we took out came right from my experience in Iraq. So many people told me before I went over, "Hey, remember, Larry, Afghanistan is not Iraq. They're so very different." Well, yes, they are, but COIN principles are principles for a reason. It's because they are transferrable, because they do fit more than one scenario and how you treat the people, how you work with the people, how you earn their trust. You can surge troops and equipment, but you can't surge trust, confidence, and personal relations. That has to be built up over a period of years.

It was a compilation and a build of trust that you had to earn. I think what made a fundamen-

tal difference between Anbar [Province] and Helmand is that we don't like to think [of] ourselves as occupiers or invaders. When we went into Anbar in '04, I think people looked at us like occupiers or invaders. Helmand's different. In Helmand, they don't all get us like that. One of my great stories is [that] on day three of Marjah we had 32 TICs [troops in contact]. In two tours in Iraq, one tour in Afghanistan, I've never been in a day that was more kinetic. It was the most kinetic day I had ever seen. Day three of Marjah, there wasn't a guy in there that wasn't in a direct firefight. It was tremendously kinetic.

Day four of Marjah, the sergeant major and I were downtown in the city center of Marjah, and there was a *shura* [consultation] going on with Lieutenant Colonel Calvert L. Worth, the battalion commander of 1/6. And he had Haji Zahir . . . the newly appointed governor of Marjah that had been kind of undressed in the press for 15 years of being a cab driver and for child abuse in Germany and being imprisoned in Germany and what have you. There's 50 men sitting on the ground and there's Cal Worth at the front and Haji's here with him. I'm sitting in the back with the sergeant major and with Rajiv from *The Washington Post* and a couple of other journalists. This guy stands up, and he looks like a tough-looking b——d—late 30s, early 40s. He goes, "I'm a Taliban. We are all Taliban." He points to Cal Worth and he says, "I like you. I like Americans, because Americans helped build Marjah." Marjah is an artificial creation. Marjah is open desert that USAID in the '50s and '60s went in and built these canals, Venice like.

Unfortunately, it became the poppy capital of the world because of all the great irrigation projects that USAID had done. He goes, "I like you, and I trust you." And he pointed to Haji Zahir and he goes, "I don't like you. I don't trust you. You

represent a failed and flawed and corrupt government." My words, but, "You represent a tyrannical government that oppresses the people and steals from the people, but I'll work with you until you prove that I can't trust you. Then I will come and kill you," which was one of the seminal moments where you're like, "Wow."

Nicholson: By day eight, I knew Marjah was pretty well over from a kinetic standpoint, when I saw two miles worth of tractors and trailers bringing all the families back in, and we had not asked for people to leave. In fact, we had told them to stay. The governor didn't want a Fallujah-like mass exodus of the city. He wanted people to stay, and he didn't want people leaving, and it would have created second- and third-order effects, refugee problems, but a lot of people did leave. A lot of people knew this was going to occur. They didn't know when, they didn't know how and they didn't know exactly where, but they knew that something big was coming, and we were advocates of that. It's Pashtunwali culture, where strength is everything. We really couched this as an inevitability. Okay, Nawa has fallen, it belongs to the government. Garmsir belongs to the government, Khan Neshin [Helmand Province], Now Zad, which as interesting as Marjah is. Now Zad is more compelling, because it's a return of the population. It's almost a Balkans-like scenario where 30,000 people had been forced out of their town, out of their city, and they were now coming back.

I think the innovation and I think the rogueness, and Bing West probably helped capture some of this a little bit. But I think we were just very aggressive on all lines of operation. I always got distracted when I heard a guy say, "Hey, I'm a lawyer. I don't do that COIN s——t." "Wait a second. What is that COIN s——t?" From high-level Khanjar or Marjah or Now Zad-like operations,

where you have supporting arms, where you've got 4,500 guys being introduced in a seven-hour period by Army aviation, Marine aviation, where you're muscling through, using amphibious assault vehicles [AAV] to breach Soviet-type minefields and you've got guys marking lanes and convoys moving through in the middle of the night, that's COIN. But that's the high end of COIN. The low end of COIN is eating goat, drinking tea, holding hands, and doing a lot of man kissing. Everywhere in between those two, that's all COIN. I think the innovation and what we tried to preach, I think we were just more aggressive.

Bing West is doing an article. He compared 1/5 with Lieutenant Colonel William F. McCullough against the battalion from RC-East [Regional Command-East]. He had this mathematical thing where every patrol from 1/5, or every squad, does two patrols a day, 12 hours a day, 16 hours a day, the amount of coverage, the amount of time. We ended up coming up with a term. It's an aviation maintenance term, but touch time. The amount of touch time on the population was off the chart. I mandated that squads don't go out for six hours, eight hours. Oftentimes, squads will go out for two or three days. They were encouraged.

Moffett: The Marineistan thing?

Nicholson: Yes. It was kind of a backhanded compliment. The article, which I hope you've got in your archives, talked a lot about innovation. One of the things I always pushed with our Marine officers was—the quote I always used was “innovation at the point of friction.” I wanted leaders that could think on their feet, that were agile and adaptable to the situations they found themselves in. Again, if you were in Now Zad, the scenario was very different than what it would be in Nawa, and very different in Khan Neshin. Each of these

areas was very unique, and even within battalion areas. You look at Garmsir, the company that was northernmost in Garmsir District had a very different fight than the one that was in the southern.

I talked to Rajiv afterward, and he felt that he had written a very complimentary article. He felt that he had highlighted and illustrated Marine Corps innovation. One of the things we did differently, that I think he did highlight a little bit, was the mullah engagement. We're very good in Iraq and Afghanistan about dealing with the local elected or appointed leadership. That was easy, Governor Mamoun, Governor Mangal. We got good in Iraq [at] working with the tribal leadership, but initially—and again, I was Major General Richard F. Natonski's G-3 at the purple finger moment when Ambassador [L. Paul] Bremer said, “Only deal with the elected officials. The tribal leadership has been marginalized by 30 years of Saddam rule. Don't pay any attention to them. They have no authority.” Boy, that was bad advice. That was terrible advice, the second-worst piece of advice, other than disbanding the Iraqi Army, perhaps.

The Marine Corps learned very quickly, and during our tour we reached out. We learned very quickly that the tribal leadership did have a lot of moral authority, did have a lot of real input. The one area that I don't remember dealing with in Iraq was the third leg of the leadership stool, and that was the religious leadership. We brought an Islamic Navy chaplain over, and he became a rock star. We took him out. He was only there 40 days, but he probably made 35 trips out in areas, and he met with all the mullahs. We called it the Mullahpalooza tour.

We reached out to these guys, and I think we were very surprised, in most cases, [that] they reached back. So we had ceded the religious leadership in Afghanistan to the Taliban for some time, because it's awkward. It's Islamic. It's not in

our comfort zone. And that was one of the things Rajiv highlighted a little bit, was that we had gone out and gotten these guys to work with us, gotten these guys to meet with us. Boy, you talk about an authority. Unlike Iraq, where it seemed like everyone had satellite TV and everyone had the ability to drive into Baghdad, in Helmand [Province], it's much more isolated. No one had TV, unless you were Lashkar Gah or one of the bigger cities. TV was ridiculous. No one had it. For most Helmandis, going to Kabul would be like going to Paris. It's a postcard scene, they're never going to go. They have no chance of going. They'll spend their lives never going anywhere near that. So where do they get their guidance? Who gives them their leadership? Well, it's going to be that tribal leader, but it's also going to be that religious leader. And the Friday sermons were so very important in terms of shaping public opinion.

I get asked a lot, and I got asked by a lot of folks about measures of effectiveness, metrics, and measurements, "How do you know if you're doing well in a COIN environment?" Is it the number of IEDs? No. Number of casualties? No. All of those things tell you part of the story, but they don't tell you the whole story. So what are the things that you can hang your hat on? One, for us, was [the] return of the population. When we saw populations return to the areas, that was a great sign. You knew things were getting better. Two was the number of young men raising their hand to join the army or the police . . . that was a pretty good indicator that things were getting better. The other was schools, not the material construction of schools, but school attendance. We opened 32 schools, and every week we looked very carefully at attendance. And you could tell that, if in Khan Neshin [District] all of a sudden we had a 50-percent reduction of attendance, it was like a bad Western [movie]. Some guys had ridden into

town and were threatening the people. But when you send your kid to school, you're voting with your own flesh and blood, and you have enough confidence in the local security that you're going to send your kid to that school.

That was one of those irrefutable, indisputable metrics of measurement that we used, judging communities, and we used those extensively. I didn't get too upset over Rajiv's article. I was surprised by Ambassador Karl W. Eikenberry's comments, because Ambassador Eikenberry used to come see us, and all he would ever tell us was, "Man, you guys are doing great. Golly, I wish everything was moving as well as this. You guys are really doing great stuff." He was always super complimentary. General Stanley A. McChrystal, USA, every time he came down, very complimentary. Lieutenant General David M. Rodriguez, USA, who I really liked. General Rodriguez used to come down, because he was the courts manager. General Rodriguez used to come down a fair amount and loved being out with the Marines. He'd go out on patrol with the Marines, and that was great.

Moffett: Just to follow up on that Marineistan article before we go back to the beginning of the MEB's deployment, Rajiv quoted several unnamed sources, presumably Army officers in Kabul and also some administration officials, but there was one comment in the story by someone from ISAF presumably saying, "We have all these Marines in Afghanistan. Why are they in Helmand and not Kandahar?" Can you speak to that?

Nicholson: I think Mike Killian came up with it. The Ruhr valley to Berlin . . . Helmand was the Ruhr valley to Kandahar. We have been in Kandahar for nine years, frankly. For nine years, there had been Coalition presence, principally Canadian, but initially, of course, Marine. Kandahar

is a patchwork quilt of some areas [that] are doing okay, but some areas not so good. Obviously, by the large operation that's about to be conducted sometime in July by RC-South [Regional Command-South], it's not where anyone thinks it ought to be, and it is the home, the spiritual home, of the Taliban. It's where Mullah Omar obviously is from. I don't know that you can separate the two.

I think Helmand had suffered for a long time from neglect, and the advantages of the Marines going into areas we had not been in—and back to your initial question, I didn't pick where to go. There was British Helmand, and then there was everything else. Everything else became Marine Helmand. We decided where we were going to go in Helmand, and again, whether you're General McChrystal or a company commander, you've got to pick and choose where you're going to be. This was a massive area—the Marine AO [area of operation]. You can't be everywhere. So you'd better pick and choose carefully where you're going to be and accept a little risk in the other areas. But what we knew from Iraq was that where we went, we had to stay. Where we stayed, we held. Where we held, we built. And where we built, we transitioned.

You can't go somewhere and then leave, and we learned that lesson as Marines in the western Euphrates River valley when RCT-7 [Regional Combat Team 7] was ordered up and into Fallujah when Fallujah I started. And they uncovered, frankly, a lot of towns out there—Rawah, Anah, Hit, Haditha. We put a MEU out there, but it didn't drive quite the coverage that a three-battalion RCT did. After we came back and went back into the western Euphrates River valley, a lot of those people that we had befriended, that we had trusted—the city councils, the leaders, the principals that we had worked with—they were either

dead or run off. They weren't real happy to see us, because we had essentially thrown them under the bus, and we vowed that that couldn't happen there. This ties back into my initial conversation with General McKiernan, and it's where I said, "Boss, sir, if the worst place in all of Afghanistan is Marjah, let us go to Marjah." Everyone was talking about "Marjah, Marjah, Marjah."

Moffett: This is February 2009 when you had this conversation.

Nicholson: Right. So I'm in Kabul with General McKiernan, one on one, and I said, "Sir, if it's the worst place, let us go there." And his answer was, "Larry, I can't let you go there, because the elections are in August, and Marjah is going to be extremely kinetic. Marjah is going to be a hell of a fight." We're very careful never to compare Fallujah and Marjah, but there was a Fallujah-esque quality to it in the sense that it was a no-go terrain for us. It had seceded from the union. This was an autonomous republic.

There was no Afghan flag. There was no Afghan government, and the Afghan government was terrified to go anywhere near it. If you flew anywhere near it, you took aircraft fire. Our Cobras were just flying around, trying to sometimes attract it. Hate to say that, but just how close can we get? What kind of antiaircraft [would we come up against]? When we went in in February, it was like putting your hand in the hornets' nest. You didn't know how those defenses would hold up. But McKiernan said, "No, I can't let you do that, because if there's a huge fight in July and the election's in August, then internationally on everybody's evening news it's going to look like [Afghan President Hamid] Karzai's lost control of his country. Because the media will focus on Marjah, and it will focus on this very,

very kinetic fight. And Karzai doesn't want that right before the election. It's just going to p— a lot of people off, and it's going to p—s the Pashtuns off." So we were told, "Hey, thank you for your interest in ISAF affairs, but you're not going to Marjah. You can go anywhere you want, but don't go to Marjah." So we ended up going to Nawa [District, Ghanzi Province, Afghanistan], where there was pretty good fighting with [Lieutenant Colonel William] "Bill" [F.] McCullough early on.

Moffett: Khanjar.

Nicholson: Operation Khanjar.

Moffett: Okay, and we left off talking about [when] you were with General McKiernan and I mentioned Khanjar, but just so that we're chronological, you were setting things up. You had done the site survey in February [2009] and met General McKiernan. You were talking about the gear being embarked. So you came back from the site survey and continued to plan.

Nicholson: We went into more detailed planning. At that point, we were ready to get into some mission analysis and look at the areas, and [we] formulated the plan of introduction of the force into the Helmand River valley. Nawa was about 30 Brits surrounded, literally, at the district center there, where there were firefights every day. Garmsir [District], the great success story of Garmsir from 24th MEU, Colonel Peter Petronzio and 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, had kind of regressed, digressed. I remember walking around Garmsir with the Brits, the dragoons, good guys but undermanned, and I think focused on—probably because of their inadequate numbers—focused almost exclusively on the district

center and on the city of Garmsir, Darvishan. I remember driving around, walking around Garmsir, with the Brits, but it was just uneasy. The atmospherics were not good.

Moffett: What time was this?

Nicholson: This was during my site survey, so this was in February. I know that 24th MEU had done great work in taking Garmsir back, but they'd turned it over to the Brits, and I think the Brits had what they called a PB line, a patrol-based line, around Garmsir. But if you went 100 meters past that, you were getting shot at. So there was a very small enclave around Garmsir that was relatively secure, but I don't think the people felt secure. The market was feeble. There were a few shops open, which I guess was progress because they hadn't been open at all the year prior. There were some shops open, but Garmsir needed a breakout. We needed to get out and get south, because the Garmsir District extended almost all the way down to Khan Neshin [District], and the rest of Garmsir District was under Taliban control, very clearly under Taliban control. One of the things we discovered was that the enemy was far more linear than we had expected.

Whether it was the patrol base (PB) line in Garmsir or in Now Zad, where two kilometers away from the Marine positions was entrenched enemy, dug in, into fighting holes and positions, with overhead cover and with sandbagged crew-served weapons positions. That was hard for us to get our head around, that the enemy was right there. Now Zad had been empty for four years, since 2006, when the fighting got so bad between the Brits and the Taliban up there when the population left. They were driven out. Now Zad had deteriorated significantly, just the infrastructure, that there was no one there. There was no

one in the city. There were some wild dogs running around that would occasionally hit IEDs. We had patrols going through sometimes, but that became untenable because of the amount of IEDs.

The enemy for years now had been putting IEDs on the sides of buildings and walls and mud huts, on the streets, so there were a lot of areas—most of the areas in that city were going to have to be de-mined professionally before the population could return. There were just a few isolated streets that we felt safe enough to be on. But I think we had an enemy that was very linear in nature and very comfortable with going toe to toe, chest to chest. They wanted to know where your forward lines were, and then just out of small-arms range, they would come in and establish their own forward lines. We didn't see that in Iraq, but this was a very different scenario in terms of the enemy.

So prior to Khanjar, we knew [what] we were getting into [in] Nawa. Nawa was just a little bubble, and there wasn't security, because every day those 30 Brits were under fire. There was a little bubble of security around Garmsir. There was relatively no security in Now Zad. Khan Neshin was our Hail Mary. Khan Neshin was the entry point that we saw. We looked at all the tracks of movement through joint surveillance target attack radar system [JSTARS] and the other ground moving target indicator [GMTI]. What we saw, the movement trails and tracks that were plotted, they came from Bahram Shah [Minaret], the border, and they moved into Khan Neshin. And once they were in Khan Neshin, now they were in the Helmand River valley. Now they could move up the valley.

So our big plan was on 2 July 2009, we put 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, into multiple positions in and around Nawa. We put 2/8 into multiple positions up and down the Helmand River val-

ley and in and around Garmsir, but the battalion headquarters in Garmsir. And then we took 2d LAR and gave them about a 200-kilometer cross-country movement across the open desert, timed it so [that] as the sun came up on 2 July, LAR was coming into (inaudible). The Taliban knew, the enemy knew, that several thousand Marines had gone into Camp Leatherneck. And Leatherneck is its own story, too, because frankly, on my site survey, Colonel Duffy White was at Kandahar. Being at Kandahar and fighting in Helmand would be like—I guess the analogy in Iraq would be like being in Baghdad and fighting in Anbar. It didn't make any sense. Duffy didn't have any choice. He was put in Kandahar, and that's where his headquarters was, but we had a choice. We could have tried to stay in Kandahar, which I don't think anyone was really crazy about [that], especially us. That was not going to work.

You've got to be in the area you're fighting in, although we did keep our [Lockheed] C-130s [Hercules] and our Harriers at Kandahar because of the air facility, but that's all we had there. So we went to [Camp] Bastion, the British base there, and had a great airfield, [a Boeing] C-17 [Globe-master] capable airfield, and said, "Okay, we need some room. What have you got?" Well, the Brits were very gracious and generous, and they showed us four or five different parking lot areas and said, "Well, you can have this, you can have that." But at the end of the day, we would have been spread over this British base. Literally walk to the edge of the base to the back gate and looked over, climbed up a British sangar [watchtower] and looked over at open desert and said, "Who owns that?" "Well, nobody. I guess the government does. If you want it, I guess you can have it." We knew that if we were going to put an MEB in there, and potentially an MEB is the lead echelon of a larger unit, you better have a place that you can build. You



Photo courtesy of by Sgt Aaron Rooks

Navy Cdr Benjamin Nicholson, commander of Provincial Reconstruction Team-Farah, talks to BGen Larry Nicholson, commanding general of MEB-Afghanistan, about the billeting and dining areas located at the Afghan National Army compound.

better have a place that has capacity for expansion and a place that you can put your force.

Moffett: So in February 2009, there was nothing there. You were up in the tower and you looked at what later became Camp Leatherneck.

Nicholson: It was myself and a few guys on the site survey with me, and there was a Navy Seabee with me, and he was like, “Okay, sir, how big do you want this?” And the [swag] was, “A mile and a half in this direction, a mile and a quarter in this direction.” We went out and walked it and

said, “Is it safe?” So we went out and walked and said, “Well, now it’s connected to Camp Bastion. What do you want to call it?” I wanted a name that was not East Coast or West Coast. I wanted to get away from that silliness, so I said, “Let’s just call it something. Camp Devil Dog? No. Camp Jarhead? How about just Camp Leatherneck? Everyone knows about Leatherneck. Let’s just call it Camp Leatherneck.” An honorable Marine name that everybody will know that’s where the Marines are at. So that’s how Leatherneck was born, and we left that day and flew back to Kandahar. . . . And before we left that day, no kid-

ding, there was one tractor, one dozer out there, starting to berm. A lieutenant commander and a couple of Seabees, they're like, "Okay, sir. That's it. That's what we'll do." I went back and told the Brits that's what we were going to do, and I think they looked at us like, "Are you sure?" You go to Leatherneck today, and there's this expansive urban area.

Humble beginnings. It's not often in your career where you're asked to start from nothing and build something—build something from nothing. Traditionally, you go to Iraq or a new unit comes over, you've got a facility, you tap the guy on the shoulder and say, "Okay, buddy, I got it. Thanks a lot." He stands up and leaves the computer, and you sit down. Not here, so we really started from scratch. We put up the tent, [that] was one of the first things we did, and we started trying to get that set up and wired. Our advance parties were principally engineers just trying to set up some kind of infrastructure.

The Seabees did magnificent work, just in terms of starting to put buildings together and COCs, sight unseen, just literally back-of-a-napkin kind of work on the site survey. Saying, "Okay, I'd like the building area here. Let's build three LSAs [Logistics Support Areas], LSA-1, 2, 3. We'll have the motor pools here." We sat down literally on the back of a napkin and sketched out what we thought the base ought to look like, and we wanted it connected to [Camp] Shorabak, which was the Afghan base, and we wanted a gate between Shorabak and Leatherneck. We wanted to make sure that was important. We wanted to open that gate, tear down the wall, and have an open gate between us and the Afghans.

And with that, I came back to Camp Lejeune, and we started. A very talented staff, [Eric Nalger] was my G-3 at the time. Lieutenant Colonel Scott [W.] Pierce, one of the great planners, we started

sketching what we thought the initial introduction of force would look like. How would we do it? Well, we thought it would be aviation intense. We wanted to get in there quickly, and again, the intention was to overwhelm the enemy, going into his strong point. We wanted to put the enemy on the horns [so] that everywhere he looked, north, south, everywhere along the Helmand River valley there were Marines coming in. We worked with the Brits, who were coming up. They were going to do a similar op called Panchai Palang [or Panther's Claw], where they were going to go into Babaji [north of Lashkar Gah, Helmand Province] and some other areas.

The cumulative effect was such that if you were the Taliban, whether you were in the U.S. sector or the British sector, everywhere in Helmand, things were moving, and that there was this large-scale introduction of force that would cause the enemy to either fight or flee, and I didn't really care. If it's not my area, if he was going to make peace with his government, or if he felt now was a good time to switch sides—and a lot did—then that was fine, too. If he was going to fight, then that advantage was probably to us, because we were probably going to do pretty well in terms of anyone that really wanted to oppose us. So early morning 2 July—we did a lot of rehearsals. We did a lot of planning. I think one of the more innovative things is we laid a map out for the governor, Governor Mangal. We went into his office and started working the key leadership engagement piece.

Moffett: When did you first meet Governor [Mohammad Gulab] Mangal? During the site survey or once you got there in May?

Nicholson: I met him on the site survey, but it was a very 30-minute kind of how are you doing.

He had no idea who I was, or he had no idea of the impact we would have on his province. I'm sure he meets a lot of military leaders, and he was cordial. I liked him instantly, and just like in Anbar toward the tail end, we started working. We figured out very quickly that engineers above all, above any other specialty . . . were the best guys to work with, even as administrators or as leaders. Because, again, they are, by definition, problem solvers. They're guys that fix things. They're guys that look at problems and figure out how to make them work. I had a great relationship with a lot of the engineers in Fallujah, and I was very happy to see that Mangal had an engineering background and was a very pragmatic guy. You hear a lot about the corrupt leaders, and again, I don't know that everyone is—I don't know that Mangal is lily white, but I'll tell you, he cared. You can't fake it. He cared about the people, he cared about the job. He was always under threat, but he was out and about. He did not lead from inside. He was out and about, and I saw that over my year with him. We exposed him many, many times to some dangerous situations, and he was always game. He would always get out there, and he was never happier than [when] surrounded by people, talking to them. So I'm very fond of the governor. I tell my guys all the time, this is not a black-and-white scenario. It's not good guys and bad guys. It is—

Moffett: Shades of gray.

Nicholson: Shades of gray, and you've got to be able to discern what shade of gray you can work with and what shade of gray you can't. But if you're looking for a bunch of guys in white hats, you're not necessarily going to find them.

Moffett: It's not.

Nicholson: Yes, that's right. Counterinsurgency is tough, and the intel reports on everybody—I mean, I had five intel reports on me that accused me of doing things. Everyone, certainly every Afghan, had somebody accusing him of something. Sorting out what was true and what was not . . . But by and large, I think we were able to very quickly separate the guys that we could work with and the guys that we couldn't. I think we set about doing that very quickly. So, anyway, we laid a map out with Governor Mangal, sitting in his office. We're now in May, probably mid to late May, laid a map out and showed him the enormity, of course, of the Helmand River valley and said, "Governor, if you were me, where would you go? I can't go everywhere. Where would you go? If you were going to bring these Marines in here, in what areas would you go into?"

Now, 80 percent of what he had recommended, we had probably already deduced were the right areas to go into, but he gave us about 20 percent. About 20 percent of the places he had picked out, we had not looked at, and so we adjusted a little bit. We never talked about Khan Neshin, so he never knew about Khan Neshin. [We] didn't know how much we could trust him, but at some point, he's the governor and he and his staff had a pretty good inkling. I think the Taliban was savvy enough to know, okay, we've got 10,000 Marines at Camp Leatherneck. They're going to go somewhere. Where are they going to go? Well, they're probably going to go to—they did think Marjah. There was a lot of activity in Marjah. They were either going to go to Marjah, Garmsir, or Nawa.

July 2d was Operation Khanjar [Strike of the Sword] and that was our first op as a MEB. It was the day we put a battalion into Nawa, 1/5 [1st Battalion, 5th Marines]. It's the day we put a battalion into Garmsir, 2/8 [2d Battalion, 8th Marines]. It's the day we put a battalion into Khan Neshin,

2d LAR [2d Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion]. Putting 4,500 Marines in a seven-hour period into those three districts that were obviously very Taliban-controlled districts, I think two days before the op, the last day or so of June, there had just recently been a change of command at ISAF. General McKiernan had been let go and General McChrystal had arrived. There was a tactical directive that was released that talked about you can't strike buildings, you can't do A, B, C, and D.

Our guys were already in the field. Our guys were already staged, they were ready to go, and there was frankly a lot of angst as that thing came across the wire, and it seemed restrictive. But as I read through it, and I probably read that document 10 times, just so I could immerse myself into it, and I think as Marines we're real big into commander's intent. Arguably, more so—we pay probably more attention to that than even our Army brethren. I think as a Corps we train our guys, "Tell me what the mission is. Give me your commander's intent. Give me a left and right lateral limit and get out of my way. Don't tell me how to do this mission."

As I sat there reading that thing over and over, where I knew that there was some trepidation out there in the ranks, so to speak, I came away feeling that the guidance we had already issued met the commander's intent that General McChrystal was trying to get across in the document. So I went out to our forces and said, "No change. No change to what we had planned on doing. There's no change. We're not going to do anything differently, because our intent is not to go in there and kill a bunch of innocent people anyhow. Continue with the plan." I think being judicious in our application of firepower is not weakness and it was not seen as handcuffing to us. It was seen as smart COIN. I think what I issued to my battalion commanders, and I met with them all several times,

even the night before the op, was, "No change. We're going to go in and do this thing the way we had talked through it, the way we planned it, the way we [rock] drilled it." Again, commanders pay attention to civilian casualties. I think going back, and I have the luxury in the not-too-distant past of having been a regimental commander in Iraq, I'll tell you, I think we got a little bit complacent in Iraq in terms of use of firepower.

The analogy I would give to my guys when I'd talk to them is, okay, I'm in Fallujah. I'm in Iraq and we're in a firefight and 5, 10 enemy break and run. They run into a building. You have the option then of—you look through your binos [binoculars], you look at the building, you don't see any women and children . . . drop the building. You use aviation-delivered fires, surface-delivered fires, but drop the building. That was our standard thing, and I think what we've taught and what we pushed is that's probably not going to be good enough in Afghanistan. We're probably going to have to be a little more—we're going to have to pay a little more due diligence to this process, because we understood that in Afghanistan, even more so than Iraq, that civilian casualties were going to cause real issues for us in this Pashtunwali culture with revenge being such a dominant thing. That's absent from the discussion many times—the Pashtunwali code.

I had some discussions with the governor prior to Khanjar and we talked through a couple of scenarios, and Governor Mangal was terrific. But as we talked through that scenario I had just given, where the 10 insurgents ran into a building, if you drop the building and you kill the insurgents, but you kill 5 women and children, you're probably going to have some issues. You could make a case from the Western mindset, "But, governor, those men ran into that building and they were hiding amongst women and children. They're cow-

ards.” And I think the Pashtun comeback is, “Yes, but the Taliban didn’t kill those women and children. You did.”

I think if you understand that, if you understand that that’s how they look at things, then you have to do a little more than just drop the building because there are some Taliban running into it. So what does that mean? What does that mean for a battalion commander and a company commander? What that means is that you now have to pursue. You have to follow them to the vicinity of that building, as opposed to just being able to sit back and drop the building. You have to now pursue. You have to surround the building. You have to gain—try to get a local and find out does anybody live there. You’re taking the extra step. You may even try to do a callout and, at some point, if you’re taking fire, you may back up and drop the building. And at that point, that’s okay. You’ve done that due diligence. You’ve tried something else, and I think that’s how we taught it. That’s how we [rock] drilled this thing with our small-unit leaders, is you’ve got to take the extra step. We’ve got to be able to say we tried. It doesn’t mean you won’t drop the building. You will drop the building, if you need to, but you’re going to go that extra step to make sure that it’s not casual, that it’s not, “Hey, there’s enemy in there, let’s drop the building. I don’t care who’s in there. We’re just going to drop the building.” I think that was one of the examples we used, but you have to be very careful as a commander to temper that to make sure that you don’t take the aggressiveness out. One of the greatest things we have on young Marines is their aggressiveness, their ability, their willingness, their desire to make contact and dominate the enemy. You don’t want to do anything to mitigate that. You just want to do it smartly.

Moffett: It said 120 degrees when Operation

Khanjar commenced on 2 July, so that’s one of the things I was looking to have you speak to was the incredible impact of the climate.

Nicholson: We didn’t surprise a whole lot of people when we went into Garmsir and Nawa. I think how we got in, the speed, the size of the force going in and the speed at which we built up that combat power was very much like an amphibious operation for us. Only instead of flying over ocean, we were flying over sand. Camp Dwyer was the other camp that we had established. It was a small British camp that we expanded probably tenfold, about 15 kilometers west of Garmsir. We had staged one of our battalions there, and we had staged the other battalion—1/5 was at Leathernneck, 2/8 had moved down to Dwyer.

We looked at it very much like an amphibious operation in the sense of the insertion, going ashore. . . . Again, completely right out of the amphibious warfare doctrine, because getting the force ashore is one thing, but supporting and sustaining that force was something else entirely.

It was a combination of surface and aviation, so it was very reminiscent of the most basic amphibious operations that you would do, where you would do a combination of assault support and ground support forces going in. On 2 July, we launched and we went to those three places very, very quickly. There was some pretty intense fighting on the first couple of days. I think in Garmsir, especially, we unhinged an enemy that was on the PB line because we got behind him. And what we found out in Now Zad and Nawa and Garmsir, is that when you get behind this linear enemy, you unhinge them very quickly. Because, like any linear front, nobody likes somebody behind them, and I think the threat of people in the rear was really—they left a lot of things right there in their holes. There were a lot of weapons and caches and



Photo courtesy of Sgt Randall A. Clinton

Cpl William Ash, a squad leader from 1st Platoon, Bravo Company, BLT 1/6, leads a patrol through a city in Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

supplies that were just abandoned as they took off. Again, many of the enemy we were fighting we ended up hiring. I'm convinced of that.

I am a big subscriber to the big-T, little-T theory that probably 10 percent of the Taliban are the big-T guys, or the ideologues or the irreconcilables. You're never going to convince them. No amount of reasoning . . . they are going to be out there to be killed or captured. But 90 percent of these guys are probably the economic Taliban, the lunch pail Taliban, the guys who are working for five, six bucks a day. I think they can be co-opted very easily. They have nowhere to go. They're not moving anywhere. They go home every night, and if the area they're

living in all of a sudden is under Afghan control, well, then they'll probably get along. They probably will work with whoever's in charge locally, but especially if they can take a paycheck home. If they can provide food and subsistence to their family, they will work for whoever is in charge.

They have no real ideological bent to them, but in this Pashtunwali culture, they will respond to whoever the biggest dog is, and if the biggest dog is the Marines or the Afghan Army or the Taliban, they'll respond accordingly. I think as the sun went down on 2 July, we were thrilled, absolutely thrilled with the fact—we had one casualty, one KIA on D-day—but we were absolutely

stunned in some ways that we had been able to pull off the largest heloborne op since Vietnam and do it successfully and get in. But that was only the start of the problem, because the temperatures were about 120 [degrees], and I was at that point more concerned about heat casualties than I was, frankly, about the Taliban. I knew we could handle the Taliban.

The backbone of our sustainment efforts were the [Sikorsky] CH-53Ds [Sea Stallions] and CH-53Es [Super Stallions]. We muscled in our logistics convoys, but that takes time to build up the kind of supplies, and even if you hit one spot, even if you get in, it's tough to get it out to everyone. And, again, we crossed line of departure [LD] with 49 percent of our gear. There was a lot of teeth sucking. Every day was Christmas Day on our soak lot. The "soak lot" is this lot outside Leatherneck where gear is arriving from Karachi [Pakistan]. We talked about how difficult it is to get gear in. We lost sight of gear when it went to Karachi, even though it had identification tags and they were supposedly scanned, the Pakistanis weren't doing that. So with those identification tags, we lost control. It was Pakistani contractors. There were no Americans in Karachi, and we were very much at the mercy of the Pakistanis to see what was showing up every day. Some things showed up immediately, some things took three months, so there was no telling where some of these things went. But we did a lot better than 10 percent. We had expected 10 percent loss. We probably had less than 1 percent loss. Most of the gear made it, and very little damage was inflicted.

We got those vehicles, I remember sitting around with Colonel John W. Simmons, my CLR commander [CLR-2], all my battalion commanders, Duffy White. We were every day counting how many HMMWVs, how many MRAPs, how many MTRVs, seven-tons [we had]. Did we have

enough? What was our minimum? We looked at when does the green light come on. This is not what I want, but it's what I need. It's what I have to do to at least get in there. And we were very much betting on the fact that there would be a continuous flow of equipment over the rest of July and August. It would continue to come in, so we could backstop any losses. But we were at a razor-thin margin in terms of gear, getting the equipment and the materiel, and we made that decision probably on about 28 June. We had our final workouts, and we slotted the table and said, "Okay, everybody's green." Nobody had what they wanted, but we had what we thought we needed to at least get ashore. One of the driving factors here was the elections in August 2009. We had to get in. One of the implied tasks was to get in and start setting up the conditions that would allow for elections in some of these areas that, frankly, had been under Taliban control for many years.

Moffett: That was another one of my questions. What guidance did you get from Kabul in terms of helping the elections take place, monitoring security? What was your mission in terms of that?

Nicholson: This was a pleasant surprise for us. I was very surprised that the Afghans really took the lead and dictated the terms of how this election would go and what our role would be. And our role was really, frankly—we were backstopping. We were the reaction force. We were not going to be anywhere near the polls. We had to use our helicopters to distribute election materials, tables, chairs, voting apparatus, ballots. But it was always accompanied by international observers. It was always accompanied by Afghan observers. But we were prepared to do a lot more planning than we really did. There were a lot of meetings, a lot of high-level planning sessions, but they were

really run by the 205th Corps ANA and by the police. We were pleasantly surprised, very pleasantly surprised. One of the remarkable things early on was that we had a violence-free election in our AO. We had people voting in places that had never had a chance to vote. Many thousands of people were registered to vote for the first time in their lives, and we had no attacks on polling stations. I don't think we had a casualty that day. We felt pretty good after that election. That was a big event for us.

Just to comment on the army [ANA], and I've talked about it with a lot of different groups, but my experience in Fallujah was that the locals hated the army, because the army, they were a bunch of Shia kids from Basrah and Sadr City and they were there to take advantage of the Sunnis. I guess I expected the same thing in Helmand, but I couldn't have been more mistaken. The people really liked the Afghan Army, and they were a bunch of kids [but] not from Helmand or from Nimroz. They were a bunch of Tajiks and Uzbeks and Hazaras, and many of them had very oriental features. They came from the north and the west of the country. They weren't Pashtun for the most part and, if they were Pashto, they were Kabul Pashto, which may as well be a different ethnicity. Very few of them spoke the local language. They all spoke Dari. Some spoke Dari, some spoke Urdu, yet the people liked them, because they didn't hit on the people, they didn't take from the people. They didn't steal.

Moffett: I sat in on one of your meetings once, and you asked about Golestan being so isolated and could that happen there, so I know that was part of your thinking.

Nicholson: Just as an aside, the Golestan thing, just based on the sheer geographical distance,

there's always a concern, especially in my mind if the weather got s—y, because sometimes you could, sometimes you couldn't, fly up into Golestan. So how do you QRF [quick reaction force] a place like Golestan, up in the mountains, where you couldn't mass? My worst scenario was the massing of the enemy north of Golestan in the mountainous area where we wouldn't have picked it up, where we don't have any ISR [intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance] necessarily flying routinely, and attack south into Golestan during a period of bad weather, where our guys would be vulnerable, where the ISR would not be necessarily up, where the ground based operational surveillance system [GBOSS] would be less effective, and where our ability to provide a quick reaction force or even tactical aircraft—they're certainly not in artillery range. They had mortars. How would we respond? And certainly that was—you get asked a lot, what keeps you up at night? That was one of them. It was tough to be in a location that you didn't have mutual support. There was not another place where I could roll forces quickly.

Moffett: There was a lieutenant in charge up there. Correct?

Nicholson: There was a lieutenant in charge. Now, the dirty little secret was [that] we said we had a platoon in Golestan, but oftentimes we had in excess of 100 guys in Golestan, a pretty formidable, robust force in terms of protecting themselves. But nonetheless, there was always concern that if a platoon was out, if a patrol was out, it would be a tough place to have to QRF under certain conditions, and we looked at that. Now, the good news is in Golestan that they had worked some amazing community relations up there. The good thing, on Christmas Day in Golestan, the locals brought them 12 turkeys. I just think we had worked very

hard in Golestan and we had had the right guys up there to be able to work with the community.

Moffett: I know in RC-South, in my experience, in your experience, an ever-greater percentage of our operations involved indigenous ANSF [Afghan National Security Forces] types. Talk a little bit about the Brits, who you worked directly with. In fact, this is pre-RC–Southwest, but we spoke before. I did want to touch on some of the other countries, from the Bahrainians to the Estonians to the Georgians to the Danish tanks, etcetera, but we didn't have time. I want to spend a little bit of time in particular on the Brits. I know from some of your meetings you seem to have a lot of affection for Al—I'm trying to think of the British officer's name, [the] liaison officer. But General [Nick] Carter was your senior. Is that correct?

Nicholson: Yes, from November to February. Prior to that, I had a Dutch commander. Of course, RC-South was commanded by the Dutch for a year and I got there in April-May, so my first six months [were spent] working for a Dutch commander—a Dutch two star—and my last five months working for a British two star. But during that entire period, of course, we were tied at the hip with Task Force Helmand. Brigadier Tim Radford was the commander of Task Force Helmand when I got there, and [Brigadier] James Cowan turned over in I think November, as well October-November timeframe. I went with two iterations, two different brigades from Task Force Helmand. Again, great affection for the Brits, and I think that it was an impossible mission they had been given initially, for Task Force Helmand to be in all of Helmand.

They were the only Coalition forces there—an enormous area—10,000 [troops], but really 6,000 with 4,000 in support. They weren't organized as

a MAGTF, so the brigadier did not have control over the air, which is odd and certainly a position I'm glad I was not in. Didn't have control over his own logistics. There was a national logistics element. The air force that was there to support him, the British Air Force, to include the helicopters, answered directly to Whitehall [headquarters for the British Ministry of Defense]. I think [that's] a tough spot to be in. First of all, the challenges of the terrain and just the enormity of Helmand. Again, as we talked about earlier, an incredibly difficult area that was thick with Taliban and really underaddressed for many, many years.

A lack of Afghan security forces. There was one corps in the south, and they were headquartered at Kandahar, 205th Corps, with one brigade in Helmand, an undersized brigade in Helmand, and that was led by Brigadier General Muhayadin Ghori. My assessment of the Brits is that they have terrific soldiers, terrific tough, young guys, but given almost an impossible task to try to go into Helmand by themselves and make that work. We . . . relieved them in Garmsir. Garmsir had become a little bit of an enclave. They were frankly surrounded. We relieved them in Nawa. Nawa was a gunfight. Every day, their CP in Nawa, the government center, was under direct-fire attack, every day. They had been in Now Zad earlier. Not the guys that we met when we were there, but the Brits had been in Now Zad. When Now Zad emptied out and the population left back in '06, their worst place probably was Sangin, which today, 17 August, we are in the process—Colonel Paul J. Kennedy and the 2d Marine Regiment, General [Richard P.] Mills and General [Joseph L.] Osterman, they're in the process of relieving the Brits in Sangin with 3/7 [3d Battalion, 7th Marines].

Moffett: Having already relieved them in Musa Qala [District Center, Helmand Province].

Nicholson: We did that when I was there. We took over Musa Qala. We resisted a little bit when I was there to go up to Kajaki [District Center, Helmand Province], because there were 50 Brits, again, surrounded at Kajaki, sitting at the dam. We now have an artillery battery up there, but I think we understand very clearly that that route from Kajaki all the way down through Sangin, and that route all the way down to Lashkar Gah, that's critical. That's critical terrain that's got to be cleared. I thought the Brits fought exceptionally well, but they have a little bit different methodology than we do. I think the Brits were garrisoned in smaller units. They had, in many cases, squad- and platoon-size units everywhere. I think that what that takes away from you—and we were very hard on platoon-size locations. There's a good reason for having a platoon by itself, and . . . there's some criteria that I would require before we would allow a platoon to be by itself. One, that you've got Afghan policy; two, that you've got Afghan Army; and three, that you have some local support.

Moffett: Going with the Golestan model.

Nicholson: Yes, so that you have some local support and interaction. If you're in a Fort Apache-type scenario, a platoon doesn't make any sense because, at that point, all you're able to do is pretty well defend yourself. You can't really do much of anything. Frankly, we closed some FOBs that we had taken over from the Brits because they were in a Fort Apache-type scenario. But if you can't generate combat power and you can't reaggregate your force to be able to go do something, you find yourself essentially imprisoned in these small little COPs up and down the Helmand River valley, where the enemy has all the advantage in the world because he's got you surrounded, and he's got you pinned down, and you're able to accomplish little

to nothing. My sense was that there were a number of small British COPs that frankly they had inherited from previous rotations. I don't think necessarily my counterparts wanted to be laid out like that. I think that they inherited some of these situations, where the lay down was something that had been done over previous years.

In contrast, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, James T. Conway, when he came to visit he talked to General Muhayadin Ghori, and Muhayadin was raving about the relations with the Marines, about how well they got along. He made a comment that General Conway carried back and used as one of his talking points. What Muhayadin said is, "You know the reason I love the Marines, General Conway? Because they drink out of the same canteen as my soldiers, and not everyone does that." I think that, in a nutshell, captures the difference. If you go into a Marine COP in the Helmand River valley, in most cases, the Afghans and the Marines are living the same. There are not two standards. In many cases, they're living together. I think 1/6 and 3/6 for Marjah, and the complete immersion, the complete putting Afghan soldiers into our squads, where every squad had a fireteam of Afghans.

It's not the preferred methodology of doing it, but it was necessary at the time because these were recruits that we got. We were hoping for some crack Afghan combat units to come down from other parts of the country to join us. We got companies of recruits with less than three weeks to train them and integrate them into the combat formation. They didn't really have any of their own officers, or not many. They were not able to function independently. So how do you do that? So I think what [Lieutenant Colonel Calvert] "Cal" Worth [Jr.] and Lieutenant Colonel Brian S. Christmas did, and [Colonel Randall] "Randy" [P.] Newman as regimental commander, the deci-

sion was we needed to integrate them at the lowest possible level, and that was the squad level. There are great pictures and footage of squads of Marines moving through Marjah with four, five, six Afghans as part of those squads. Again, that's not going to get you where you want to go in the long term, because the Afghans have to be able to function independently at some point. But when you talk about partnering, this was total immersion. This was absolute immersion. And I know that that wasn't being done in—probably nowhere in the country did anyone try anything like that. Again, it goes back to innovation, but that was out of necessity. We didn't think that was just such a great idea on its own merit. That was a necessity.

We shut down— Just as a factoid, and I don't remember the exact numbers, but as we took over Musa Qala from the Brits, we went up there several times during the turnover process, just trying to get a review of “Okay, what are we getting into here?” We shut down. Lieutenant Colonel Michael A. Manning in 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, my guidance to him, my guidance to Paul Kennedy, was we are not going to inherit 40 COPs, 40 squad-size outposts. That's not how we're going to do business. We're going to do it differently. So I gave them complete license, “Take a look at every one of these things. Find out which ones we want. Find out which ones we don't, and let's reorganize. Look at this as a blank sheet of paper. Given the fact that there are a couple of large FOBs that we're going to inherit, and the airfield, obviously; but in terms of what the lay down is, in terms of our forces, let's do this our way. Just because there's a generator and a water bowl there doesn't mean we've got to put a squad there.”

I think they did. In fact, they did. A number of small COPs and FOBs—another thing was police stations. We would never, ever have a police station somewhere where there were police by themselves.

Throughout the Musa Qala—and I know Musa Qala because I was on that piece, and again, I don't know Sangin, but there were a number of places in Musa Qala District where there were 10, 15 police by themselves. We wouldn't do that. That's not us. So we shut those down and moved the police to another place, reaggregated, if you will, some of the forces so we could go out and do things. I think kind of re-looking at the areas we'd gotten into and closing down some of these squad-size FOBs was something we did when I was there.

Moffett: Just to shift gears to air. But can take just a few moments and address Marine Aircraft Group 40 (MAG-40), Colonel Kevin S. Vest, and the role that they played in things?

Nicholson: As we started forming the MEB, I was told that there would be an ACE [aviation combat element] force and there was no real decision as to who that ACE would be or what they would be called, but that there would be an ACE, and that we would enlarge the existing footprint of Marine aviation in country. Duffy White, of course, had a relatively small ACE. Duffy's ACE was probably even smaller than what a MEU normally takes, but it provided enough combat power for that battalion, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines. And again, prior to 3/8, 2/7 [2d Battalion, 7th Marines] had been there, and 2/7 had really no air, and 2/7 went ostensibly on a police training mission, working for CSTC-A [Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan], and as they got into into Delaram and Golestan and Bakwa and Now Zad, what they found out [was that] for the most part there were no police. In most of those areas, there were no police at all. What there were plenty of were Taliban. So now you had 2/7 getting into a very kinetic fight as a straight-legged battalion with no aviation.

[The] 24th MEU, Pete Petronzio, the distress call went out, “Hey, can you help?” Well, they had their hands full in a very different geographical area down in Garmsir as 24th MEU and Lieutenant Colonel Anthony M. Henderson with 1/6 went in and started doing the great work they did down there. They tried, and as the Special Purpose MAGTF stood up, I think principally one of the reasons it was stood up was to provide that command and control, the linkage to higher headquarters. The air piece, to bring air in to support that one battalion that was up in what we called [Hotbox] Tripoli.

I guess sometime in late January, I met Colonel Vest. I was informed that he would be the commander, and that MAG-40, which had been [in] mothballs, the colors had been rolled—it was kind of a breaking glass, time-of-war kind of organization, but that MAG-40 would be reactivated and would be the command for the MEB. There was a supply bridge, an air bridge of supplies. What was convenient for us and mutually beneficial was that as Iraq was drawn down, they had excess gear, so we were able to really take great advantage of that. We flew C-130s, there was almost a nonstop air bridge of C-130s going from Bastion to al-Asad, Iraq, and back, coming back loaded with gear—radio gear, comm wire, cabling, anything and everything, parts, spare parts. We were able to—not only through the normal system, but through an intertheater operational/logistics hub that was established at al-Asad. I’ll tell you, Brigadier General Juan G. Ayala was very generous to us in terms of trying to help us get what we needed. He was the 2d Marine Logistics Group (2d MLG) commander with II MEF (Forward), so he was at TQ (al-Taqaddum Airbase, Iraq) and, as they were closing down TQ, frankly, I think we helped them, but they certainly helped us in terms of the amount of gear coming in.

We were so dependent on Marine air to support our force, and we were so vulnerable. We knew that the principal vulnerability to the heat, and again, not knowing how much contact we would make, with the ability to reinforce and resupply our guys with ammunition. Less concerned about chow, but water was terribly concerning. At the end of 30 days, on 2 July, we took stock of where we were at. We had 17 heat casualties in 30 days, 17 medevaced heat casualties, and all but one returned to duty. But Marine aviation, every aspect of it, whether it was CAS [close air support] in support of us or whether it was just the constant movement of personnel and gear in and around the battlefield, did an amazing job. Of course, the Ospreys came in with Lieutenant Colonel Anthony J. Bianca.

Moffett: They came in later?

Nicholson: Yes. They came in. They just finished, so about seven months ago. I’m trying to remember when they came in. They just rotated out, so I guess they would have come in in October, November. I think November. I was expecting someone at Headquarters Marine Corps to tell me to take it easy on the Ospreys, protect them, coddle them, baby them. No one ever did, and we didn’t. Whether it was Operation Cobra’s Anger, putting them in fire, putting them under fire, time and time again, these guys were going into hot zones. I think that aircraft—I know it went to Iraq for a couple of rotations. I just don’t know how much combat it saw. These guys were phenomenal. Not only were the crews trained and well prepared for this mission, but the aircraft itself vindicated itself against a lot of the critics that have been out there.

I got to the point where my preferred mode of transportation for a longer trip was the Osprey, no question. Shorter trips, I always like to take the UH-1Y Huey, the [four-bladed] Huey, because that

again was a tremendous change for us, when we got the Yankees—when we got rid of the UH-1N Hueys and brought the Yankees in, what they were able to do and the relief they were able to provide the 53s. Previous to that, every time I had to go anywhere, I had to go in a 53, and that was always dedicated aircraft that we felt we were taking away from the daily sustainment and movement of the force. I was very, very pleased with Marine aviation and their work with, frankly, Army aviation, because a couple of our principal lifts, whether it was Khanjar or Marjah, we used Colonel Paul W. Bricker, USA, and the 82d Combat Aviation Brigade. They did a tremendous job in support of the Marines.

Moffett: I know that we used Danish tanks up at Now Zad.

Nicholson: We worked with the Danes because they had tanks, period. The Danes are a battle group that works for the British, so as we undertook—Let me go back to my February conversation with McKiernan. I'm sitting with McKiernan, and we're talking about Marjah. Now the discussion comes up—tanks. I want to bring a company of tanks with me because, I think in the rolling open desert of the south tanks, [they] make sense. They don't make sense up in RC-East in the mountainous area, but they make sense down south. I made my argument, and McKiernan looked at me and kind of smiled and said, "Larry, the greatest tank force in the world is the United States Army. The United States Army has no tanks in Afghanistan. I'll be d—d if the United States Marine Corps is going to bring tanks in here." I think there was a lot of discussion about [that] it would smack of the Soviets. I've heard it time and time again. "You can't have tanks, because it's going to remind people of the Soviets. It's sending the wrong image.

We're here to help the people. You send tanks in and it looks like we're here to kill the people." I'm like, "Well, okay. A Stryker [armored vehicle] is not a tank, but the Stryker is a pretty formidable looking, pretty muscular vehicle."

Moffett: And the Afghans call everything a tank.

Nicholson: Yes, everything's a tank. So then I said, "Okay, sir. Don't worry about a company. How about a platoon? Just give me a platoon of tanks because I'm going to need it for Marjah. I'm going to need it for Now Zad. I'm going to need it for these other places." He was like, "Larry, you don't understand. No tanks. No friggin' tanks." So we pulled them off. They were on the force list at that point. That was the original thinking. So we scratched them and, frankly, we were told, "No, you can't take the tanks." When we needed the ABVs [assault breacher vehicle], when we decided that these minefields, these IED belts were so formidable, Soviet-esque in their design and nature, we asked for the ABV, we initially got the same response. "No, it's a tank. It's going to scare the people. It's going to remind them."

We fought like hell to convince the U.S. Army leadership in Kabul that, "G——d d——n it, these are not tanks. These are engineer vehicles." But no one had ever seen an ABV because the Army doesn't have anything like it. All they know is it's on an M1 chassis. Well, if it's on an M1 chassis, if it looks like a tank, smells like a tank, must be a tank. We made a great case and I got some help up there.

Major General John A. MacDonald, USA, and a couple of guys really helped me convince COMISAF that, okay, this is an engineered vehicle. It shoots mine clearing line charges [MICLIC]. It does a hell of a lot more damage, they're a lot more formidable than a tank at some level, but we

were able to get those—15 in the Marine Corps. And out of the 15 in the Marine Corps, we had 5 of them in Afghanistan, so we had a pretty good slice. They had never been used in combat before, and the first time ever used was in Now Zad. Again, 1,700 pounds of C4 launched by the MICLIC can open a pretty nice lane to move the forces through, but we needed them.

The IEDs were just so formidable. Those IED belts were for real, but back to my youth. I felt like a lieutenant at Twentynine Palms [California] breaching minefields there, the old Soviet style. So when it came time for Now Zad, we wanted tanks. We talked with the Brits, we talked with RC-South, and the Brits were very generous in allowing us to use those tanks. And the Danes were very excited to be able to work with the Marines, and I'll tell you, they did a great job. The Marines loved them. They fit right in. A great young Danish lieutenant came up there and led that platoon and they got some shots. They were able to actually use their main gun. But it sent the right signal in Now Zad, that the situation changed, that the Coalition and the government of Afghanistan, the status quo had changed. It's no longer acceptable.

Moffett: In Garmsir, there was a riot. Of course, Delaram had a riot, too, but if you can speak a little bit to dealing with the subversives or the Taliban trying to come in and stir things up, Koran desecrations, and that type of thing.

Nicholson: What we called it was the oldest play in the book. It was the hidden-ball trick. If you can't criticize or if you can't go after the Coalition forces based on their conduct, based on their actions, the most base level at which you're going to be able to attack us and probably gain some traction is on religion. It is that area that there is always some doubt that why are the Americans—especially to

a largely uneducated population. Afghanistan, I think there is such broad ignorance—they're not stupid, they're just not educated. I think the base level at which you could stir emotion very, very quickly is religion. Any accusation about desecration to the religion, to the Koran, achieves immediate results, and it did.

We had our first one in Delaram, and then got through that. I thought the police and the army did a great job of settling that. The governor of Delaram or the governor of Nimroz, Dr. [Ghulam Dastgir] Azad, got on the radio and he told people, "Hey, this is a Taliban trick. It didn't happen. It's the Taliban." Very quickly, he was out in front of the story, and he helped. He told the print media very, very quickly. He got the word out to his network, "This is b——l s——t, the Americans didn't do that. Taliban trick." When it happened in Garmsir, I'm quite sure that where it happened the people genuinely believed it, because they started finding the Korans. But we knew a Marine is just not going to do that. I have a hard time believing that a Marine would ever do anything like that.

I think there wasn't a lot of concern that that was something we had done. The concern was, "Okay, here they go again. This is the hidden ball trick one more time." It worked in Delaram a little bit. Let's see if it can work here. Getting the local leaders to aggressively respond and say that they would investigate and take charge of the situation was kind of tough. Carter Malkesian [diplomatic advisor], and I guess it was Major Scott A. Cuomo and some of the local guys in 2/8, did a great job of sitting down, of stopping the mob, bringing in the elders. They brought the elders in, they sat down, they talked to them, and things calmed down a little bit. It wasn't, though, until we found the bagful of Korans, burnt Korans, that we were able to take it to the governor, take it to



Photo courtesy of Sgt Timothy Brumley

U.S. Navy casualty evacuation corpsmen with MAG-40 receive a weapons safety brief before firing on a battle-sight zero range outside Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, on 11 May 2009. MAG-40 is the aviation combat element for the 2d MEB, which conducts counterinsurgency operations in partnership with Afghan national security forces and prepares them to assume future security responsibilities.

all the local leaders and say, “Look, look what we found.” It was amazing. Every time a Marine left a building, there would be a burnt Koran behind him. I think they overplayed it a little bit, and they found this bag of burnt Korans.

One of the immediate things we set out to do was get every one of our leaders together at every level—platoon commanders working with their Afghan counterparts—and make sure that they understood, “If it hasn’t happened yet, it’s going

to happen. You need to know right now—mayor, governor, local city—it’s going to happen. Someone’s going to come up to you and say, look, I found this burnt Koran. I found a burnt Koran, the Americans have done that.” The question is, how are you going to act? In Garmsir, they burned the school down. I think our two-minute drill on that was to go out, to do an immediate reach out to every local leader, whether he was elected, tribal, or religious, and have that talk. That talk, that special chat, was, “It’s going to happen. It’s going to happen right here in beautiful Nawa, or beautiful Khan Neshin. It hasn’t happened yet, but it’s going to happen. What are you going to do Mr. Local, Tribal, or Religious Leader when that happens? How are you going to react? If you don’t come out strong and say we’re going to investigate, we will take a look at this. If you don’t come out strong and do that very, very quickly, then you’re in danger of losing control of your school, of your city. Who knows what they’ll do next?”

I think what the Afghans had a hard time with was that any real Muslim would burn a Koran. They had a hard time wrapping their head around the fact that “Yes, the Taliban are some shady guys, but they’re Muslim. They would never do that.” Well, yes, they actually would. They actually did, and when the guy got caught with those 60 burnt Korans, that became [a] great counterinformation operations (IO) platform for us, that these guys are so desperate, these guys are so despicable, that they would use your religion against us. I think for us the IO was—our best IO footprint was what we were doing every day. “Look at the people that are at work, look at the schools that are open, look at the clinics that are open, look at how the Marines treat the people.” I think it was not just our message, it was our actions that allowed us to really capitalize on our own IO.

Moffett: The civil affairs piece is huge and ongoing. Sir, if you could speak to the female engagement team (FET) piece of it.

Nicholson: You go to Kabul, you see women. You go to Lashkar Gah, you see women. Anything outside of Lashkar Gah and Helmand, you don’t see women. You don’t see them in Delaram [District, western Afghanistan]. You certainly don’t see them in Bahram Shah. I mean, you don’t even see them. I’m not talking about dealing with them, you don’t see them. They don’t shop. Women are so isolated and so protected, but sheltered and hidden. We had a Pashtun woman called [Holly Jawani]. She lives in Alexandria, [an] American citizen, but Pashtun and spent a lot of time in Afghanistan. We had some very talented civil affairs folks. We just had a perfect storm of opportunity there to put together some teams to go out and experiment.

Again, I go back to the opening with Rajiv of the rogue out-of-control network. Like I said, we threw a lot of stuff against the wall [and] said, “You know, that worked.” Some worked, some didn’t. Some was a miserable failure. The FET was an experiment. Post-kinetic, after things have settled down a little bit, as we’re trying to win the confidence of the population. I think we had some opportunities to take some small teams of women, put them out there in areas that recently had been contested, and just started engaging, seeing what the other 50 percent of the population was thinking. We started with Holly Jawani and some of the women, Master Sergeant Julia L. Watson, and we did some experiments. We literally knocked on some hatches, knocked on some compound doors, and went in. [Holly’s] pretty strong. She’d throw the men out and they were very docile, the men would all leave. They’d sit there with 10, 15, 20 women in a compound, women and girls. They’d drink tea and they would just chat

for hours. It was not an intel-gathering organization, not designed for that, but you can't help but come out of there with some atmospherics as to what's going on and what do you think. What are the men saying? What's the perception of the community? And I think those things are important. We also found that the FET team was exceptionally good at working with men, with Afghan men. Afghan men were much less reticent about coming up and telling our women any number of things.

We saw a tremendous opportunity for growth here, and we started taking volunteers to take them to an FET academy, and Colonel Edward Yarnell did a great job of kind of taking the lead on that with Master Sergeant Watson. Probably once a month, we'd have a class of volunteers. Women would raise their hands. We worked it like a volunteer fire department thing, where we would train women from the MLG [Marine logistics group], from the ACE, pull them out of the flight line, from headquarters, and when we needed a team to go to Now Zad or Khan Neshin or Marjah, we'd ring the bell and see who's available. Send a mass email out saying we need 10, and for 10 [spots] we'd have 100 volunteers. We'd pick 10 and we'd take them out two or three weeks at a time, and then we'd bring them back and let them go back to the flight line or supply warehouse or wherever. But while they were there, they were doing great jobs. They were working in the schools. They were out every day. They were not sheltered. They were going out and we just saw great potential. I had several female Marines tell me, "Hey, sir, if I could do this for the rest of my career, I'd sign up tomorrow. If I could do this forever, this is what I'd like to do."

Moffett: I wanted to give you a chance to touch quickly on technology. You talked about ISRs [intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance]. So, in

terms of Marine Corps history, there was a lot of historic use of Ospreys and then the mine clearing at Now Zad and then later at Marjah. We're certainly interested in anything that smacks of the historical. But GBOSS (ground based operational surveillance system), obviously Vietnam didn't have the GBOSS capability. Could talk about some of the novel or historic uses of technology.

Nicholson: I like to tell a story, when I got to Fallujah for my regimental command tour, and I did that in '04/'05 as a G-3. But when I got back to Fallujah, if I wanted to send a portfolio or a package of secret information to a company commander, downtown Fallujah, if I wanted to send something to Mr. John Kael Weston, my POLAD [political advisor] downtown at the government center, it was Civil War-like, only instead of giving it to a rider on horseback, I'd call the gunny and tell him to get the PSD [personal security detail] ready. And I'd give a package of material to the gunny. I'd say, "Take this to Captain [Allen] at FOB Blah." And off they'd go. "Take this to Stonewall, and don't get caught." By the time I left Fallujah, almost every company FOB had secret Internet protocol router network [SIPR], had a GSWAN [general support wide area network]. We called it our SWAN antenna or satellite. That was a quantum leap. That was not evolutionary. That was revolutionary. How [do] you survive in a combat environment without data, without secure data, SIPR? I don't know how we did it. That was 2006. So by 2007, almost everyone had them. By the time I left in February '07, almost everyone had them. Flash forward to Afghanistan and GBOSS. We had one or two. The first GBOSS tower ever—this is a great story.

I come back now to Afghanistan and every platoon—if a platoon is at a site, Golestan, they have SIPR. They not only have one, but some-

times multiple GBOSS towers, which is a big thing for us. As we're sitting in Camp Lejeune saying, "Okay, what do we need? What do we need in terms of specialized gear, GBOSS and GSWAN, those SWANs that can get SIPR?" We ordered a hell of a lot of them, anticipating the fact that as the situation matured, we would put platoons out there. Lieutenant Colonel Martin F. Wetterauer and the guys took it to the next level in Now Zad. As we had the breakout there with Operations Cobra's Anger and Eastern Resolve, as we started spreading our tentacles there and we went down to some of those local towns around Now Zad, we put smaller FOBs around. We had towers up. So now we had the potential for the company commander not just to see the tower that's located outside its FOB, but to be able to see the towers within his company area. We call it the constellation, and we worked with our science and technology guys to have the ability in Lima 3/4's [Lima Company, 3d Battalion, 4th Marines] COC.

And, again, that was a dramatic leap forward in the use of technology. As we pushed down into the Helmand River valley, as we pushed down into Marjah, shortly after getting settled, in came those GBOSS towers. We had to order a lot of them. They're not inexpensive, but what a tremendous capability. I think that helped. I think we're always looking for some sort of persistent surveillance platforms and techniques, looking for guys laying IEDs and what have you. It's not a magic bullet. It doesn't solve all your problems, but it certainly helps. From a force protection standpoint, it is a tremendous asset.

Moffett: Anything else on technology, the drones?

Nicholson: The ISR, by the time you got Afghanistan, you had company commanders that could take control of Predator and Reaper UAVs—armed

Predators and Reapers—and they had the ability to use them. The trickle down of technology to the maneuver company level was exceptional. HIMARS is a great platform; it certainly reduces the reliance on tubed artillery. The HIMARS, with the extent of the range, with the precision, was an invaluable weapon that we used when we needed it.

Moffett: Iran is usually in the news for different reasons, but it does border on Nimroz and Farah. The road that the Indians built [Route 606 or the Delaram-Zaranj Highway] basically ties in Iran with Delaram. So can you offer just a couple quick thoughts on Iran as part of the equation near where the Marines had been working?

Nicholson: As I used to tell folks, and it would be annoying, the most important highway in my AO was not Highway 1 [circulates inside boundary of Afghanistan].

Moffett: It was Highway 9 [or Route 606].

Nicholson: It was Highway 9. Highway 1 was intermittently busy, a lot of contractor vehicles traveling on Highway 1. Highway 9 was bumper to bumper. It was open 12 hours a day and it was crowded 12 hours a day [with] 18-wheelers coming up a modern, Western road from Zaranj [southwestern Afghanistan near border of Iran]. Unfortunately, there were areas on that road that the Taliban controlled and they collected tolls on, which drove us to distraction and which special operators targeted from time to time. But until we could establish a permanent presence in some of those areas—[Kashru] was the name I'm talking about—until we could get down there, that was going to be a problem for us. But we knew that there was great commerce coming in.

We knew that Delaram— And again, I felt sometimes that I was explaining this over and over to guys in Kandahar and Kabul, that Delaram was an emerging center of commerce, and it was one of the only places in the country where two hardball roads connected—Highway 1 and Highway 9—and the city was booming. The city was relatively secure and safe. It was prosperous. The Marines had a good relationship there. We had good ANA there, very cultivated. We were very proud of Delaram and the progress there in Delaram, but we had a hard time convincing others that anything west—anything in that western portion was worth their attention. Population-centric operations absolutely agree with that, but again, it's the effects on the population, not the geolocation of the population.

I make the analogy all the time that if you take population-centric operations, if you don't understand that correctly, you would think that your forces need to be in the populated areas. Take Garmsir. If we moved all of our forces from the southern areas into Garmsir, the fighting in Garmsir would start soon, because that's now the flood. You have to be outside, and I think Garmsir is very prosperous because of the fact that we pushed the enemy so far down toward Khan Neshin. I did not see as much traffic as was coming through Zaranj, and as much commerce as was coming through there. And I'm sure that there were some bad things coming in, no doubt in my mind. We were always concerned about any kind of escalation of activity on the other side of the border in terms of the Iranians scrambling fighters or moving forces to the border, and it never happened.

I just don't know that we had a good feel for all of the things coming in on that road, and I would have liked to have spent more time and attention keeping that highway safe and keeping that highway open, because I think for the

commerce of Helmand and for the prosperity of Helmand, that's a pretty damn important life-line that was there. Again, I did not see any. We caught guys from time to time and we detained guys with Iranian papers and we turned them in. But word came back, "No, he's a worker who was working in Iran, but he came back." So we never really knew. We never knew exactly what the flow was, but there's no question there was a hell of a lot of people coming across those borders from Iran. And, certainly, while many of them were probably legitimate workers, no doubt there were some that were causing problems for us.

Moffett: If you could take a mulligan—if there's one or two things, the biggest things, that you would have done differently if you could.

Nicholson: I think going after local leadership earlier on, trying to develop, trying to get more. What I'm hearing right now is that the MEF is putting together a civil service academy. It's a brilliant idea, and again, it speaks to the Marine innovation that is resident in all of us. For the same reason, we started police boot camp and then army boot camp. If the institution doesn't give you what you need, do it yourself. It's the sort of attitude that permeates our Corps. I would like to have gone after, and whether it's Kandahar University, I would have liked to have worked harder to fill the [line] ministries. One thing that I didn't get done was I wanted at every district an education minister, we would have a health minister, we would have all those people, and we didn't collect that level of talent.

Moffett: And some of this goes back to paying them.

Nicholson: Yes. One thing we wanted to do [that] I didn't get done was [an] independent Afghan battlespace. I think as we sat down at Camp Lejeune

and thought about what we were going to do when we got over there, one of our goals was [an] independent Afghan battlespace. But the reality of it was [that] when we got there, there were 400 Afghans within the entire AO. We really started well behind. We couldn't do the kinds of things we had initially wanted to do in terms of it. But I told General Mills that that was something we had failed to get done. . . . I think another thing we would have liked to have gotten done, but we just ran out of airspeed and altitude, and again, Moshtarak kept getting pushed back and pushed back, but opening the border at Bahram Shah. It's inevitable, and while we ran into a lot of resistance as we talked about getting down there and establishing that border, it's a Wild West smugglers', criminals' town.

Moffett: To get to my final question, and you know better than anyone, if you look at the situation in May 2009, with the Brits doing what they could and with the Taliban everywhere, versus April 2010, when the MEB staff departed, [it was] a dramatic, profound, wonderful, historic, and consequential deployment. I know it's hard to ask you this question, because there are so many accomplishments, but if you could cite one or two things that maybe nobody's noticed or that should be part of the historical record.

Nicholson: One of the more amazing things about the deployment had nothing to do, frankly, with Afghanistan. It had to do with the ability of our Marine Corps to put together such a large, disparate force, with units coming from all four divisions, all four wings. And I had reserve squadrons from the very beginning—all four MLGs, Reserve Marines, regular Marines—putting them all together in this experiment that we call II MEF or MEB-A. Hell, we didn't even settle on a name until we were about done. And effectively intro-

ducing that force into sustained, significant combat operations in early July when much of it was forming in March, April . . . gear still flowing.

The fact that we crossed the LD with 49 percent of our gear, the fact that we accepted that risk, I'm very proud of that. . . . I didn't know Colonel Vest. I didn't know my MSC [Military Sealift Command] commanders. I'd never heard of them. I didn't know Duffy White. Bringing that size force in from all over the world . . . and in a very short period of time being able to make sure everybody was on the same page. And we trained hard for a very short period of time, and we trained in country. There was no Mojave Viper for us. There was no, "Hey, let's get the whole MEB to the national training center for 30, 40, 60 days of training."

. . . I mean, we sort of got to know each other electronically. We had a couple of quick meetings at Camp Lejeune, but not everyone, and then we fell in on the Special Purpose MAGTF, which was already in country, already in the fight with 3d Battalion, 8th Marines. We fell in on that and 3d Marine Regiment imploded. As soon as we got there, their OPSO left. Half their staff had to rotate out because they were on 210-day orders. They were going off to command. . . . [I]t was a challenge to put that team together and it was a tribute to that team, and really a tribute to our Corps, that we are able to composite a force from throughout the world, with a bunch of relative strangers, put them together and in a few short weeks—a few short weeks, put them in sustained, very difficult combat situations and have them succeed. That is probably what I am most proud of is being a part of that.

. . . I'm proud of so many things and so many people, so many great heroes of the MEB, and certainly very humbled by the great sacrifices that so many of our guys made. This was not cost free. This was a very expensive deployment in terms of

lives and warriors. I am immensely proud of the fact that we were able on very short notice . . . to put that team together and introduce them into the fight. And we did it again a little bit in January as 1/6 and 3/6 showed up, but by then at least we had the infrastructure. . . . But whether it's Afghan

training, the army, the police, whether it's Now Zad, whether it's a list of our districts from A to Z, and look at where they're at today from where they were at 15–16 months ago. Even the most ardent critic could not say that, "Holy crap, that's pretty impressive improvement in those areas."



A convoy from 2d Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, 2d MEB-Afghanistan, crosses the line of departure during Operation Khanjar to join other Marine forces in the Helmand River valley.

Photo courtesy of Sgt Aaron Rooks



Marines Launch Mission in Afghanistan's South Focused on Security and Governance

by Rajiv Chandrasekaran

The Washington Post, 2 July 2009

CAMP LEATHERNECK, Afghanistan, 2 July —Thousands of U.S. Marines descended upon the volatile Helmand River valley in helicopters and armored convoys early Thursday, mounting an operation that represents the first large-scale test of the U.S. military's new counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan.

The operation will involve about 4,000 troops from the 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade, which was dispatched to Afghanistan this year by President [Barack H.] Obama to combat a growing Taliban insurgency in Helmand and other southern provinces. The Marines, along with an Army brigade that is scheduled to arrive later this summer, plan to push into pockets of the country where NATO forces have not had a presence. In many of those areas, the Taliban has evicted local police and government officials and taken power.

Once Marine units arrive in their designated towns and villages, they have been instructed to build and live in small outposts among the local population. The brigade's commander, Brigadier General Lawrence D. Nicholson, said his Marines will focus their efforts on protecting civilians from the Taliban and on restoring Afghan government services instead of mounting a series of hunt-and-kill missions against the insurgents.

"We're doing this very differently," Nicholson said to his senior officers a few hours before the mission began. "We're going to be with the people. We're not going to drive to work. We're going to walk to work."

Similar approaches have been tried in the eastern part of the country, but none has had the scope of the mission in Helmand, a vast province that is largely an arid moonscape save for a band of fertile land that lines the Helmand River. Poppies grown in that territory produce half the world's supply of opium and provide the Taliban with a valuable source of income.

The operation launched early Thursday represents a shift in strategy after years of thwarted U.S.-led efforts to destroy Taliban sanctuaries in Afghanistan and extend the authority of the Afghan government into the nation's southern and eastern regions. More than seven years after the fall of the Taliban government, the radical Islamist militia remains a potent force across broad swaths of the country. The Obama administration has made turning the war around a top priority, and the Helmand operation, if it succeeds, is seen as a potentially critical first step.

Traveling through swirling dust clouds under the light of a half-moon, the first Marine units departed from this remote desert base shortly after midnight on dual-rotor CH-47 Chinook transport helicopters backed by AH-64 Apache gunships and NATO fighter jets. Additional forces poured into

the valley during the pre-dawn hours on more helicopters and in heavy transport vehicles designed to withstand the makeshift but lethal bombs that Taliban fighters have planted along the roads.

The initial Marine units did not face resistance as they converged on their destinations. Marine commanders said before the start of the operation that they expected only minimal Taliban opposition at the outset, but that assaults on the forces would probably increase once they moved into towns and began patrols. Field commanders have been told to prepare for suicide attacks, ambushes, and roadside bombings.

Officers here said the mission, which required months of planning, is the Marines' largest operation since the 2004 invasion of Fallujah, Iraq. In the minutes after midnight, well-armed Marines trudged across the tarmac at this sprawling outpost to board the Chinooks, which lumbered aloft with a burst of searing dust. A few hours later, another contingent of Marines boarded a row of CH-53 Super Stallion helicopters packed onto a relatively small landing pad at a staging base in the desert south of here. As the choppers clattered through the night sky, dozens of armored vehicles rolled toward towns along the river valley.

The U.S. strategy here is predicated on the belief that a majority of people in Helmand do not favor the Taliban, which enforces a strict brand of Islam that includes an-eye-for-an-eye justice and strict limits on personal behavior. Instead, U.S. officials believe, residents would rather have the Afghan government in control, but they have been cowed into supporting the Taliban because there was nobody to protect them.

In areas south of the provincial capital, local leaders, and even members of the police force, have fled. An initial priority for the Marines will be to bring back Afghan government officials and reinvigorate the local police forces. Marine



Photo courtesy of SSgt William Greeson

Helmand Province government officials meet at Patrol Base Jaker in the Nawa District of the Helmand Province on 23 July 2009 with Provincial Reconstruction Team-Helmand and BGen Lawrence Nicholson, commander of 2d MEB-Afghanistan, to discuss reestablishing the Afghan government in the Nawa District.

commanders also plan to help district governors hold shuras—meetings of elders in the community—in the next week.

“Our focus is not the Taliban,” Nicholson told his officers. “Our focus must be on getting this government back up on its feet.”

But Nicholson and his top commanders recognize that making that happen involves tackling numerous challenges, starting with a lack of trust among the local population. That mistrust stems from concern over civilian casualties resulting from U.S. military operations as well as from a fear that the troops will not stay long enough to

counter the Taliban. The British Army, which had been responsible for all of Helmand since 2005 under NATO’s Afghan stabilization effort, lacked the resources to maintain a permanent presence in most parts of the province.

“A key to establishing security is getting the local population to understand that we’re going to be staying here to help them—that we’re not driving in and driving out,” said Colonel Eric [M.] Mellinger, the brigade’s operations officer.

With the arrival of the Marines, British forces have redeployed around the capital of Helmand, Lashkar Gah, where they are conducting a large



Photo courtesy of CWO3 Philippe E. Chasse

U.S. Marines with 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, Regimental Combat Team 3, 2d MEB, along with approximately 650 Afghan soldiers and police officers from the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF), prepare to board CH-53D Sea Stallion and CH-53E Super Stallion helicopters at Forward Operating Base Dwyer, Afghanistan, on 2 July 2009. The Marines and ANSF are partnered for a major operation in Helmand Province to transition security responsibilities to Afghan forces.

anti-Taliban operation designed to complement the Marine mission. Two British soldiers were reported killed in fighting in the province Wednesday.

The Marines have also been vexed by a lack of Afghan security forces and a near-total absence of additional U.S. civilian reconstruction personnel. Nicholson had hoped that his brigade, which has about 11,000 Marines and sailors, would be able to conduct operations with a similar number of Afghan soldiers. But thus far, the Marines have

been allotted only about 500 Afghan soldiers, which he deems “a critical vulnerability.”

“They see things intuitively that we don’t see,” he said. “It’s their country, and they know it better than we do.”

Despite commitments from the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development that they would send additional personnel to help the new forces in southern Afghanistan with reconstruction and governance development,

State has added only two officers in Helmand since the Marines arrived. State has promised to have a dozen more diplomats and reconstruction experts working with the Marines, but only by the end of the summer.

To compensate in the interim, the Marines are deploying what officers here say is the largest-ever military-civilian affairs contingent attached to a combat brigade—about 50 Marines, mostly reservists, with experience in local government, business management, and law enforcement. Instead of flooding the area of operations with cash, as some units did in Iraq, the Marine civil affairs commander, Lieutenant Colonel [T.] Curtis Lee, said he intends to focus his resources on improving local government.

Once basic governance structures are restored, civilian reconstruction personnel plan to focus on economic development programs, including programs to help Afghans grow legal crops in the area. Senior Obama administration officials say creating jobs and improving the livelihoods of rural Afghans is the key to defeating the Taliban, which has been able to recruit fighters for as little as \$5 a day in Helmand.

In meetings with his commanders at forward operating bases over the past three days, Nicholson acknowledged that focusing on governance

and population security does not come as naturally to Marines as conducting offensive operations, but he told them it is essential that they focus on “reining in the pit bulls.”

“We’re not going to measure your success by the number of times your ammunition is resupplied. . . . Our success in this environment will be very much predicated on restraint,” he told a group of officers from the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, on Sunday. “You’re going to drink lots of tea. You’re going to eat lots of goat. Get to know the people. That’s the reason why we’re here.”

Note

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About the Author

Rajiv Chandrasekaran is a senior correspondent and associate editor with *The Washington Post*. He was bureau chief in Baghdad for the first two years of the Iraq War. He also has been a correspondent in Cairo and Southeast Asia. Chandrasekaran is the author of *Imperial Life in the Emerald City* (Knopf, 2006), a best-selling account of the troubled American effort to reconstruct Iraq. A graduate of Stanford University, he joined *The Post* in 1994 as a reporter on the metropolitan staff.

Marines from 3d Battalion, 11th Marines, India Battery, fire an M777A2 lightweight howitzer during a field fire at the training ranges near Camp Leatherneck in southern Afghanistan's Helmand Province on 4 June 2009.

Photo courtesy of Sgt Christopher R. Rye





“Arty” in Afghanistan— “We’re Here to Shoot”

by Andrew Lubin

Leatherneck, January 2010

Task Force Leatherneck’s efforts are attracting world-wide attention; 100 members of different media outlets have embedded since last July’s Operation Khanjar in Afghanistan. People like CNN’s Anderson Cooper and the NBC folks travel with baggage handlers and crew. Cooper spent a week with 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, and *The Washington Post* ran an article in October lauding the unit’s success. Other media organizations reporting on TF Leatherneck include *National Geographic* magazine, Reuters Cairo, Slovenian Television, and The Netherland’s *de Volksrant* newspaper.

“All are very interested in what the Marines are doing in Helmand Province,” said Slovenian TV’s Karmen Svegal. “It’s very impressive how successful their counterinsurgency [COIN] strategy is in only three months.”

With 3d Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment, at FOB Fiddler’s Green

“We have two missions,” said Lieutenant Colonel James “Chris” Lewis, the battalion’s commanding officer. “One is to be in position to fire in support of any fire mission, and the other is to provide mobile fire support throughout our entire area.”

Even for Marine artillery that is a tall order. Task Force Leatherneck’s area of operations covers Helmand Province, Nimroz Province, and parts

of Farah Province, and 3/11 [3d Battalion, 11th Marines] brought only two firing batteries: Battery I (India) and Battery N (November).

But 3/11 made a name for itself quickly; not only was it the first Marine artillery unit in Afghanistan with TF Leatherneck, records indicate it also was the first to transport the new howitzers via helicopter to support a combat operation. At the same time, similar to the experiences of countless “cannoncookers” in Iraq, the Marines of 3/11 not on the gun line spent hours as provisional infantry doing foot patrols with the Afghan National Army (ANA).

“We’re stretched thin,” Lewis admitted. “November [Battery] is some 100 klicks [kilometers] (62 miles) south of us at FOB [Forward Operating Base] Pico, supporting 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, in ‘The Fishhook,’ and we recently took away three of their guns to support an LAR [light armored reconnaissance unit] movement pushing even farther south.” With 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, in almost daily firefights with the Taliban, November Battery also executes fire missions almost daily, and at the time of this writing has sent some 400 rounds downrange in a mix of high explosive, illumination, and global positioning system-guided “Excalibur” rounds.

The missions at Fiddler’s Green are simple, if intensive: provide fixed artillery support, send provisional infantry patrols out into nearby villages, and be ready to provide mobile artillery support wherever and whenever TF Leatherneck requires it.

“We’ve got no enablers attached to us,” said Major [Christopher] “Chris” [B.] McArthur, the artillery battalion operations officer. “There’s no CAG [civil affairs group], and no contract lawyers; while we’ll do some provisional infantry, we’re here to shoot.”

With India Battery

India Battery is commanded by Captain Chad [I.]

Altheiser, who spends his days balancing the need to keep two guns manned and ready for firing 24 hours a day, seven days a week with the requirement to provide provisional infantry to help train the Afghan National Security Force units being cycled through Fiddler’s Green. There is an Afghan army camp adjoining the Marine FOB, and Altheiser and his men have brought a variety of Afghan army units out on patrol with them. Currently, ANA’s 3d Company, S Kandak, 206th Corps, is on base. This is reported to be a special unit loyal to President Hamid Karzai, and this is the first time they’ve been sent so far away from Kabul.

“We’re supporting 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, to our east,” Altheiser explained, “plus we need to be ready to shoot into Marjah, the local Taliban stronghold. We’re shooting lots of illum [illumination rounds] to keep them off balance. At the same time, I need to send Marines out daily for local presence patrols and training the Afghans.”

There was a change of pace on 13 October as the Marines and Navy at Fiddler’s Green celebrated the birthday of the U.S. Navy. Lieutenant Colonel [James] Lewis, [USA,] addressed the assembled Marines and sailors, reminding them of the tradition of those who came before them and how they need to be ready to fight in air, on land, and at sea.

Mobile Arty to Golestan

Under the command of Captain [Matthew] “Matt” [H.] Bates, Battery F’s mission was to support 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, in clearing Taliban from a mountainous area. “We flew three guns up to Golestan . . .,” said First Lieutenant Caleb Murphy, the battery fire direction officer. “The Taliban controlled the Baji-Ba Pass, and 2/3 [2d Battalion, 3d Marines] infantry [Fox Company] needed our help to drive them out.” The Baji-Ba Pass is a chokepoint on the single road north to Golestan,

and Lieutenant Colonel [Patrick] “Pat” [J.] Cashman, commanding 2/3, needed to have it cleared in order to resupply his Marines.

The artillerymen helilifted their howitzers, crews, and local security into a field and set up. “We sited the guns first thing,” said Lance Corporal Justin Roberts, “setting our azimuths before filling sandbags and establishing our base.” Sleeping in two-man tents, they alternated digging, manning their guns, and sleeping until their second evening.

“We got attacked with volleys of RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades] and rockets,” said Corporal [Matthew] “Matt” [A.] Mennecke, “but our outgoing fire drove them off.”

The guns were sited in on the foothills of the Hindu Kush—an area with terrain so fierce and mountainous that the guns were set back some 25 kilometers from their potential targets, which did not deter India Battery.

“At ‘game-on,’ it was awesome,” related Lance Corporal Joseph [M.] Boschinski. “We were firing Charge 7 and Charge 8 red bags, with a 48-second VT [variable time] fuze.”

“We mostly fired IS [immediate suppression] missions,” added Roberts. “We knew the ‘grunts’ needed our help, and we weren’t going to let them down.”

One of the howitzers went down, however, so the two remaining guns “talked” by themselves during the 30 fire missions called in the next two days. Their fire was effective, even on the difficult reverse slope missions.

“We’d hear on the Taliban radio that we’d just killed four, and they needed more men,” said First Lieutenant Murphy, “and I told the Marines how good a job they were doing.” At one point, a fierce leatherneck artillery barrage drove a group of Taliban into a cave.

“We were begging for an Excalibur mission;

we wanted to finish them off,” said Boschinski, “but higher [headquarters] gave it to Marine air, who sealed the cave with a Hellfire, but it was us who drove them into that cave!”

With 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, at FOB Jaker

Some eight miles to the east of 3d Battalion, 11th Marines, the Nawa marketplace is bustling. “On Friday, there were 2,000 people here shopping, as compared to when we arrived in June when the shops were mostly closed up and might attract 30 people,” said Captain [Frank] “Gus” [A.] Biggio, the 4th Civil Affairs Group officer attached to Company C, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines [1/5].

The Nawa marketplace is lively now, but when Charlie Company, 1/5 arrived in mid-June, it was anything but. A British detachment of 40 infantry was based there, but with such a small number, they were unable to regularly patrol the nearby marketplace or outlying farmlands. The Taliban took advantage of the weak Coalition force to tax the people, close the schools, and generally control this rich agricultural area of about 75,000 people.

“It’s Clear, Held . . .”

“We changed the dynamics here,” the Charlie Company commanding officer, Captain Brian [P.] Huysman, said, “and the locals have responded to us. We took fire our first day here, from that treeline [perhaps 100 yards away], and we lit it up.” It was a full-fledged combat zone; the Taliban were firing 107mm rockets, RPGs, and AKs, and the Marines and Brits replied with even heavier firepower.

“The bad guys weren’t used to Marines,” explained First Sergeant David Wilson. “We pursued them, we didn’t break contact, and we hunted them down and shot them—and in 10 days the area was secure.”

And then the Marine presence got even heavier.

Task Force Leatherneck—2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade—kicked off Operation Khanjar [on] 2 July, and 4,000 Marines were inserted at night in the biggest helicopter assault since Vietnam. By dawn, they'd set up small bases the length of the Helmand River valley. "That assault changed the minds of a lot of locals," said Wilson. "Suddenly, they realized we were here in force, and that we could—and would—fight."

“. . . and Build”

The first goal of a successful “COIN” is to show the local citizens that cooperating with the Marines improves their lives, and killing or driving out the Taliban was an enormous step in that direction. With Huysman's Marines having successfully initiated “clear and hold,” it was time for the infantrymen, civil affairs, and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to concentrate on the “build” phase of counterinsurgency operations.

Nawa is an agricultural district running south along the Helmand River; in better times (before the Taliban and the Russians) grapes, apples, wheat, soybeans, and meal were grown and trucked north to the larger towns of Marjah and Lashkar Gah. USAID built an irrigation canal system there in the 1950s and '60s, and Captain Biggio, in conjunction with the local USAID official, hired the locals as basic laborers to clear those canals. The program was well received; 254 people are employed now, earning cash salaries for the first time in several years.

“The word about jobs gets around,” Biggio said. “Even where 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, is fighting down south, the locals are coming to them and looking for work.”

Governance ranks equal to economics in importance in COIN. Unlike many appointed officials, Abdul Manaf, the Nawa District governor, lives in

a district town and visits Kabul sporadically. He's the visible face of governance in Nawa as he travels with the Marines, demonstrating to the locals that there is a viable local government working to provide them with basic services.

Appearing at a small shunt (town hall-type meeting) with Marine battalion commander Lieutenant Colonel [William] “Bill” [F.] McCullough, after the locals expressed their thanks to “Colonel Bill,” as he is known locally, for the improved security, they also took the opportunity to express to Manaf their need for schools in their villages as well as female doctors for their wives and daughters. This is “COIN Marine Corps style,” where the local villagers see their lives improve by working with the Marines, who are assisting the local government.

The locals are uneducated, but they are intelligent, and in Nawa District they want their children educated. Although less than 50 students attended school sporadically when the Marines arrived, now, just 100 days later, 1,200 children, grades K-12, attend school daily.

In their short time, Huysman's “Charlie” Company Marines have made a significant improvement. The entrepreneurial locals have the confidence that security brings: They reopened their livestock market and also built a waterwheel, hooked it to a generator, strung wires, and electrified the Nawa District Center. No cash was requested; their only request was to borrow a Marine crane in order to place the waterwheel into the river.

But with success comes increased risk. When accompanying a patrol into the marketplace, an improvised explosive device [IED] made of two mortar rounds was discovered 20 yards outside of the marketplace. It took explosive ordnance disposal Marines several hours to come to the scene; however, only minutes before the IED was discovered, a careless insurgent blew

himself up along with a bridge while attempting to plant another IED. This was the bridge that a designated quick reaction force would have used to drive to the town center, demonstrating that this enemy, while not yet technically competent, is attempting to bring the fight to the Marines.

That same evening, friendly citizens delivered warnings that the Taliban may soon be targeting locals who work with the Marines. While the Nawa District is more peaceful now than it has been in many years, the fight is far from over. So, that night Charlie Company leathernecks planned yet another day's presence patrols into Nawa.

Note

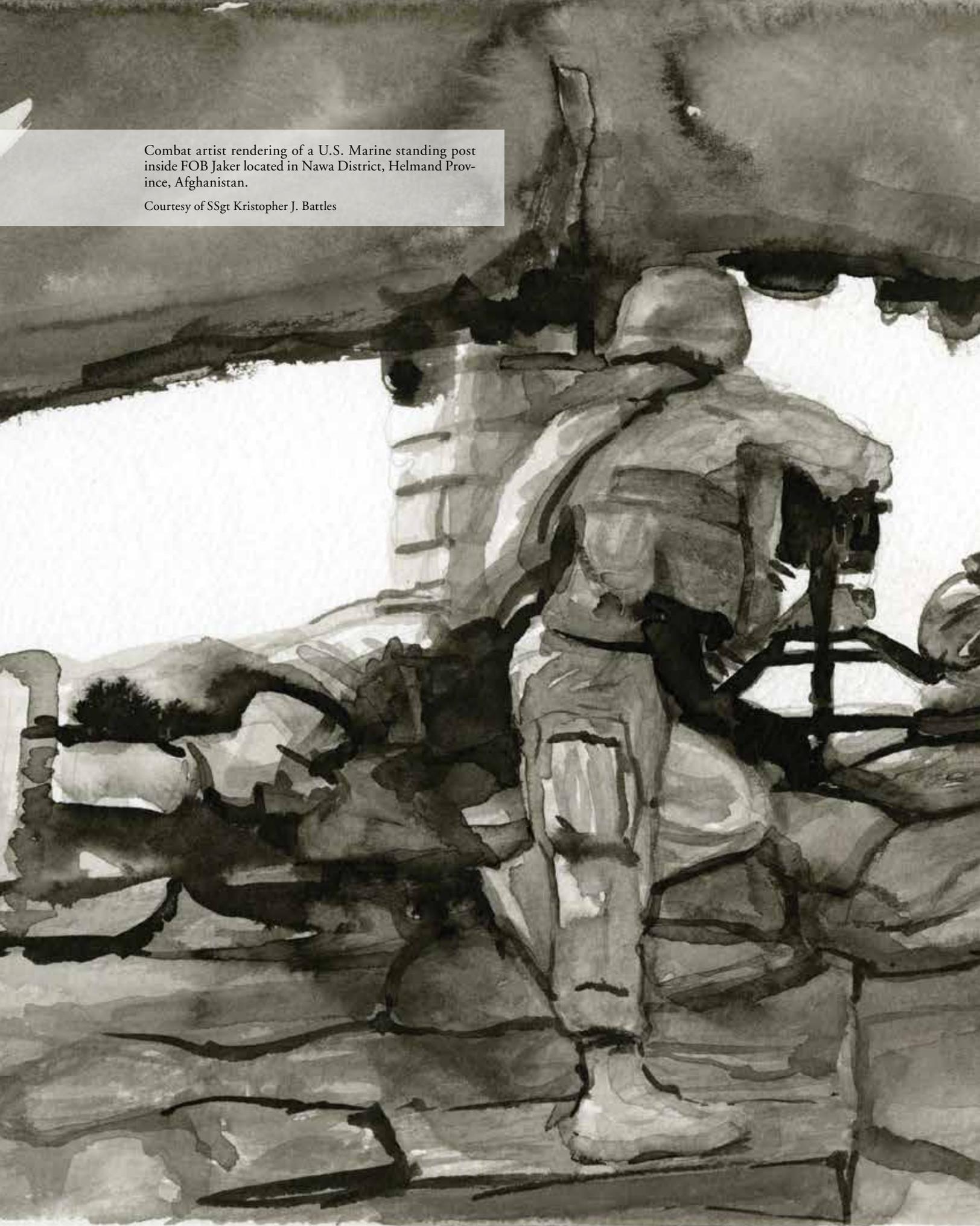
Leatherneck 93, no. 1 (January 2010): 38–42. Reprinted with permission. Copyright *Leatherneck* Magazine.

About the Author

Mr. Andrew Lubin embedded with 3d Battalion, 11th Marines, at FOB Fiddler's Green in Nawa District, Helmand Province, Afghanistan, and with 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, at FOB Geronimo along the Helmand River valley.

Combat artist rendering of a U.S. Marine standing post inside FOB Jaker located in Nawa District, Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

Courtesy of SSgt Kristopher J. Battles





Counterinsurgency on the Ground in Afghanistan: How Different Units Adapted to Local Conditions

U.S. Marine Battalion Nawa, Helmand, 2009

*by Jerry Meyerle, Megan Katt,
and James A. Gavrilis**

In the summer of 2009, 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment (1/5), undertook an operation to clear and hold a Taliban stronghold in the Nawa District, Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

In June, 300 Marines joined a small contingent of British and Afghan soldiers already in Nawa to patrol near their base and draw insurgents into the district center. Two weeks later, the remainder of the battalion closed in on the district center from the north, south, and west. After two days of fighting, the Taliban was tactically defeated. The Marines quickly transitioned from combat and clearing operations to stability and holding operations that included befriending locals, holding

*Unless otherwise noted, information in this vignette comes from interviews with U.S. Marines from 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, on 24–25 February; 22, 29, and 30 March; 21, 27, and 28 April; 6 and 19 May 2010.

community shuras, and conducting small reconstruction projects.

Throughout their deployment, the battalion's first priority was to provide security for local Afghans. In order to do so, the Marines spread out to 26 outposts over 400 square miles of farmland and desert. They conducted multiple daily foot patrols along with Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP)—collectively known as Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)—for the primary purpose of talking to locals and creating alliances with key leaders.

While locals were initially hesitant to cooperate with the Marines and ANSF, the presence and actions of the Coalition gained the Afghans' trust over time. While the Marines were managing the security situation, the battalion commander worked closely with the new district government representatives to help promote local governance. The battalion commander also formed close relationships with the British stabilization advisor, USAID representative, and civil affairs officer to ensure unity of effort. Together, they held community shuras to discuss major Afghan concerns and visited villages to conduct impromptu shuras with local leaders. Working with key leaders also allowed them to devise a reintegration campaign for villagers who had low levels of involvement with the insurgency.

In addition, the battalion helped Afghans rebuild the infrastructure throughout the district. They cleared canals, built roads, improved small bridges, and opened schools and clinics. Once security was provided, the Coalition prioritized projects to win over locals and stimulate the economy using information collected by the Marines during their patrols and shuras. Within weeks of the Marines' arrival, Afghans began to return to Nawa. The district center was transformed from a ghost town to a relatively secure and lively marketplace.

A British Platoon Surrounded

In 2006, a small British Operational Mentor and Liaison Team (OMLT) was sent to Nawa to mentor Afghan soldiers and police. Collectively known as Task Force Nawa, the British and ANSF were outnumbered by Taliban fighters and became pinned down [by] heavy, daily firefights. The British in Nawa lacked the manpower to conduct daily patrols. When they did patrol, they could rarely travel far from their patrol base at the district center. The task force became tactically isolated and was only accessible by helicopter as Taliban fighters encircled the base. As a result, the British had little access to the population and, in turn, knew little about what was happening outside their base. Beyond their small security zone, the Taliban had freedom of movement.

During this time, there was no Afghan government in place. By 2009, the district governor had not been to Nawa in two years. The Taliban taxed, threatened, and stole from locals, closed schools, and generally controlled the area. Many of the locals fled. Only a handful of the approximately 120 shops in the district center's main bazaar remained open.

These conditions prevailed until summer 2009, when the U.S. Marines deployed to southern Afghanistan.

Shaping Operations in Nawa

In the early summer of 2009, the Marines worked with the British military to devise a plan to drive the Taliban out of Nawa. In late June 2009, 300 Marines arrived in the district. These Marines joined the British OMLT and ANA soldiers at the district center.

Insurgents attacked the district center as soon as the Marines arrived and continued to attack them every day. For two weeks straight, the Marines experienced heavy, daily fighting.¹ The Taliban in Nawa

were good fighters; they were aggressive and had a basic understanding of infantry tactics. The police fought aggressively and with little restraint—“like cowboys”—alongside the Marines at the schoolhouse. Within days, the Marines began including the ANP on their platoon-size patrols, expanding the security zone.

The ultimate goal of the U.S. Marine surge in the south was not only to provide security, but also to instill confidence in the local population about their government. Shortly after the initial 300 Marines arrived in the district, a new district governor, Haji Abdul Manaf, was appointed to Nawa. Locals knew and respected Governor Manaf from his experience fighting against the Soviets during the 1980s.

Clearing Nawa

In early July, the rest of the battalion entered Nawa as part of a major offensive across Helmand called Operation Khanjar (“Strike of the Sword”). An additional 800 Marines and their ANSF partners conducted movement to contact, cleared the district center, and expanded the security zone around the district center. The Marines encountered little opposition. The Taliban were tactically defeated and relinquished control of the district within 36 hours. While many Taliban fighters were killed, others fled to the nearby town of Marjah or went into hiding. The battalion dispersed throughout the district into small outposts. Each Marine company was assigned two positions based on the locations of population centers and lines of communication.

The Marines’ number one priority was to provide security for the population and, by doing so, separate the insurgents from the population. Therefore, they were more concerned with befriending the local populace than hunting down enemy fighters. They limited the use of mortars and air power.² Despite opportunities [to strike at Taliban

fighters], they did not drop a single bomb out of fear of harming civilians and alienating the population. The Marines also reimbursed many locals for damage that occurred during the fighting.³

Similarly, the Marines initially conducted some raids against suspected Taliban leaders. However, after a few missions, the Marines realized that these raids upset the local population while yielding few results. The Marines cut back on these raids. Communication with the population was vital to the Marines’ success in Nawa. Unlike in many other operations, prior to their deployment the Marines prepared a unified strategic communication plan based on five “enduring talking points” to explain who they were, what was going on, and why they were there. These were as follows:

1. We are here in your village/town at the request of your government to help your brave Afghan National Security Forces make the area safer, more secure, and increase prosperity for the people.
2. We are here in partnership with your Afghan security forces. Together, we can improve peace and prosperity in your town.
3. We seek your assistance in identifying those who are seeking to destroy your government and keep you in fear. The sooner we can identify these enemies of Afghanistan, the sooner we can remove them from your village.
4. Coalition forces have no intention to stay in your village permanently. We will stay long enough to ensure security and will leave when your own security forces can maintain this security on their own.

5. We look upon you as our friends. We have left our families to assist you, just as we would for any friend.

Holding Nawa

Before the operation, the battalion expected heavy fighting until September. So when fighting stopped just two days after they arrived in Nawa, they were forced to transition from combat to stability operations much sooner than anticipated. The Marines spent the remaining months of their deployment patrolling the area, supporting the expansion of governance, and developing security forces to “hold” and “build” the district.

The Marines and ANSF had sufficient numbers to disperse throughout the district. From the initial assignment of two company-size positions, the Marines further dispersed into platoon- and squad-size outposts, ending up with 26 positions by the end of their deployment. These additional outposts were selected based on areas that the battalion needed to control, such as villages and roads where there had been frequent Taliban activity. Marines at these outposts conducted three to four patrols a day, which reassured locals that there were Marines everywhere, providing security. In addition to protecting Afghans, Marines conducted foot patrols to meet with locals (with the help of interpreters), discover local issues and concerns, and identify local leaders.

At first, however, few locals wanted to talk to the Marines, as the Taliban continued to threaten and intimidate locals. For example, the Taliban had spread propaganda that the Marines would leave after the August 2009 presidential elections, and the Taliban would then regain control of Nawa. Since Nawa had been cleared in the past and the Coalition had never stayed in sufficient numbers to hold the area, local Afghans were

inclined to believe the rumors. To demonstrate their lingering presence, the Taliban occasionally left threatening “night letters” (*shabnamah*) in villages after nightfall to let villagers know that they were still around and watching them. Villagers also received threatening phone calls. However, the Marines actively sought to continuously disprove Taliban propaganda—for example, by staying in the area after elections—and distinguish themselves from the threatening actions of the Taliban. Marines emphasized the “golden rule”: to treat others as they would want to be treated if their roles were reversed. They were also apologetic when necessary. The population soon realized that the Taliban could no longer back up their threats, which prompted local Afghans to cooperate more freely with Marines.

The Marines met with locals on every patrol, shaking hands and drinking tea. By doing so, the Marines also differentiated themselves from their British predecessors who had “pointed guns” at locals when they patrolled and had not spent much time talking with them. The Marines were careful to be “culturally aware” and respectful of the local culture. For example, Marines respected mosques and did not enter them unless they were invited.

Persistent foot patrolling made the Marines’ presence known to the local population. The battalion commander’s policy was that no Afghan was to go 72 hours without seeing a Marine or police officer. Some platoons distributed their own version of night letters during night patrols to let people know that the Marines were always around. Many locals began to believe that the Marines never slept.

The Marines used their patrols as an opportunity to collect information about their area. They asked locals about their opinions and top five concerns. Typical questions included:

- What changes to the population have there been in the past year? Have people left? Have people returned? Why?
- What are the most important problems? Why?
- Who do you believe can solve your problems? Why?
- What should be done first? Why?

Asking these questions required the Marines to have patience and good “people skills.” It was worth the effort, though—the Marines familiarized themselves with the area, befriended locals, and prioritized projects.

During their patrols, the Marines also made a conscious effort to identify an area’s key leaders and befriend them. After discerning powerbrokers in their area of operation (AO)—including village elders, tribal leaders, and religious leaders (*mullahs*)—the Marines met with them at least once a week to drink tea and talk about their concerns. In some cases, these discussions increased in frequency to every other day by the end of their deployment. Many company and platoon commanders took off their gear when talking with elders as a sign of respect. This key leader engagement not only helped the Marines learn more about what the locals needed, but also drove operations by providing Marines with better and more accurate information about whom to talk to and what was happening in their area.

The Marines also worked with key leaders on reintegration. From the beginning of their time in Nawa, the Marines advertised that local Afghans who had worked with the Taliban—known to the Marines as the “little t” Taliban—would have the opportunity to reintegrate. That is, Marines

would forgive past small grievances and not arrest past aggressors as long as they were peaceful in the future. By late July, it became an official policy. This involved the assistance of village elders. In front of their village elders, men pledged not to participate in insurgent actions; by witnessing their pledges, the local elders took responsibility for keeping them straight.

Community meetings (*shuras*) gave the Marines another opportunity to collect information about their respective AO. The battalion commander and district governor walked around to talk with locals in what became known as a “walking shura.” Similarly, Marines held impromptu shuras with locals at the platoon and squad levels during their patrols. After noticing ripped-up leaflets in canals, the Marines decided against the routine mass distribution of informational materials. Instead, the Marines began to use the handouts as an ice-breaker with which to convene a small impromptu shura. They would have an interpreter on hand to explain the leaflets. The idea was that those Afghans would then take the leaflets back to their village to an educated villager, who would read and confirm what they had been told by the Marines. In addition to leaflets, the Marines began to publish a Nawa District newsletter every couple of weeks to explain what was going on in the district. The Marines also relied on policemen to hand out these newsletters in main bazaar areas. Because of low literacy rates, all written products included numerous pictures.

In addition, the Marines distributed radios in a box (RIABs) to locals during their patrols.⁴ These radio transmitters had recorded messages from leaders, such as the district governor, police chief, and ANA commander. Separately, the battalion also operated a local radio station and broadcast music, prayers, news, and health messages for the local populace.

The Marines partnered with ANSF at the lowest level. They ate, lived, and patrolled side-by-side with ANP and Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP). They also planned most operations together. On every patrol, the Marines encouraged positive ANP interaction with the populace. For example, they encouraged the police to distribute flyers and to stay to answer any questions from the local populace.

Upon arrival, one Marine likened the ANP to the Mexican Federales because they only behaved when closely monitored. If the Marines did not closely watch them, a policeman might smoke hashish or carry away a farmer's chicken. In October, the local ANP were sent to the police academy as part of the eight week focused district development (FDD) program. Additional ANCOP were sent to the area to take their place. Although the locals initially preferred them to the ANP, they ended up requesting their local police back because they were more familiar with the area. After the ANP returned from their training, the Marines noticed a slightly more professional force. Their behavior also improved the longer they spent with the Marines. By the end of the 1/5 deployment, some of the ANP even tried to mirror the Marines' appearance by cutting their hair in Marine fashion.

Even when the ANP were not present, the Marines tried to build up police credibility among locals by talking about the positive things the ANP had done. Posters of police officers with Afghans were posted in bazaars to improve how the locals perceived the ANP, and to give the police a constant reminder of the need for professionalism.

A few weeks after the Marines cleared the area, shops began to open and residents began to return home to Nawa. Many residents had fled north to Lashkar Gah but returned once they heard (through word-of-mouth) that security was improving. By the end of October 2009, the Marines noticed

that at least 80 of the 120 shops were open in the district center bazaar, demonstrating that locals had growing faith in the economy and the security environment.

By the end of the Marines' deployment, local Afghans had started to take responsibility for their own security. IED incidents went down 90 percent.⁵ As security improved, locals approached the Marines about other issues, such as healthcare and irrigation. Lack of water was always an issue. The Marines listened to the locals' problems but emphasized to them that the solutions to these problems were the district government's responsibility. Yet the Marines enabled the government by providing funds and equipment for projects. In essence, the Marines served as a broker. This demonstrated to locals that everyone was working together. The Marines also conducted numerous confidence-building projects, including clearing canals and building roads. Each platoon had a budget—almost exclusively funded by the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP)—but local village elders decided on projects. Locals were hired to do all the building.

Even though Helmand was responsible for the most opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan and Nawa District was the second-highest cultivator in the province in 2008, the Marines (unlike their ANSF counterparts) avoided participating in poppy eradication. However, in conjunction with the Helmand provincial reconstruction team (PRT), they did help push out wheat seed distribution during the planting season in the fall. They also discussed opium poppy planting with locals and recommended that they not grow it in the next season.

Building Nawa

By providing security, the Marines were able to help foster the development of local government.

The battalion commander created strong ties to the new district governor and other local leaders, and was so widely respected by the population that he became known as “Colonel Bill” throughout the district. The battalion commander and district governor began attending community meetings together to build confidence in the Afghan government. The district governor and administrator went out in the district center every day and to outlying areas at least twice a week. While the people did not trust the central government in Kabul, they trusted the provincial and district leadership. By force of personality, the battalion commander was able to work closely with the U.S. and British civilians in the area. Within a month of arriving, the Helmand PRT sent a British stabilization advisor to the district from another part of the province. The battalion was also assigned a USAID representative. Both civilians, in addition to a civil affairs reservist, worked closely with the battalion commander and his Marines.

At least once a week, the battalion held a high-profile community outreach shura to discuss major district issues and concerns. They typically involved the battalion commander, district governor (and in some cases the provincial governor), district administrator, USAID representative, and British stabilization advisor, and so demonstrated a united front. Each week these meetings were held in a different part of the district. The first one, in late July, involved the provincial governor. Platoons advertised these shuras during their patrols, and more locals attended them as time went on.

These planned shuras allowed the battalion and Afghan government officials to address big issues, such as civilian deaths and Taliban propaganda. For example, early in their deployment, a Marine sniper team killed a farmer who was irrigating at night, mistakenly believing that he was planting an IED. The battalion held a large shura afterward to

apologize to locals and admit their mistake. These shuras also helped address Taliban propaganda. For example, the Taliban spread rumors that the Marines were there to change the Afghan lifestyle. The Marines quickly tried to emphasize that they wanted to help improve the local Afghan lifestyle and provide Afghans with the security necessary to allow for political discussions. Local concerns seemed to be assuaged rather quickly once a commanding officer addressed it at a shura.

Despite improvements in security, there were also setbacks. In late September, the PRT worked with the district government to build a 46-member community council in Nawa (including a handful of known former Taliban). The district governor persuaded elders to reconstitute a traditional council featuring locally selected representatives from each subdistrict. Unfortunately, after the community council was created, insurgents assassinated three of its members, all former Taliban. Their deaths, however, only seemed to strengthen the community council’s resolve and reaffirm their belief that they needed to continue. For security purposes, the council members all stayed in a house together, which forged a bond between them.

As winter approached, the locals became worried because the Marines they knew were about to be replaced by a different Marine battalion.⁶ The outgoing Marines eased their fears by introducing their replacements to locals and key leaders and distributing flyers explaining the transition.⁷

Conclusion

During the summer and fall of 2009, the Marines conducted a population-centric counterinsurgency campaign in Nawa. Because they faced far less resistance than expected, they began executing the “hold” within days of the “clear.” The Marines transitioned quickly from a situation that they thought would be heavily kinetic to a heavy

civil affairs and information operations (IO) focus in order to favorably influence local perceptions. They were flexible and quickly adapted to a campaign of “handshakes and smiles.”

Throughout their campaign, the battalion’s enduring mission was to protect locals from the Taliban threat and win their confidence. The concentration of force, with the recommended troop-to-population ratio, pushed Taliban fighters out and then protected the population on daily foot patrols. Ultimately, the population did not care who provided security, as long as it was provided. While there was some early hesitation to cooperate, locals seemed to resent being bullied by the Taliban. By living among the people and reassuring Afghans that they would be there for “as long as it takes,” the Marines gave villagers a sense of security. The return of families was a sign of progress.

The relatively secure environment allowed the Marines to build personal relationships and trust with locals. The battalion realized that “building castles and wearing heavy armor” would distance them from the people. Therefore, the Marines operated in small units (alongside ANSF) and walked everywhere to focus on befriending the populace, not hunting the Taliban. This required patrols to have tactical patience—to spend time drinking cups of tea and shaking hands with locals—and not being in a rush to get back to the base. By taking the time to talk with locals and build these relationships, the Marines were able to collect better intelligence that they could use to hunt insurgents.

Understanding the local population was a priority. Squad leaders, platoon leaders, and company commanders were all responsible for analyzing the civilian communities and befriending local leaders in their respective areas of operations. It took some time for Marines to get used to the Afghan

schedule and their customs (e.g., irrigating at night), but they learned quickly and were able to adapt to local circumstances.

Information operations were the primary driving force behind all Marine actions and were integrated throughout all activities. As part of their IO campaign, the Marines did not make big promises at the beginning of their deployment, and were careful not to promise anything they could not deliver so they did not raise unrealistic expectations. Even as the end of their tour approached, the outgoing 1/5 Marines distributed informational materials, explained the troop transition, mentored their replacements, and introduced them to locals and key leaders to assuage the people’s fears.

After the battalion’s focus on security, governance and development followed. The Marines worked to build the credibility of the district government and security forces while maintaining security. The battalion commander created strong ties with capable Afghan and civilian partners, and his company commanders mirrored him. It also helped that all of the company commanders had former counterinsurgency experience in Iraq.

Through large community outreach shuras and small impromptu shuras, the Marines—from the battalion commander to the squad leader—worked with local leaders to identify community problems and gain a better understanding of what was happening in their area. The Marines were outside the wire every day talking with locals and addressing concerns, such as civilian casualties or misperceptions spread by the Taliban. In addition, they helped the local government fund and supply local development projects.

Notes

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U.S. Marines assigned to Special Operations Task Force-West in Herat Province, Afghanistan, return to their camp following the completion of a presence patrol.

Photo courtesy of Defense Video and Imagery Distribution System





With Special Operations Marines in Afghanistan

by Stewart Nusbaumer

Leatherneck, November 2009

This is no oasis. In winter, it's frigid; in summer, a furnace. Patches of scrawny pine trees, clumps of scraggly bushes, and scraps of crab grass all desperately struggle to survive. They usually don't. What thrives here is brown and desolate and often annoying. Windswept dirt and shifting dunes mashed into fine grain sand scratch your eyeballs red. Jagged rocks scattered about can cause you to twist your ankles. Craggy brown mountains perched on the horizon highlight the bleakness.

Herat Province, gateway to the Dashti Margo—the “Desert of Death,” slayer of foreign armies from the Persians in 500 BC to the Soviets in the 1980s—continues to be a nasty hotbed for ugly weather and dangerous people.

To the south is a stronghold of the resurging Taliban, its forces slipping into Herat Province to harass and kill. To the west is Iran—no one knows what the Iranians are up to. To the north and the east is an impregnable wall, the Hindu Kush mountains. Swarming throughout this harsh and brutal land squeezed between pressing Taliban and hostile border and towering barrier are gunrunners, opium dealers, and smuggling gangs.

And smack in the middle of this nasty neighborhood are U.S. Marines. They're Marines of the U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC).

The base unit consists of the 14-man Marine Special Operations Team (MSOT). In Afghanistan, Special Operations Marines deploy in company-size units, but today they are more often scattered around in small-unit teams—MSOTs—conducting distributed operations. I embedded with an MSOT from “Fox” Company, 2d Marine Special Operations Battalion, in Herat Province this past summer.

MARSOC With the Afghan National Army

Riding in several sport utility vehicles, the Marines pulled up abruptly, shooting a cloud of dust over the staging area. On the edge of an Afghan National Army (ANA) base, an Afghan platoon was weighed down with machine guns, belts of ammo, and RPG-7 rocket launchers. They were packed for battle.

Although the patrol route was not necessarily dangerous, in Afghanistan not necessarily dangerous can turn very deadly in a flash. And there were rumors that Taliban “squirters” fleeing the Marine offensive down south had slipped into Herat. Two files of Afghans and Marines mixed [together] and both wearing tri-color Afghan uniforms exited through a side gate and hiked at a comfortable clip down an asphalt road lined with lanky pine trees. Then the asphalt ended, the dust began, rocks worked on our ankles, and the sun inched higher.

The lead Marine advisor for these Afghan troops, a herculean-built sergeant, said he views foot patrols as patrols-plus: the plus being an opportunity for Afghan soldiers to improve their patrolling skills spacing, pacing, changing formations with changing environments . . . everything that can give a patrol an edge if it turns deadly. “We’ve been covering all this in classes and drills on the ANA base,” he said while scanning the barren landscape

for movement, “but reinforcement and live conditions are crucial for their progress.”

Four days a week, the sergeant and other operators train and mentor an Afghan army platoon in basic infantry skills: shooting positions, vehicle convoy security, mission planning, leadership, and human rights. “But these are not Marines; you have to do extra things with them,” the sergeant emphasized. “Like march all the way back to their barracks with them, eat with them, drink chai with them. These things are very important to Afghans.”

We turned on to a dirt path, crossed an open area, and headed down a gravel road with trees and several simple houses. The Afghan soldiers were alert and appeared to be in good physical shape.

The sergeant served three years in 2d Recon Battalion, another three years in 2d Force Recon, and left the Corps to attend college. Afterward, he rejoined 2d Force Recon, which became 2d Marine Special Operations Battalion. “I was out of the Marines for four and a half years, but returned because there was a war going on and there were still things I wanted to accomplish in the Marines.”

During college, the Marine veteran worked as a mental health technician in a lockdown facility for abused kids, ranging from age 7 to 18, with psychiatric problems. “It’s amazing how much you can learn from human beings with mental disorders,” he said while studying a motorcycle kicking up a trail of dust on a parallel road. “You have to really listen to understand them. You have to reach those people on their level. That takes a lot of patience. That’s where I learned to have patience.”

We entered a village of low buildings, the main road lined with tiny shops selling basic food and household items. The residents stared, some with icy glares, others with smiles—the children all smiled. In 10 minutes, we were out of the village and humping across a broad open area—another

potential ambush area. We then looped back to the ANA base.

At the staging area, after the three-hour patrol, the sergeant addressed his Afghan platoon: “Everyone did a good job. You did a good job on security, on pace, and on changing formations.” Then the Afghans hiked back to their barracks and the Marines drove back to their base—except for the sergeant, who hiked with his Afghan platoon.

MARSOC Marine Qualities

Riding back to base with the leathernecks, I asked them what personal qualities make for a good Special Operations Marine. “Physical and mental toughness,” said the team chief, a gunnery sergeant. “No selfishness,” said a staff sergeant, the team’s communications chief, adding, “. . . take extreme pride in what you do.” Another Marine said, “The ability to mesh with a changing environment.” The one attribute every team member mentioned was “maturity.”

The staff sergeant explained: “Operating at this level requires a Marine to have a certain level of life experiences and Marine Corps experiences. We need guys who can make quick life-or-death decisions without any hesitation. The more mature you are, the less your senses get overloaded during a crisis, and you can make sound decisions. If you have a young guy out of boot camp, you are going to have to supervise him, and that can’t always happen [on a team]. I would say a lot of experiences, and we work together and can get through any situation.”

With classified information and clandestine missions and sensitive information, loose talk and immature boasting is dangerous. The staff sergeant added, “That’s something that cannot be tolerated. Operators live by the motto, ‘Silent Professionals.’”

Operators also spoke a great deal about being “adaptive.” Being a small unit operating far from

“Big Marine Corps” support and working closely with local troops, leaders, and civilians in their local culture—flexibility and adaptability are crucial. There is not one way to do things here. Nor, is there one job for every Marine.

“Everyone has several duties,” the team leader, a captain, said. “All of us have many skill sets to learn,” the team chief added.

For this team, they work on foreign internal defense several days a week, training Afghan soldiers. Yesterday they had a direct action mission. Soon there will be a special reconnaissance assignment. Today was a civil affairs project. For Special Operations, change is one of the few constants. Maturity and adaptability, with other qualities, are what make a good Special Operations operator.

MARSOC Marines and Civil Affairs

Several hundred Afghans, in anxious anticipation, huddled against the shiny whitewashed wall for shade. In the rising morning sun, the bright-white structure contrasted sharply with the village’s dirt brown buildings and the surrounding desolate desert.

At a few minutes after 9:00 a.m., a group of 10 women, including a distraught woman carrying a screaming baby, a frail, elderly woman assisted by a young teenage girl, and a tiny girl with disheveled hair and a big case of sniffles, was escorted inside to a waiting room where they sat on brightly colored rugs. Then men, including a middle-aged man hobbling on wooden crutches, an old man with a long white beard being pushed in a wheelbarrow, and a sneezing teenage boy, were directed to a long wooden bench in the courtyard.

The old and feeble and young yet sick are all dirt poor in one of the poorest countries in the world with nowhere to go for medical care. Nowhere, except, to the weekly MEDCAP (Medical Civil Affairs Program).

On every Thursday, Special Operations Marines with Army Special Forces join Afghan Commandos and soldiers for a public medical clinic. The Afghans furnish two female nurses, a doctor and physician assistant, two pharmacists, and Army and Commando medics. The Americans contribute two Navy corpsmen with MARSOC and two Army Special Forces medics. The local population furnishes 300–350 patients, more than 4,000 in the last three months.

The Afghan doctor, with trimmed white beard, said he treats “lots of mental problems, and intestinal and kidney problems.” I asked him what is needed most, expecting to hear expensive equipment and trained health personnel. “What is needed most is health education. Why people should wash, how often, why dirty water will make them sick.”

“It feels good to help these people,” said a broad-shouldered corpsman, a hospital corpsman third class. “It also lets them know that we are here to help them. I give them meds, mostly for headaches, sore throats, worms, pains ‘in their bones,’ and lots of baby formula. Some are dehydrated. They drink strong black tea all the time.”

The corpsman’s training included the Basic Reconnaissance Course at Camp Pendleton, California; airborne training at Fort Benning, Georgia; and Navy Diving and Marine Combatant Diver training in [Panama City,] Florida. In Special Operations, corpsmen need to be prepared for anything.

“It worked out that 2d Marine Special Operations Battalion needed a corpsman, so I was lucky enough to receive orders here.”

Old Breed, New Breed: The Marine Breed

There are many reasons why Marines and sailors volunteer for an assignment to MARSOC, although from my experience with this team, the reasons can be boiled down to three. Foremost is the personal

challenge. Highly motivated and driven to excel, Special Operations, especially for those who were in Force Recon, was their next logical challenge. A second reason is they felt restrained, held back by the “Big Marine Corps,” its bureaucratic rules and regulations. In unconventional warfare, there is more freedom of action. Finally, with the struggle against Islamic radicalism, these Marines and their corpsmen wanted to be in the middle of the fight.

And in Special Operations, they are challenged, have greater autonomy, and are in the middle of the fight. Plus something every Marine relishes: they have intense camaraderie. In small units, Marine comradeship flourishes big-time.

Inside the clinic—on other days the building is used to train Afghan Army and Commando medics—patients were directed to one of five treatment rooms. Immediately their seats in the waiting room and on the bench were filled. After visiting a medical practitioner, patients were directed to the pharmacy at the end of the hall. It’s all well organized, with a stern-faced Afghan directing the steady flow of patients.

If the leathernecks’ reasons for joining Marine Special Operations are clear, MARSOC is less so. When you think Army Special Forces, Navy SEALs, Air Force Special Operators, you have a clear idea who they are—superb culture warriors, first-class direct action operators, and daredevil fliers. But Marine Special Operations? Well, nothing, beyond Marines.

“We’re [MARSOC] still in our infancy,” the team chief said. “We haven’t settled into a niche yet,” another gunnery sergeant added. Other Special Operations components have been in SOCOM [Special Operations Command] for more than 20 years. Some units have existed for more than 40 years, while MARSOC has existed for a little more than 3 years. It takes time to develop an identity, or maybe just a cliché.

Some Marines have called the MARSOC Marine “a new breed of Marine.” Yet these MARSOC Marines disagree. “We’re not new,” said the lead advisor sergeant. “We have a lineage that goes back to World War II with the Raiders.” At the other extreme, some leathernecks have expressed a concern that Special Operations Marines are no longer really Marines. “We are Marines first!” every MARSOC Marine insisted.

The Marine Corps, more than any military service, has a long and rich history in unconventional warfare. During the “Banana Wars” of the twentieth century, small units of Marines engaged in pacification programs and direct action.

In the early, dark days of World War II, Marine Raiders battled behind enemy lines and spear-headed main-force Marines. Joint assault signal companies executed special reconnaissance, and under horrific conditions directed air and naval gunfire. Leathernecks in the amphibious reconnaissance battalion scouted enemy beachheads right under the eyes of Japanese soldiers.

In Vietnam, force reconnaissance became the premium deep recon and direct action unit, and

pioneered new insertion methods. Combined action platoon Marines lived in Vietnamese villages and organized local defense units.

In Herat Province, these Special Operations Marines are not a new breed. They are the latest of an old breed. A breed that for more than 100 years has fought in small units separated from the main force and used unconventional tactics—unique reconnaissance, lightning raids, assisting civilian populations, counterinsurgency programs, precision assaults, and training local militaries. And they are, like the Marines before them, excelling at this different type of warfare.

Note

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About the Author

Stewart Nusbaumer, a Vietnam veteran, embedded with numerous Marine units in both Iraq and Afghanistan.



U.S. Navy LtCmdr Abuhena Saifulislam (right), Central Command mullah, talks with an Afghan National Army soldier serving with 201st Corps and a religious cultural advisor during a key leader engagement at Forward Operating Base Mehtar Lam, Laghman Province, Afghanistan on 2 February 2012.

Photo courtesy of Defense Video and Imagery Distribution System



Religious Leader Engagement in Southern Afghanistan

by Alexs Thompson

Joint Force Quarterly, 4th Quarter 2011

Interaction with religious leaders and institutions in Afghanistan has been inconsistently addressed by foreign military, diplomatic, and development officials. Recent efforts to correct that trend in southern Afghanistan make it clear that a sustained, consistent, well-thought-out religious leader engagement program supports and advances the traditional components of counterinsurgency (security, development, and governance). Systematic engagement of religious leaders at the provincial, district, village, and farm levels created another line of communication whereby the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) promoted its mission of stability and Afghans voiced their needs and commitment to a stable future.

One of the most pressing observations made about U.S. military efforts in the twenty-first century has been the need to leverage culturally specific factors in support of counterinsurgency (COIN) efforts. One of the most important—and underemphasized—aspects of Afghan society is the importance of religious leaders in countering anti-Afghan rhetoric.¹ This article examines the role of religious leaders and institutions in Afghan society and identifies them as a crucial dimension to stability operations in Afghanistan. It is argued that religious leader engagement is a core factor for

expressing U.S. objectives, mitigating the effects of kinetic operations, and legitimating the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) through specifically Afghan modes of discourse and participation. The observations and conclusions presented are informed by the author's personal experiences in Afghanistan and his interviews with others who have implemented religious leader engagement programs in southern Afghanistan. Religious leaders, and especially those at the district and village level who are regarded as representatives of their communities, are powerbrokers whose position and authority situate them as key partners for stability and who should not be ignored by the United States or ISAF.

Roles of Religious Leaders

Religious leaders and institutions play a significant role in how the legitimate GIROA describes itself; the same is true for the enemies of Afghanistan.² The primary question, then, is not whether religious leaders will continue to play a significant role in the future of Afghanistan, but rather how those leaders and the institutions they represent can be fully integrated into stable, effective political processes. The highest priority is not simply to provide counter “-religious” ideology, but to counter specifically “violent” religious ideology that quells the voice and will of the Afghan people.³ Undermining the impact of violent religious rhetoric, however, is primarily the responsibility of Afghans; they should encourage, publicize, and sustain the incorporation of religious language, individuals, and institutions in their own vision of the future. One of the ways that the U.S. government/ISAF can support Afghans in this endeavor is to promote sustained programs of religious leader engagement.

As a starting point for engaging religious leaders, it is prudent to envision a future Afghanistan where religious institutions and leaders are promoted

as essential aspects of the social fabric—not eliminated or begrudgingly accepted. Even those religious leaders who currently support the enemies of Afghanistan find themselves seeking reconciliation with GIROA from time to time and pursue full participation in the political process.⁴ If religious leaders will be prominent in Afghanistan's future, it behooves the U.S. government and ISAF to identify religious leaders who are amenable to dialogue and integration with GIROA; this will set the conditions for the marginalization of radical religious leaders in favor of those who support stable political processes. It is of tremendous importance, then, that religious leaders from all dogmatic, geographic, and linguistic communities be engaged in consistent public dialogue so that Afghans can responsibly choose how they wish to advance a narrative that preserves their religious heritage and ensures long-term, sustainable political processes. Such a wide-ranging program would require coordination across the security, development, and governance spectra with reliable leadership from GIROA and ISAF. While it may be clear that engaging religious leaders is a critical component of stability operations, what is less clear is how those engagements can be conducted in a way that does not undermine key ISAF objectives or alienate large swathes of the population. What follows are several examples of religious leader engagement in Helmand Province and recommendations for how religious leader engagement can be broadly conceptualized so that it respects local variations and supports stability operations.

Engagement in Southern Afghanistan

Beginning in October 2009, Lieutenant Colonel Patrick Carroll, USMC (Ret), and Patricio Asfura-Heim began to develop a religious leader engagement program for 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade (2d MEB) that addressed the tendency

for religious leaders to be ignored in military and diplomatic engagements. Carroll explained that, in the early period of his deployment, he traveled to six districts in Helmand Province to assess the effectiveness of local government structures. He went on to write, “My conclusion was that we were thoroughly partnered with the Afghan district governor and some of the officials from his *tashkiel* [organization] or other provincial line ministry *tashkiels*. . . . When I asked about the engagement with influential religious scholars, such as mullahs or *ulema* [experts in Islamic doctrine] . . . I heard comments like ‘The mullahs are not that important.’”⁵

In the wake of such prevalent dismissal of religious leaders, Carroll observed that even if mullahs served *only* a religious role, the primary argument of the Taliban is that they are pious individuals fighting foreign infidels, and therefore “the most credible voices to counter the Taliban’s rhetoric were moderate mullahs themselves; i.e., Islamic religious leaders who did not believe in the Taliban’s extremist interpretations of the Qur’an, who would support . . . GIRoA and who were at least neutral—possibly positive—to the presence of ISAF.”⁶ Carroll highlighted one of the most important aspects of religious leader engagement: it is not necessary that religious leaders support ISAF (but they must at least be neutral toward it) so long as they support GIRoA and legitimate governmental processes. Such an attitude reflects the necessity for Afghans to conceptualize and implement the future of their country; how religious leaders and institutions function in Afghan society is an Afghan question.

In support of his observations, Carroll and Asfura-Heim began a project to reintegrate religious leaders in their provincial religious organizations, such as the Helmand Ulema Council and the office of the Helmand Director of Hajj. Carroll and Asfura-Heim found that religious leaders in

southern Afghanistan were open to direct engagement and had specific grievances that could be addressed through greater integration of religious leaders. Primary among the concerns of these religious leaders was that they had been marginalized by the central government and had been sidelined in community discussions that did not directly address religious issues.⁷ Given their personal experience with religious leaders at various levels of Afghan society, Carroll and Asfura-Heim concluded that religious leaders’ impact was not confined to religious issues; religious leaders were key powerbrokers whose input should be included in discussions about economics, security, and development projects. Integrating religious leaders at the provincial level proved fairly simple with Carroll and Asfura-Heim’s ability to travel to provincial headquarters; what was lacking, however, was consistent interaction with religious leaders at the subprovincial level.

Attention to subprovincial religious leaders was further strengthened with the arrival of a U.S. Navy Muslim chaplain in February 2010. Chaplain “Salam,” whose name has been withheld, is a naturalized U.S. citizen and a naval chaplain who was serving in the Washington, DC, area when he was asked to come to Afghanistan.⁸ Based on his past experience with the U.S. military and foreign Muslim officials, it was determined that Chaplain Salam would be the ideal person to extend the reach of the religious leader engagement program. Chaplain Salam and Chaplain Philip [J.] Pelikan did not act alone, however; they had the support of the 2d MEB commander. In recognition of the important role that religious leaders and institutions play in the overall COIN effort, then-Brigadier General Lawrence [D.] Nicholson, commanding general of 2d MEB, inquired whether it would be possible and beneficial to facilitate the visit of a Navy Muslim chaplain to

Afghanistan. Chaplain Pelikan knew such a person and undertook a six-month process to bring him to Afghanistan.⁹

In an article he wrote for *Small Wars Journal*, Chaplain Pelikan summarized Nicholson's intent:

By order of the Commanding General, 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB), Afghanistan, the Command Chaplain and a Muslim Chaplain (if obtainable), along with appropriate political specialists, governance advisors, and necessary security, were to engage with Islamic leadership in Helmand and Farah Provinces in discussions to enhance the relationship with key religious leaders and the communities in which they serve in order to convey the good will and otherwise positive intentions of U.S. Government and ISAF (International Security Assistance Force)/NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] forces operating in the region in conjunction with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) and its military and police forces.¹⁰

In effect, Nicholson called for a systematic engagement of local religious leaders with the knowledge that these leaders are key nodes in the social network and have increased capacity to spread the U.S. government/ISAF message of support for GIROA and rejection of violent religious ideology.¹¹ Command support is yet another crucial factor for successful reintegration of religious leaders. The logistical support requirements and the sometimes prevailing attitude that religious leaders are not of central importance to building stability can hamper the attempt to engage religious leaders. Afghan religious leaders primarily serve the role of a mediator; as trusted leaders of their local communities, they are local advocates

to ensure that ISAF projects and intentions match those of the community. Concomitantly, as trusted partners to ISAF, Afghan religious leaders transmit and reinforce the ISAF message of security and effective governance.

In addition to calling for a systematic engagement plan with religious leaders, Nicholson offered a paradigm for understanding that their target audience was "little 't' Taliban." "Little 't' Taliban" were those who were lured into the Taliban with promises of power, money, and stability—for financial and social, not religious, reasons. If Pelikan offered, local Afghan religious leaders could explain the ways that ISAF and GIROA were working to bring stability and clarify the opportunities for local Afghans to participate in those programs, then it would be possible that Taliban rhetoric would be undermined. If U.S. military chaplains, and Muslim chaplains in particular, could engage with religious leaders, then those religious leaders could act as trusted partners for participation in legitimate political, commercial, and religious institutions.¹² What Nicholson and Pelikan brought to the growing focus on religious leaders in Helmand was the value of military chaplains. It was not enough for provincial-level 2d MEB individuals to meet with provincial-level religious leaders; there was a need for both groups to reach to the district and village levels where the message of stability has the most impact. The ability to extend to subprovincial levels was brought about most effectively through the work of military chaplains.

The introduction of a Muslim chaplain served as an "icebreaker" for many religious leaders in southern Afghanistan and fostered trust between ISAF and the tens of Afghans who traveled from remote villages for the engagements.¹³ In particular, the religious leader engagement team would schedule their religious leader engagements such



Photo courtesy of 1stLt Timothy R. Irish

Navy Lt Asif Balbale, a Muslim chaplain and imam, prepares for a meal at the district governor's compound in Sangin, Afghanistan, on 3 September 2009. Balbale visited with elders, local mullahs, and political leaders from the area. He spent the month of Ramadan conducting religious engagements and leading prayers across Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

that the Muslim chaplain would open with brief remarks that were followed by an open discussion with local religious leaders. As one example, the effects of these discussions had significant positive effects in Golestan District, Farah Province: “[the engagements] enhanced the ability of the Marine company commander at the Golestan Forward Operating Base (FOB) to communicate with the locals, determine better ways to assist the community with their many ‘quality of life’ issues, and helped empower the local mullahs by connecting them with GIRoA through

the Farah Provincial Director of Hajj.”¹⁴ There was certainly an atmosphere of religious camaraderie in the reports about these meetings, but the most important aspect was the ability of local 2d MEB commanders to open new channels of communication through religious leaders and ensure that the needs of Afghans across the entire spectrum were being considered.

Other Perspectives

Rajiv Chandrasekaran, who reported on these events for *The Washington Post*, noted that 2d MEB was

one of just a few units in Afghanistan that made a concerted attempt to engage religious leaders as part of its campaign plan. Such a feat by the Marines stands as a testament to the religious and nonreligious impact of mullahs and other religious leaders in small, remote villages in southern Afghanistan. Chandrasekaran pointed out the impact of bringing one of only a few Muslim chaplains to southern Afghanistan: “At his [the Muslim chaplain’s] first session with religious leaders in Helmand, the participants initially thought the clean-shaven [chaplain] was an impostor. Then he led the group in noontime prayers. By the end, everyone wanted to take a picture with him.”¹⁵ The benefit of involving a Muslim chaplain in this religious leader engagement program is undeniable: it bolstered existing relationships, weakened barriers to communication through shared language and ritual, and fostered new and enduring relationships with religious leaders at every level of Afghan society.

The U.S. contingent in Helmand was not the only group to consider the role of religious leader engagements, however. The United Kingdom (UK) delegation at the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team also constructed a religious leader engagement program in late 2009 that was intended to undermine Taliban propaganda by having religious leaders act as reliable mediators between ISAF and the Afghan people. As part of their efforts, the UK delegation invited a group of Afghan religious leaders to Great Britain; in response to their visit, one mullah said, “The Taliban tell everyone that Britain is an infidel nation hostile to Muslims, but the mullahs were able to see for themselves that in fact Britain is a tolerant country in which Muslims can build mosques and practice their religion peacefully.”¹⁶ The UK efforts, similar to those of the United States, aimed at discrediting the Taliban by addressing the dominant source of their claim to legitimacy: piety.

By engaging religious leaders at every level, UK and U.S. representatives were able to disseminate the message of Afghan stability to the farthest reaches of their areas of responsibility with the face and voice of Afghans. For example, while visiting Bakwa District, Farah Province, the religious leader engagement team was approached by a mullah who wore the mark of the Taliban—a crescent moon and star tattooed on the right hand—who was deeply moved by the presence of Afghans and Americans praying together: “He told us that he was a Taliban *Mawlawi* [religious scholar] who taught in a Madrasa . . . just outside Bakwa. So tremendously impressed by our message, he stated, ‘Before today I just thought that all Westerners were infidels and I was against you. But today I saw something that I’d never seen before. And I have changed my mind about Americans. I will work with you from now on.’”¹⁷ In this way, Afghan religious leaders acted as force multipliers, strategic communicators, and trusted allies in the fight for stability. As more Afghan religious leaders are engaged, Afghans themselves will carry the message of responsible development, effective governance, and sustainable security.

Role of Chaplains

The involvement of chaplains was central to the success of the religious leader engagement program in southern Afghanistan, but the historic and doctrinal role of chaplains presents certain challenges for how these types of programs can be expanded. Chaplains have traditionally been charged with providing for the morale and spiritual well-being of their troops. As military operations have evolved in the twenty-first century, so have the responsibilities and expectations of chaplains; whether by personal abilities or requests from various partners, chaplains have been regularly involved in stability operations through engagement and support of

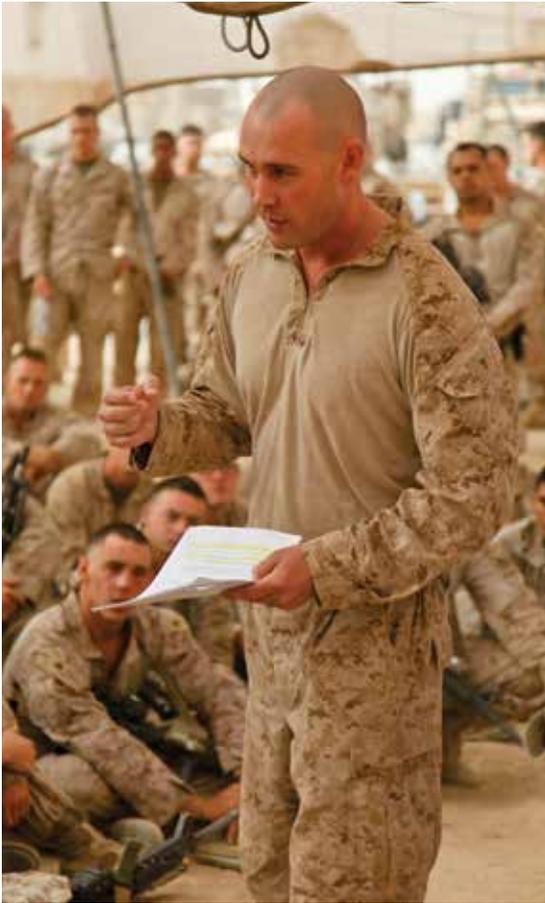


Photo courtesy of LCpl Travis A. D'Ambrogii

Navy Lt Dru A. Nelson, a chaplain with the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, Regimental Combat Team 8, speaks with Marines at Combat Operating Post Ouellette in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, on 16 July 2011. Nelson briefed the Marines on the traditions of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

local populations. Chaplains may represent an ideal nexus for religious leader engagement programs because of their intimate knowledge of religious matters: “In the general conduct of counterinsurgency operations the religious aspect is often either overlooked or is simply thought of as something to shy away from because many people feel unqualified to discuss religion. We chaplains, however, are never ashamed to talk about religion. And our experience in this operation proved that the direct approach with the Afghan religious leaders was the right one.”¹⁸

Chaplains’ commitment to religious ideals is an invaluable asset for developing relationships with local religious leaders, but that religious basis is a means by which to develop relationships that channel legitimate Afghan concerns from the lowest to the highest levels of Afghan society.¹⁹ The designation of chaplains as noncombatants is another consideration for how they can participate in stability operations: “A potential controversy exists when a chaplain is asked for specific information from commanders or intelligence officers related to his interaction with local mullahs. Chaplains, as doctrinal noncombatants, could be placed in the awkward position of providing targeting information to commanders, a combatant task.”²⁰ The designation of noncombatant has its limitations, but it is also a contributing factor to presumptions of good-faith interactions that allow chaplains to develop relationships that can ensure the faithful transmission of the true objectives of ISAF and GIRoA in the face of anti-Afghanistan rhetoric.²¹

Military doctrine is continually adapting to more effectively describe and empower chaplains at every level. Army Field Manual (FM) 1–05, *Religious Support*, appendix A, “Religious Support in Civil Military Operations,” for example, describes specifically how U.S. Army chaplains ought to support civil-military operations. While reaffirming that the primary duty of chaplains is to support the religious needs of soldiers, the appendix goes on to encourage chaplains to advise commanders on the religious dynamics of the local population and reinforces that chaplains ought not to be the sole participants in negotiations with host nationals or in human intelligence collection.²² In this way, chaplains are seen, primarily, as part of a larger engagement team; where chaplains are restricted in their behavior, other members can take the lead.



Photo courtesy of LCpl Richard Sanglapherami

Afghan National Army mullah, Capt Mawlanoor (right) from the Garrison Support Unit, 1st Brigade, 215th Corps, welcomes attendees from different districts in Helmand Province attending the Voices of Religious Tolerance (VORT) conference at Camp Garmsir, Afghanistan, on 17 April 2011.

FM 1–05 represents the growing awareness that chaplains can play a leading role in engaging local religious leaders of host nations, but there still remain certain limitations to how chaplains can be involved in stability operations. For example, Chaplain William Sean Lee proposed that military doctrine be changed to include the title “religious liaison” for chaplains. In that role, chaplains would be formally tasked with engaging “indigenous religious groups and leaders” to support stability operations; were such a change to be implemented, chaplains could be identified as the primary partner for religious leaders, with

those relationships occurring in concert with security, governance, and development objectives.²³

Thus, while chaplains are uniquely prepared to engage Afghan religious leaders because of their sensitivity to religious issues, there are certain factors that should be borne in mind to maximize their effect. While chaplains are a vital tool in the fight against a jihadi narrative, they are not the sine qua non of religious leader engagements. As seen with 2d MEB, chaplains can help open dialogue, lay a foundation of trust, and demonstrate ISAF commitment to the Afghan people, but the sustained work of religious leader engagement

comes through continued involvement with religious leaders within the communities where they enjoy positions of authority.

Religious leaders and religious institutions play an undeniably important role in Afghan society, and it is in the best interest of the U.S. military to design, implement, and effectively sustain engagements with those leaders. Religious leader engagement programs in southern Afghanistan demonstrate that well-thought-out plans of action can have tremendous impact on GIRoA's intent to counter anti-Afghanistan propaganda and address the legitimate needs of the Afghan people. In short, ISAF is a short-term solution to a long-term set of complex issues that can only be addressed by Afghans and the individuals they identify as legitimate powerbrokers. Ultimately, no amount of foreign savvy can account for the credibility and sustainability of driving the religious leader engagement process through legitimate GIRoA-affiliated individuals and institutions.

To ensure the continued integration of religious leaders at every level of Afghan society, religious leader engagement programs should be routed through official GIRoA channels to ensure that the process can be sustained once GIRoA takes full control of its affairs. In Helmand, for example, the director of Hajj and Religious Affairs, Sayed "Mullah" Mukhtar Ahmad Haqqani, was a key partner in the fight to discredit Taliban ideology because "he was a dynamic and engaging man who immediately grasped our plan and intentions and took [Salam and Pelikan] 'under his wing' as we circulated throughout the province together."²⁴ As Afghans determine how, when, and which religious leaders are actively involved in the process of their own stabilization, ISAF and the U.S. government will accomplish their goals.

From the perspective of ISAF and the U.S. government, it should be kept in mind that religious

leader engagement is a distinct type of engagement that has benefits and limitations that differ from other types. Engagement with religious leaders should rest on a long-term, sustainable plan that specifically considers the role that religious leaders play in village-level to national-level operations. U.S. military chaplains are key to the creation and sustainment of religious leader engagements, but their role does not need to be constant and should respect their status as noncombatants. There is reason to believe that the doctrinal elements of chaplain responsibilities ought to be reconsidered and adjusted to meet the rapidly changing needs of military operations in the twenty-first century. One of the most beneficial aspects of religious leader engagement in southern Afghanistan was the involvement of a Muslim chaplain; his presence broke down barriers between local religious leaders and allowed for more honest discussions about stability operations.

One of the difficulties associated with the religious leader engagement programs was the availability of U.S. military Muslim chaplains. The U.S. military may wish to consider reaching out to nonmilitary chaplains (at hospitals, universities, and prisons, for example) who would be willing to support religious leader engagements around the world. A robust chaplaincy that can minister to U.S. troops as well as host nationals will boost U.S. military stability operations around the world. In fact, sustained religious leader engagement programs need not be confined to conflict zones; American foreign policy, in general, can benefit from recognizing the role of religion in societies throughout the world.

The enemies both of GIRoA and of stability in Afghanistan have waged a war based primarily on violent ideology shrouded in religious language that cannot be bombed into submission. The most effective method of dealing with ideology

is to provide viable rhetorical alternatives. Active, sustained, and consistent engagement with religious leaders cultivates meaningful relationships and empowers local leaders to articulate ISAF and GIRoA commitment to stability. The primary effect of religious leader engagement has been to bring greater legitimacy to GIRoA. By connecting local religious leaders with their district political and religious leaders, district officials with provincial officials, and provincial officials with national leaders, ISAF was able to undermine some of the most frequent causes of instability: political alienation, religious extremism separated from mainstream society, knowledgeable religious leaders operating outside legitimate institutions, and the allure of violent narratives.

Notes

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1. William Sean Lee, Christopher Burke, and Zonna Crayne, *Military Chaplains as Peace Builders: Embracing Indigenous Religions in Stability Operations* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University, 2004), 5, www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf&AD=ADA425869, hereafter Lee, Burke, and Crayne, *Military Chaplains as Peace Builders*.
2. “The enemy has succeeded in establishing jihad as their pervasive, overarching narrative. Consistently over time and space, all of their remarkably sophisticated information operations uniformly hammer home this religious message of jihad. Virtually all Taliban leaders, from senior military and political leaders down to sub-commanders at the district level, are *mullahs*. The implications of this have not yet sunk in. We are fighting a counterinsurgency; the enemy is fighting a jihad. But the intersection of how insurgencies end and how jihads end is historically nil.” Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, “Refighting the Last War: Afghanistan and the Vietnam Template,” *Military Review* (November–December 2009), 2–14, http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/militaryreview/archives/english/militaryreview_20091231_art004.pdf, hereafter Johnson and Mason.
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Marine Capt Alison M. Anderson, future operations officer for G-3 communications, Marine Expeditionary Brigade-Afghanistan, shakes the hand of a local Afghan woman as they say goodbye after a chai break. The female engagement team meets with local women to find out what their wants, needs, and desires are, a task that male Marines or military officials could not easily accomplish.

Photo courtesy of Sgt Jennifer Calaway



Female Engagement Teams: The Case for More Female Civil Affairs Marines

by Master Sergeant Julia L. Watson

Marine Corps Gazette, July 2011

There is a direct relationship between the security of women and the security of states. Levels of democracy, economic development, and identity show that the physical security of women is a better predictor of state security and peace.¹ For this very reason, the Marine Corps needs to take a progressive role in the training and employment of increasing female engagement efforts in Afghanistan before harm comes of our actions. There is doctrine, MOSs [military occupational specialties], and vast research from those who have been engaging women for decades in Afghanistan that has yet to be fully utilized to support engagement efforts. There is also a century's worth of science available from anthropology and ethnography to draw from before we make decisions regarding what some believe is a new concept. Not doing so could keep us fighting Taliban in Afghanistan for decades.

The engagement concept isn't new in counterinsurgency (COIN), as the success of the combined action platoon program² in Vietnam and the many examples found in the 1940 *Small Wars Manual*

show us. Using female service members wasn't necessary until the last decade where the culture prohibited servicemen from interacting with half of the population in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Although we had observed lessons in Iraq on the enabling effects of using female service members to access, engage, and search Iraqi women, we didn't bring a trained capability with us going into Afghanistan, resulting in the Afghanistan female engagement teams (FETs) being built in reaction to a security incident in July 2009.³ This effort combined the concepts of two earlier Marine Corps programs that were initiated in Iraq—the Lioness Program and the Iraqi Women's Engagement Program (IWE). Lioness was mainly a search effort at entry control points and was used for some "knock and greets,"⁴ but had little to no follow through after initial contact with women. IWE was aimed at identifying sources of instability from the women, connecting the women together, and then coordinating with local government, civil affairs personnel, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) to facilitate the reduction of those instabilities.

Under 2d MEB–Afghanistan [2d MEB–A], teams were ad hoc and on call. During this time, they gained anecdotal cultural and atmospheric information, and many local Afghans accepted FET presence, but at the time there was limited ability to assess their effectiveness according to the MEB–A's logical lines of operations (LOOs). Ad hoc anecdotes led I MEF (Forward [Fwd]) to bring an all-female detachment to serve as full-time teams that would eventually be replaced by II MEF (Fwd) FETs. The anecdotes also supported a recommendation⁵ to the commander of International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) to replicate the Marine Corps model of FET, which promptly led to a directive for ISAF units to standardize engagements.⁶

Based on a few successful vignettes, ISAF units looked to the Marines in Helmand [Province] for lessons on training and employment, making FET a "buzzword"⁷ that has continued to generate a lot of confusion and disputes as to best training, employment, and effects. It has also sparked the U.S. Army to rush to adopt the Marine Corps' FET program,⁸ resulting in degraded learning due to assumptions from the absence of method, purpose, and end state of female engagement.⁹ Although FETs have received high visibility in the media due to their access to half of the population and their roles as women in combat and COIN, the effort needs evaluation to ensure that its ever-changing mission supports long- or short-term essential stability tasks.¹⁰

In support of the local battlespace owner's intent, the FET mission statement has gone through many changes but has always retained the notions of direct engagement with the local population, disseminating commanders' messages, information collecting (passive and active),¹¹ deescalating/softening the public's perception of offensive operations, and influencing and understanding the needs of the population.

Marine leaders have leveraged the availability of these [female] Marines to mitigate these challenges when it comes to the female population in their area of operations. But the culture is so diverse and ancient that there are few who are able to become experts on true engagement. I propose that true female engagement should be a part of meaningful dialogue and not just "girl talk" or information collection. These face-to-face engagements require appropriate follow through and resources that will give the commander the ability to understand and influence the population to support operations.

As the employment and engagement mission of the FET has morphed over time, so too has

its predeployment training. The current concept of employment is for a single team to be used as a “female in a box” for multiple efforts, such as searching, information operations, military information support to operations, civil-military operations (CMO), and garnering information that has infringed at times into intelligence collection.¹² Being marginally trained in a variety of skills and then thrust into on-the-job training once in-theater will not yield full capacity and may be dangerous. This “jack-of-all-trades, master of none” approach leads to an unbalanced engagement, confuses the local population, overlooks opportunities for nonkinetic targeting, reduces the ability to build relations, and inhibits follow through in an effective and sustainable manner, especially when female service members are often viewed as a benevolent presence.

Because Pashtun gender prohibitions are designed to protect Pashtun women not Western women, female service members are perceived as a “third gender”¹³ and as being “there to help versus there to fight.”¹⁴ This perception allows us access to the entire population, which is crucial in population-centric operations. Our military’s need for information is inexhaustible, and we are anxious to collect it, but we’ve allowed advertisement of the FET to be viewed as “collecting intelligence from the Afghan women.”^{15, 16} Garnering information should not come at the expense of the population, for it’s the people we should be protecting as we aim to separate them from the insurgents. There is a belief that because we are females, we have an edge since insurgents and malign actors do not appear to know or account for the capability of female Marines.¹⁷ From my limited experience and what Afghan men and women have told me, I argue this concept and believe that the Afghan people are acutely aware of our intentions and capabilities as FETs. The truth is, once we leave their

compounds, there is nothing we can do to protect the women we engage. Afghan women have been beaten and intimidated for far less than engaging with a Western female,¹⁸ and our engagements must be thoughtful and well planned so as to not place Afghan women in jeopardy.

It should be required for female engagers to be fused into a gender-mixed team¹⁹ rather than constructed into all-female teams if we want to fully expand the ability to understand the operational environment. But in training and employing all-female teams (believed to have a distinct identity and an autonomous mission), by default we have created “METs” (male engagement teams). Not only does this put a wedge in our unity of effort toward the population, it may, to our detriment, affect the perception and our influence on the local population.

FETs, like their male counterparts, are and should engage with local men. It’s important to recognize that it may be more critical for female enablers to engage with local men than solely with local women. Not only do the vast majority of female engagements only occur and are allowed through the men of the community,²⁰ but neither can we bring jobs, education, or long-term solutions to the plight of the Afghan women unless the Afghan men facilitate them. Possibly the most valuable part of a female engaging is not that they are talking to Afghan women, but that the Afghan men are interacting differently with and often providing more and differing information to female servicemembers.²¹ It makes sense that if the military’s desire was really to help these women, then we’d have the influence and authority to do so, beyond simple interaction, in the eyes of the Afghan men.

What does a young,²² all-female team bring to the table in order to get buy-in for sustainable effects along the LOOs when working with

decision-making Afghans? Without the money, rank, influence, or power that our male Marine tribal elders (our inferred social structure)²³ carry, the FETs may have severe limitations.

Since we have the perception that we are women “there to help,” it needs to be noted that engagement creates *expectations*. FETs are meeting with local women and discussing their problems. These problems are largely related to livelihood, insecurity, health care, education, employment, and other socioeconomic needs. Discussing needs raises expectations that the FETs will provide this socioeconomic assistance. But, FETs lose out on fully influencing the local people if they pass off what they should and could follow through on to other enablers, essentially saying, women really can’t take care of the problem, and they are just here to talk (collect intelligence), hand out soap and aspirin, and nothing more.

While it is critical to have all-female personnel for the majority of engagements with conservative Afghan women, FETs as they are constructed and trained are not linked to other similar enablers and lack transitional efficacy in their work. There are multiple, short-term initiatives that are providing a temporary means to win hearts and minds, such as medical outreach, humanitarian assistance, providing school supplies, and small businesses for women, but until recently they lacked the coordination with the district stabilization team, PRT, Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA), or NGOs that bring the capacity for long-term sustainability. There is a time and place for these efforts, but without key leaders in the community, and a unity of effort, these efforts have a short shelf life, create a society of dependency, and often fail once units leave the area.

Until recently FETs also lacked a systematic approach to consulting women, as our approach should be less dichotomous and focus on “them

and them” versus “us and them.” We should be facilitating local women engaging each other in order to connect the women to GIROA at the district level; Helmand Women’s Department; pre-existing networks, such as midwives; and the over 23 women’s associations in Helmand.²⁴

Thanks to guidance from the CMO/G-9 [civil-military operations], concept of operations and utilization, the ingenuity of FET personnel and exceptional leadership within their ranks, the FETs are now beginning to address the expectations they create. Although FETs are beginning to increase their effectiveness, their construct is a redundant capability and a nonintegrated enabler because they are in fact conducting CMO and the core tasks of civil affairs. As the *Commandant’s Planning Guidance*²⁵ and *Marine Corps Operating Concepts*²⁶ suggest, the Marine Corps is not only short civil affairs personnel,²⁷ but also is looking to reduce the redundant efforts in order to be more effective. Civil affairs Marines focus on the population; the Afghan women are simply the female demographic of the population, so an increase in the force structure of overall billets in the civil affairs community (Active and Reserve components) makes sense instead of building an autonomous enabling unit that is likely not an enduring requirement post-Afghanistan. While quantity is not quality, the quantity of FET personnel currently being employed could easily augment the female Marines in the Reserve and Active component civil affairs detachments.

During predeployment, FETs have received, on average, a three-day training session on CMO. Female Marines slated to engage should attend the civil affairs MOS school in addition to their unit’s predeployment training. Marine Corps Special Operations Command (MARSOC) has had a similar capability, called cultural support teams, since November 2009.²⁸ MARSOC sees the value

of gender in the conduct of CMO and has begun to send its female Marines to the Civil Affairs School in Quantico [Virginia].

While some support the concept of disbanding FETs and increasing females in civil affairs, those who oppose focusing FETs as civil affairs augments argue that by doing so other capabilities, such as collection, influence, and searching, will be lost. The seeming losses of these tactical capabilities are in reality a part of the civil affairs milieu. CMO is by definition operational in nature and the responsibility of the commander. All Marines conduct CMO, not just those who are civil affairs Marines. CMO crosses all LOOs during all phases of operations, enhances a commander's ability to influence and have access to people, and is not limited to development.²⁹ Therefore, if a female civil affairs Marine is needed for occasional searches, then so be it. A trained civil affairs Marine will turn the search into an engagement opportunity.

Civil affairs teams specialize in assessing and working with the civil dimension. It is significant to relate the August 2006 female engagement efforts led by a female civil affairs Marine in al-Qaim, Iraq. Al-Qaim had been under insurgent control until 2006. This started to change in late 2006, as it became the first part of Anbar Province to effectively throw out and fight insurgents (also known as the al-Anbar Awakening). In 2008, al-Qaim had become the most economically and politically advanced city in Anbar. As there is not a single effort that could cause the local people to shift their support away from the insurgency, the role that local women played behind the scenes when they decided to organize, meet often, and bring problems they couldn't fix on their own to their city-level government (due to CMO efforts toward the female demographic) may not be accounted into why al-Qaim had the

COIN success it did so quickly after the local women became more involved.

Cultural intelligence analyst Larissa Mihalisko also related what a civil affairs team (including a female civil affairs Marine) did in Now Zad [Helmand Province] during and after [Operation] Cobra's Anger (conducted during December 2009):

They humanized the "Taliban," in that [the civil affairs team] broke down that label to identify the real reasons why people were fighting. Always unsatisfied with the cheap, lazy label of "Taliban" that did nothing to help Marines figure out how they could best counter to the insurgency, I think their proximity to the Afghans and incredibly robust engagement efforts made them actually empathize with locals. When I talk about proximity and engagement, I don't mean that they just lived next to the district center and held shuras. They visited people's homes, opened schools, jump-started major de-mining operations, knew the names and backgrounds of every local, engaged their communities at home to get involved, danced at weddings, buried the dead at funerals, and much, much more. . . . They kindly allowed the civilian to help dissect Now Zad with them, and although I was always warmly welcomed there is nothing like living with these people [as the civil affairs team did].³⁰

The Afghan's ability to perceive honesty, sincerity, empathy, and even alternate motives is astounding, as this ability is what they have had to rely on just to survive decades of war. They can recall vivid images of past decades like it happened yesterday, and what our FETs are doing today will

be vivid in the minds of the youth for decades to come. Essentially FETs are planting “seeds of hope” among the women. If the seeds don’t grow, if they are injured, or if their environment doesn’t change, then after a time we may lose the support of not only the Afghan women (which was beginning to occur during my deployment in 2010), we may also lose the support of generations to come as stories are passed for generations about our failed attempts to help them after we drink their tea and they risk their lives to give us information. Hence, we are possibly creating a new generation of Taliban that is fueled from Afghan mothers to their sons.

If Afghanistan’s stability depends on the Afghan women’s involvement in democracy and economics, then our female engagement effort needs an overhaul before we continue to unnecessarily put Marines and Afghan lives at risk. Therefore, the Marine Corps needs to look to our history and use existing doctrine and research available when determining the way forward with the employment of FETs.

Notes

Marine Corps Gazette 95, no. 7 (July 2011): 20–24. Reprinted with permission. Copyright *Marine Corps Gazette*.

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The Police Mentoring Team walks the streets of the Now Zad bazaar in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, during a routine patrol on 10 April 2010. The increased presence alongside newly graduated Afghan policemen created a safer environment in the bazaar, and previous residents of the area are moving back into their homes.

Photo courtesy of Cpl Paul J. Basciano





Acknowledging Limits: Police Advisors and Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan

U.S. Marine Corps

Police Mentor,

Now Zad District, 2009

by William Rosenau, PhD

A gunnery sergeant serving with a military police (MP) company, 2d Marine Division, arrived in Now Zad District, Helmand Province, in August 2009.* As a member of a PMT [Police Mentoring Team], he trained members of the district's Afghan National Police (ANP).

“Welfare Cases”

Some of the Afghan police had been trained by British mentors. They had uniforms, and 10 of them had been through the Focused District Development, which vetted, retrained, reequipped, and mentored district police forces. But the 36 men that the sergeant was to mentor required substantial additional training.

“We had only a handful of guys who wanted to be legitimate police,” he recalled. Conditions for

*Quotations used in this vignette are drawn from the author's interviews, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, 17 February 2010, and subsequent email communications.

ANP officers were poor. There were a lot of “welfare cases,” he said. “They weren’t getting their basic needs met—food, warm clothing, vehicles.” The district chief of police did nothing to try to meet these shortfalls. Driven out by the Taliban in 2007, the chief was “more concerned about his Land Rovers and getting a gift” now that he was back, the Marine recalled.

Things Start to Get Hot

The team set up a training schedule for the ANP. For two weeks, the focus was on developing law enforcement skills, including checkpoint operations and vehicle and personnel searches. But then “things started to get hot again” when Taliban snipers began operating in Now Zad, remembered the Marine advisor.

In addition to mentoring, the PMT had to serve as a quick reaction force (QRF). “We were called into action to assist the infantry who were pinned down by the enemy sniper teams,” he explained. “I had military working dogs that I used to track the enemy snipers to their positions and take them out.” The team also provided security during the evacuation of civilian casualties and during joint Afghan National Army–Marine patrols. Continuing threats posed by the Taliban illustrated for the police mentor the importance of previous combat experience. “You needed to go to survival mode quickly,” he said.

Police-Oriented Training

During the fall, security had improved to the point where the team could devote more attention to police-oriented training. “We tried to go beyond just having them go out and arrest people,” the Marine advisor said. “The focus went from being aggressive to starting to collect names and intelligence on local bad guys.” The PMT also attempted to foster relationships

between the district police and village elders—a version of Western-style community policing in which law enforcement personnel worked with local residents to solve problems. “We had the ANP attend shuras and play mediator in things like land disputes,” the Marine mentor recalled.

But overall, progress was slow. As in many other districts across Afghanistan, most of the ANP in Now Zad were illiterate, and a number of policemen were as young as 14 years old. A lack of formal education meant that Now Zad policemen generally lacked the discipline and persistence to absorb the PMT’s mentoring. “They had a 10- to 15-minute attention span,” the sergeant said. “We had to keep things very visual and do a lot of hands-on training.”

The ANP’s personnel system presented the mentors with other difficulties. Provincial police headquarters in Lashkar Gah [capital of Helmand Province] was supposed to generate an ANP roster for the district but never did. As a result, it was impossible for the team to determine who was officially a policeman and who had been vetted by the Afghan authorities. Provincial headquarters also failed to provide a police recruiter, but according to the sergeant, no recruiter was willing to venture into the district.

Motivating the Now Zad police proved to be a considerable challenge. “They didn’t want to run point on patrol,” he recollected. “We had to use psychology on them.” For example, the PMT appealed to the Afghans’ self-image as a culture of warriors: “I’d say to them, ‘We hear back in the states that you’re fierce warriors, but I’m not seeing it.’” The PMT pressed the police to take responsibility for planning and conducting their own operations, but with limited success. “We didn’t go outside the wire without the ANP,” the Marine said. “We pushed them to plan cordon-and-knock operations and raids. We’d tell them,

'You have information, this is your country, you're the police. What are you going to do about it?'"

A Question of Trust

In the sergeant's view, two other factors limited the ability of the mentors to make progress with the ANP. The first was the inability of the Marines to "get past" the differences they had with the Afghans. The problem was particularly acute with respect to rampant police corruption and criminality, which the ANP considered a normal part of being a police officer. The PMT found it hard to develop a sense of respect for men who engaged in illicit behavior to the degree the Now Zad ANP did.

The second factor was a lack of trust. Team members often found themselves second-guessing the Afghans and their motivations. In the case of the ANP's mediation of land disputes, for example, the police seemed to be acting in a positive way, but the Marine advisor often found himself wondering what the real agenda was behind their actions. "With the Afghans, who knows?" he wondered. He was also concerned about the ANP's loyalty. "How much do you really want to train them?" he asked. "After all, they can switch sides and join the Taliban."

Conclusion

The sergeant's experience in Now Zad highlights some of the major challenges that police mentors faced in many parts of Afghanistan. The security situation in Now Zad required the team to function as a QRF in addition to performing their mentoring duties. In his view, previous combat experience was invaluable in a mentoring environment that could quickly "get hot."

The police force was riddled with corruption, incompetence, and criminality. At the senior level, the district chief of police was unwilling or unable to improve the conditions of the men

serving under his command. At the rank-and-file level, illiteracy and a lack of discipline made mentoring difficult.

Motivating the district police posed another serious challenge. The team prodded them to take responsibility for planning and conducting their operations and appealed to their sense of themselves as Afghan "warriors" to carry out their missions, but with limited effect.

Finally, the sergeant's tour with the Now Zad PMT exemplifies the importance of trust in effective police mentoring. The mentoring team found it impossible to look beyond the corruption and criminality that plagued the force. Widespread illicit behavior on the part of the police led the Marines to call into question the motivation of the men they were mentoring. The team also questioned the loyalty of the Now Zad police. Under such circumstances, it was impossible to create the bonds of trust and respect necessary for effective mentoring.

Note

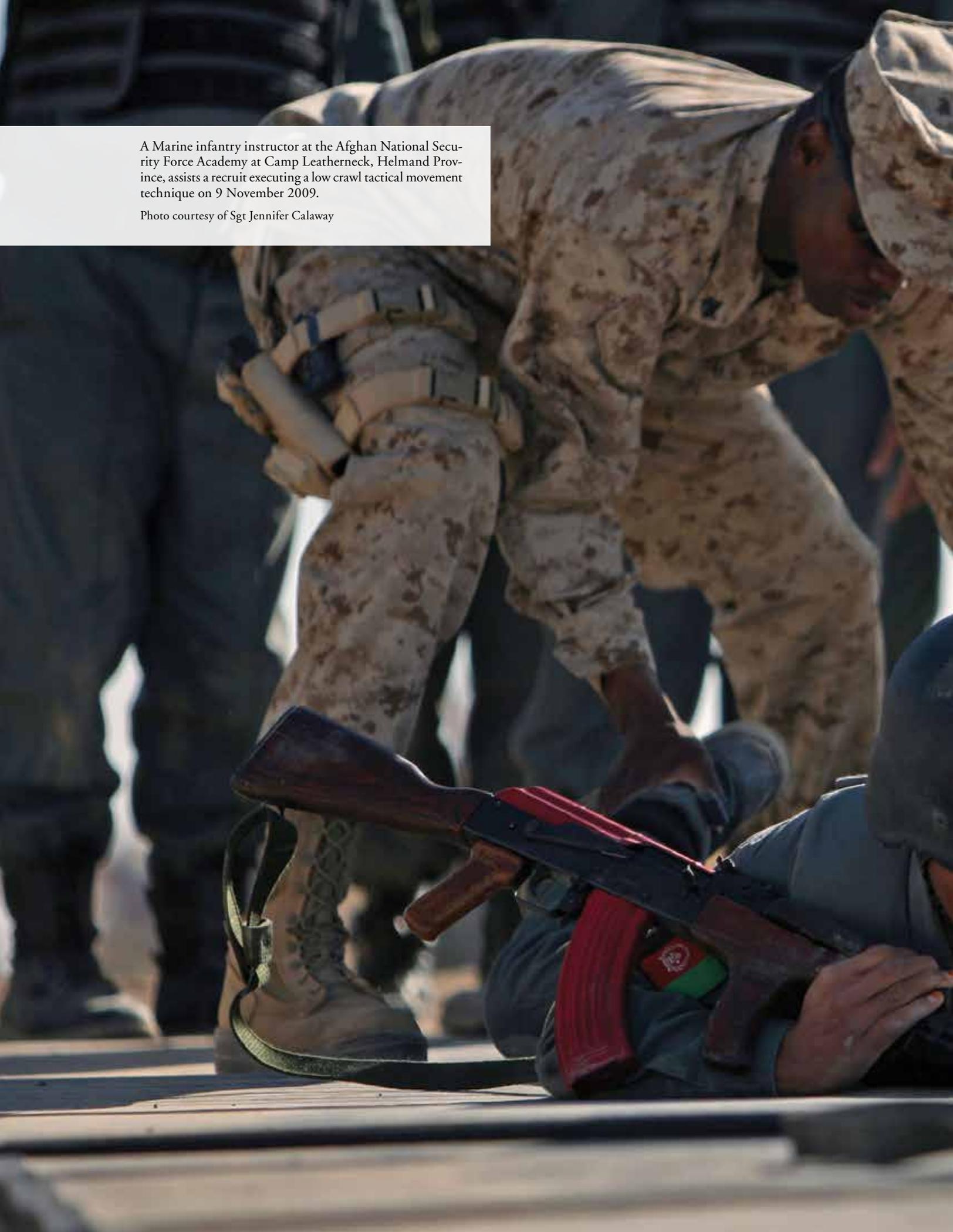
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A Marine infantry instructor at the Afghan National Security Force Academy at Camp Leatherneck, Helmand Province, assists a recruit executing a low crawl tactical movement technique on 9 November 2009.

Photo courtesy of Sgt Jennifer Calaway





Victory in Afghanistan

*by Lieutenant Colonel Patrick J. Carroll,
USMC (Ret) and Chief Warrant Officer-5
Terry L. Walker, USMC (Ret)*

Marine Corps Gazette, June 2010

Ultimate success in counterinsurgency (COIN) is gained by protecting the populace, not the COIN force.¹ It is likewise the police officer, operating in his “battlespace” or in his precinct, who serves as the living embodiment of long-term security in a civilized society. With that framework in mind, the most important legacy that the United States Marines can leave behind in the COIN fight in Afghanistan is credible, local Afghan police forces. Victory in Afghanistan will ultimately revolve around the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan’s (GIRoA) ability to assume responsibility for security within its own borders, and to provide good governance and measurable improvements in the delivery of services.² While the Marine Corps is a supporting actor in the quest to establish strong local governance in Afghanistan, it can—and will—take the lead in training and mentoring local Afghan Uniformed Police (AUP). U.S. Marines only know one acceptable outcome: once combat is joined—victory! If the Afghan police cannot fight, though, then the Marines cannot win decisively in this COIN. A well-trained local AUP is arguably the key to fully establishing local governance on the provincial and district levels and thereby allowing for the transfer of lead security responsibility (TLSR) to GIRoA and its Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).³

When the 2d MEB arrived in southern Afghanistan in April 2009, there were less than 300 police officers within their Area of Operations (AO) Sea Dragon. Moreover, the vast majority of these police were untrained and largely ineffective. As of the first of this year, however, there are over 400 trained AUP operating within the seven districts controlled by the Marines within Helmand, Nimroz, and Farah Provinces,⁴ and there are plans to train hundreds more at the Joint Security Academy Shorabak (JSAS), a Marine Corps-led academy at Camp Shorabak, the Afghan National Army's (ANAs) facility adjacent to the MEBs headquarters at Camp Leatherneck, Helmand Province.⁵ Until October 2009, the Marine Corps had relied on Afghan police recruits generated from two nationally run police academies in the capital city of Kabul and Spin Boldak in Kandahar Province. Nevertheless, the commanding general (CG), 2d MEB, Brigadier General Lawrence [D.] Nicholson, quickly recognized the need to accelerate this process and subsequently ordered the establishment of the Marine's own police training academy.

The result is an eight-week course at JSAS that is taught by eight Marine instructors, three AUP instructors, and five contracted civilian police trainers/advisors. Furthermore, the academy's curriculum has been refined to reflect the challenging security environment facing the graduating police. JSAS teaches all of the required core-level skills prescribed by the Kabul Police Academy, but the Marines go the extra mile to teach "critical combat skills"—primarily shooting and combat patrolling—that will ensure victory for the Afghan police in southern Afghanistan. Since the police will face a wide array of enemy in the south, the insurgents must not only see the "cop on the beat," but must also recognize that it is the insurgent who is clearly outmatched in combat skills. The first 52 recruits

of this "new" police proudly graduated at a formal ceremony held on 10 December 2009 at Camp Leatherneck, the headquarters for the 2d MEB. As each new policeman accepted his graduating certificate from Governor [Mohammad Gulab] Mangal of Helmand Province and Governor [Ghulam Dastagir] Azad of Nimroz Province, he [the graduate] loudly declared to the assembled crowd of Afghan, U.S., and NATO dignitaries, "I pledge to work in the service of Afghanistan!"

More important than their appearance in front of these Afghan officials, though, the Afghan population needs to see these police out in their villages—day in and day out. *Persistent presence* is the critical watchword. If the populace cannot see the "cop" in the bazaars and at vehicle checkpoints, then security does not exist in their minds. This is why this first step in Marine Corps training, mentoring, and partnering with the local police forces of southern Afghanistan is so very important. With President Barack [H.] Obama's declaration at West Point [U.S. Military Academy] on 1 December 2009 that we will begin the transfer of our forces out of Afghanistan in July 2011,⁶ the Marine Corps needs to already start thinking about how to conduct transition of lead security responsibility with GIRoA and the ANSF. So, what should transition of lead security responsibility look like? We should start with two basic assumptions.

The long-term presence of U.S. Marines in Afghanistan's provinces and districts is not a normal state of affairs. This is true for not only all foreign troops (like our partners in AO Sea Dragon—the British, the Danes, the Italians, the Bahrainis, etcetera), but it is likewise true for the ANA. The ANA's ultimate role for GIRoA is to defend the nation from external threats. The use of ANA—many of whom are either of non-Pashtun tribal ethnicity or Pashtuns from eastern Afghanistan—should only

be a temporary stopgap, similar to the employment of U.S. Marines “to clear” but not necessarily “to hold” or “to build,” especially over the long haul.

“Normalcy” is local Afghan government officials providing for the basic needs of their citizens and a credible, experienced local AUP guaranteeing internal security and stability. Everywhere Marines have gone and conducted tactical conflict assessment planning and framework surveys, they have heard the same thing from the local citizens. Their primary concern in all districts is “security, security, security.”⁷ This is reminiscent of the immediate period in Fallujah, Iraq, following Operation al-Fajr in November 2004. The only security footprint were Marines and a largely Shi’a Public Order Brigade. Locals did not truly feel secure until a local (Sunni Arab) Fallujah City Police Force under CG Salah al-Ani was established in the summer of the following year.

So, how does the Marine Corps get from here to there? First, it is important for Marines to continue to do much of what they are already doing in southern Afghanistan. Infantry and light armored reconnaissance battalions are out daily (and nightly) conducting multiple ground security patrols. They are engaging in a positive manner with the local citizens within all of the Afghan districts under their watch. Attached civil affairs teams are out initiating reconstruction and development projects using Commanders Emergency Response Program funds, implementing cash for work projects, and working with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to plan for even larger projects. Operating right alongside them are the civilian advisors who constitute the district stabilization teams (DSTs), coordinating with their military partners, engaging daily with Afghan district subgovernors, developing and partnering with local Afghan community councils, working with district ministry representatives,

etcetera. Nevertheless, there is at present a dearth of Afghan civil servants—educated and experienced bureaucrats and technocrats. No matter how determined the United Kingdom’s District Stabilization Advisors, U.S. Department of State officials, or USAID officials on these DSTs are, some factors are simply beyond their control when it comes to attracting more qualified Afghan civilians to fill critical government jobs in the districts.

In particular, there is a need for more qualified civil servants to fill out the *tashkils*⁸ of the district subgovernors or the ministry representative’s offices. Some of the reasons for this current state of affairs have to do with the poor state of education in Afghanistan. Over 75 percent of the Afghan population is illiterate,⁹ and there just are not enough highly educated individuals who are willing to work as civilian servants. Low pay, danger, or poor living conditions all lead to a negative situation in most cases. The provincial reconstruction teams are all striving with Regional Platform-South and/or with the U.S. embassy, and in turn with the organs of GIRoA, such as the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG), to improve this situation. Furthermore, according to the Five-Year Strategic Workplan of the IDLG,¹⁰ much of the reform in Afghan civil service is years away—2011 and beyond. Here is one example from the work plan:

By the end of 1389 “hejira” date (20 March 2011), the government will build institutional and administrative capabilities in provincial, district and, municipal administrations to manage basic service delivery through reforming organizations structures, streamlining management processes, developing essential skills and knowledge of civil servants and, improving; management of public service delivery.

With this in mind, the Marines need to set their sights at how to best support the governance effort, and the ideal way to do that is to expand the security zone in districts and to set the stage for transition of lead security responsibility. What Marines can therefore most affect is the development of AUP—from recruiting them (with the help of the DSTs and local Afghan civil, tribal, and religious leaders) and sending them to formal schooling at JSAS, to welcoming them back to their districts along with local Afghan officials and elders, to partnering with and thoroughly training them to become the best police in the country.

If the Marines have learned anything from their experience in al-Anbar Province in Iraq, it is the necessity of achieving security first. One cannot win where the native population is intimidated, threatened, and abused by insurgents. Moreover, the Marines' superb combat forces constitute the security blanket that provides the necessary time—even as little as one year or 18 months—to get the police forces trained and in place. It might seem counterintuitive at first, but the U.S. Marines in Afghan need to return to their "Smedley Butler roots" and his training of the Haitian gendarmerie in the earlier part of the last century. We should realize that the training of indigenous police forces is part of Marine Corps history, and it should be done again. Indigenous police are indeed the cornerstone and bedrock of the rule of law in a society; they are the first rung on the national security ladder. Conversely, the Taliban largely offers death, destruction of schools, tyranny, ignorance, and poverty. One of the reasons that local Afghans have told us that they have sometimes sided with the Taliban "shadow governments," however, is that in the absence of any GIRoA capacity, the Taliban at least represent some minimal form of justice, as barbarous as it may be. Yet even the Afghans admit that the Taliban

largely enforce their "justice" through medieval, cultish fear, and Afghans—like all men—if given the choice of living in fear or free, will all choose to live in freedom.

The Marines of 2d MEB and their associated civilian counterparts have set the stage for success in southern Afghanistan through their valiant efforts during much of 2009. The 2010–11 time frame, though, is the period in which they should continue the emphasis on JSAS and should focus more and more on generating quality AUP and partnering with them to the greatest extent possible. Marines will also set high standards for these police. No underage men are allowed,¹¹ there is no tolerance for illegal drugs, and all of the police in the Marines AO will be systematically sent for formal schooling at JSAS. They must also strengthen the ethics training for the Afghan policemen. One of the many complaints from local Afghans against GIRoA is the graft, greed, and corruption of the Afghan security forces in the past, particularly the police. The Marines need to improve how the Afghan police view themselves within their society and with respect to their relations with the local population they serve. Along these lines, the Marines must also make aggressive attempts toward improving the Afghan policemen's general level of education, even basic civics, lessons on good governance, and rule of law. Nevertheless, the Marines must also be realistic and accept the fact that the finished product will not necessarily reflect a Western construct.

The police of 2050, just like the state of GIRoA in 2050, will largely rely on Afghans embracing institutions that fit with their cultural norms. What we, the Marines, need to focus on is training to win . . . now! Shooting and combat patrolling skills, basic ethics education and training, and confidence through experience on the ground, partnered with the world's finest warriors, will all

pave the path to success. If the Marines put in a maximum effort from now through the next 18 months, they will achieve victory, the successful transfer of responsibility to local security in many of the districts currently under the MEB's control, a plan for future transition of lead security responsibility in the remaining districts, and a long-term partnership between the government of the United States of America and the GIRoA to continue to develop more and more Afghan civilian government capacity.

Notes

Marine Corps Gazette 94, no. 7 (July 2010): 22–25. Reprinted with permission. Copyright *Marine Corps Gazette*.

1. *Field Manual 3-24*, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5, Counterinsurgency, Headquarters Marine Corps, Washington, DC, 2007.
2. *Afghanistan National Development Strategy: 1387-1391* (2008–13), Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Afghanistan National Development Strategy Directorate, Gul Khana Palace (Sederat), Kabul, 21 April 2008.
3. ANSF is an “umbrella” term that includes all Afghan Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defense forces.
4. Golestan and Bakwa Districts (Farah Province), Delaram District (Nimroz Province), and Now Zad, Nawa, Garmsir, and Rig Districts (Helmand Province).
5. Camp Shorabak is also the headquarters for the 3d Brigade, 205th Corps, of the ANA; the ANA unit closely partnered with the 2d MEB.

6. President Obama's speech at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, 1 December 2009.
7. After security, the basic needs of the Afghan people are typically clean water for human consumption and agricultural projects, education/schools, medical care, infrastructure, and a justice system.
8. An Arabic/Pashto word meaning “organization,” but roughly the equivalent of our Marine Corps term for table of organization.
9. Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>.
10. *Municipal Governance in Afghanistan: A Handbook*, Volumes I and II, published by USAID and funded by the Afghanistan Municipal Strengthening Program-International City/County Management Association (Kabul), March 2009.
11. All Afghan police recruits must be 18 years of age to apply for the AUP.

About the Authors

Lieutenant Colonel Patrick J. Carroll is an infantry and Middle East foreign area officer who served as a cultural and governance advisor, G-9 Civil Affairs Section, 2d MEB. He is employed by L-3 Communications Expeditionary Operations Branch. Chief Warrant Officer-5 Terry L. Walker is a Marine Corps gunner with more than 34 years of active duty service, with much of that time spent training indigenous forces. He served as the special advisor on ANSF training to the commanding general, 2d MEB. Walker is also employed by L-3 Communications Expeditionary Operations Branch.

President Barack H. Obama awards Sgt Dakota L. Meyer the Medal of Honor on 15 September 2011. Meyer is the first living Marine recipient of the Medal of Honor for actions in Iraq or Afghanistan. He and his family and friends gathered at the White House to commemorate his selfless service.

Photo courtesy of LCpl Daniel A. Wetzel





Remarks by the President Awarding the Medal of Honor to Sergeant Dakota Meyer

The White House
Office of the Press Secretary
For Immediate Release
15 September 2011

East Room
2:50 p.m. (EST)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, everybody. Please be seated. Thank you, Chaplain [Margaret G.] Kibben. Good afternoon, everyone. And on behalf of Michelle and myself, welcome to the White House.

It's been said that "where there is a brave man, in the thickest of the fight, there is the post of honor." Today, we pay tribute to an American who placed himself in the thick of the fight—again and again and again. In so doing, he has earned our nation's highest military decoration, the Medal of Honor. And we are extraordinarily proud of Sergeant Dakota Meyer. (Applause.)

Today is only the third time during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that a recipient of the Medal of Honor has been able to accept it in person. And we are honored to be joined by one of the

two other recipients—Sergeant First Class Leroy Petry, who is here.

I would point out something else—of all the Medal of Honor recipients in recent decades, Dakota is also one of the youngest. He's 23 years old. And he performed the extraordinary actions for which he is being recognized today when he was just 21 years old.

Despite all this, I have to say Dakota is one of the most down-to-Earth guys that you will ever meet. In fact, when my staff first tried to arrange the phone call so I could tell him that I'd approved this medal, Dakota was at work at his new civilian job on a construction site. He felt he couldn't take the call right then, because he said, "If I don't work, I don't get paid." (Laughter.) So we arranged to make sure he got the call during his lunch break. (Laughter.) I told him the news, and then he went right back to work. (Laughter.) That's the kind of guy he is. He also asked to have a beer with me, which we were able to execute yesterday.

Dakota is the kind of guy who gets the job done. And I do appreciate, Dakota, you taking my call. (Laughter.) The Medal of Honor reflects the gratitude of the entire nation. So we're joined here by members of Congress, including somebody from your home state, the Republican leader of the Senate, [Addison Mitchell] "Mitch" McConnell [Jr.]. We are joined here by leaders from across my administration, including Secretary of Veterans Affairs [Eric Ken] "Ric" Shinseki and Navy Secretary [Raymond Edwin] "Ray" Mabus, and leaders from across our Armed Forces, including the Commandant of the Marine Corps General James [F.] Amos.

We're honored to welcome Dakota's father, Mike, who's here; his extraordinary grandparents; and more than 120 of Dakota's family and friends, many from his home state of Kentucky. I want to welcome Dakota's comrades from the

Marine Embedded Training Team 2-8, and we are humbled by the presence of the members of the Medal of Honor Society.

Dakota, I realize the past two years have not been easy for you, retelling the story of that day and standing here today. You're a very modest young man. But, as you've said, you do it for a simple reason—retelling the story—because it helps you to honor those who didn't come home, and to remind your fellow Americans that our men and women in uniform are over there fighting every single day.

So that's how we'll do this today. It's fitting that we do so this week, having just marked the 10th anniversary of the attacks that took our nation to war. Because in Sergeant Dakota Meyer, we see the best of a generation that has served with distinction through a decade of war.

Let me tell the story. I want you to imagine it's September 8, 2009, just before dawn. A patrol of Afghan forces and their American trainers is on foot, making their way up a narrow valley, heading into a village to meet with elders. And suddenly, all over the village, the lights go out. And that's when it happens. About a mile away, Dakota, who was then a corporal, and Staff Sergeant Juan Rodriguez-Chavez, could hear the ambush over the radio. It was as if the whole valley was exploding. Taliban fighters were unleashing a firestorm from the hills, from the stone houses, even from the local school.

And soon, the patrol was pinned down, taking ferocious fire from three sides. Men were being wounded and killed, and four Americans—Dakota's friends—were surrounded. Four times, Dakota and Juan asked permission to go in; four times they were denied. It was, they were told, too dangerous. But one of the teachers in his high school once said, "When you tell Dakota he can't do something, he's is going to do it." (Laughter.)



Official U.S. Marine Corps photo

(From left to right) HM3 James R. Layton, USN, GySgt Aaron M. Kenefick, 1stLt Michael E. Johnson, and Sgt Dakota Meyer with Afghan National Army members in Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

And as Dakota said of his trapped teammates, “Those were my brothers, and I couldn’t just sit back and watch.”

The story of what Dakota did next will be told for generations. He told Juan they were going in. Juan jumped into a Humvee and took the wheel; Dakota climbed into the turret and manned the gun. They were defying orders, but they were doing what they thought was right. So they drove straight into a killing zone, Dakota’s upper body and head exposed to a blizzard of fire from AK-47s

and machine guns, from mortars and rocket-propelled grenades.

Coming upon wounded Afghan soldiers, Dakota jumped out and loaded each of the wounded into the Humvee, each time exposing himself to all that enemy fire. They turned around and drove those wounded back to safety. Those who were there called it the most intense combat they’d ever seen. Dakota and Juan would have been forgiven for not going back in. But as Dakota says, you don’t leave anyone behind.

For a second time, they went back—back into the inferno; Juan at the wheel, swerving to avoid the explosions all around them; Dakota up in the turret—when one gun jammed, grabbing another, going through gun after gun. Again they came across wounded Afghans. Again Dakota jumped out, loaded them up and brought them back to safety.

For a third time, they went back—insurgents running right up to the Humvee, Dakota fighting them off. Up ahead, a group of Americans, some wounded, were desperately trying to escape the bullets raining down. Juan wedged the Humvee right into the line of fire, using the vehicle as a shield. With Dakota on the guns, they helped those Americans back to safety as well.

For a fourth time, they went back. Dakota was now wounded in the arm. Their vehicle was riddled with bullets and shrapnel. Dakota later confessed, “I didn’t think I was going to die. I knew I was.” But still they pushed on, finding the wounded, delivering them to safety.

And then, for a fifth time, they went back—into the fury of that village, under fire that seemed to come from every window, every doorway, every alley. And when they finally got to those trapped Americans, Dakota jumped out. And he ran toward them. Drawing all those enemy guns on himself. Bullets kicking up the dirt all around him. He kept going until he came upon those four Americans, laying where they fell, together as one team.

Dakota and the others who had joined him knelt down, picked up their comrades and—through all those bullets, all the smoke, all the chaos—carried them out, one by one. Because, as Dakota says, “That’s what you do for a brother.”

Dakota says he’ll accept this medal in their name. So today, we remember the husband who loved the outdoors—Lieutenant Michael [E.] Johnson. The husband and father they called “Gunny

J”—Gunnery Sergeant Edwin [W.] Johnson [Jr.]. The determined Marine who fought to get on that team—Staff Sergeant Aaron [M.] Kenefick. The medic who gave his life tending to his teammates—Hospitalman Third Class James [R.] Layton. And a soldier wounded in that battle who never recovered—Sergeant First Class Kenneth [W.] Westbrook [USA].

Dakota, I know that you’ve grappled with the grief of that day; that you’ve said your efforts were somehow a “failure” because your teammates didn’t come home. But as your commander-in-chief, and on behalf of everyone here today and all Americans, I want you to know it’s quite the opposite. You did your duty, above and beyond, and you kept the faith with the highest traditions of the Marine Corps that you love.

Because of your Honor, 36 men are alive today. Because of your Courage, four fallen American heroes came home, and—in the words of James Layton’s mom—they could lay their sons to rest with dignity. Because of your Commitment—in the thick of the fight, hour after hour—a former Marine who read about your story said that you showed how “in the most desperate, final hours . . . our brothers and God will not forsake us.” And because of your humble example, our kids—especially back in Columbia, Kentucky, in small towns all across America—they’ll know that no matter who you are or where you come from, you can do great things as a citizen and as a member of the American family.

Therein lies the greatest lesson of that day in the valley, and the truth that our men and women in uniform live out every day. “I was part of something bigger,” Dakota has said, part of a team “that worked together, lifting each other up and working toward a common goal. Every member of our team was as important as the other.” So in keeping with Dakota’s wishes for this day, I want



Photo courtesy of Sgt James J. Shea

Stateside on his father's farm in Greensburg, Kentucky, Sgt Dakota Meyer shows the black wristbands he wears on each arm honoring the three Marines and the Navy corpsman who were killed in action in Ganjgal, Afghanistan, on 8 September 2009. Meyer said he will wear these wristbands for the rest of his life to honor his fallen friends. Meyer received the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest award for valor, from President Barack Obama in Washington, DC, on 15 September 2011, making him the first living Marine recipient since the Vietnam War.

to conclude by asking now-Gunnery Sergeant Rodriguez-Chavez and all those who served with Dakota—the Marines, Army, Navy—to stand and accept thanks of a grateful nation. (Applause.)

Every member of our team is as important as the other. That's a lesson that we all have to remember—as citizens, and as a nation—as we meet the tests of our time, here at home and around the world.

To our Marines, to all our men and women in uniform, to our fellow Americans, let us always be faithful. And as we prepare for the reading of

the citation, let me say, God bless you, Dakota. God bless our Marines and all who serve. And God bless the United States of America. Semper Fi. (Applause.)

MILITARY AIDE: The President of the United States, in the name of the Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Corporal Dakota L. Meyer, United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty, while



Photo courtesy of Cpl Ned Johnson

Sgt Dakota Meyer fires an MK12 during a visit with comrades while Cpl Adam Martinez, 1st Recon Battalion, spots for him on 27 September 2011. Meyer, a trained sniper, talked to the Marines about their last deployment before joining them on the firing line.

-serving with Marine Embedded Training Team 2-8, Regional Corps Advisory Command 3-7, in Kunar Province, Afghanistan, on 8 September 2009.

Corporal Meyer maintained security at a patrol rally point, while other members of his team moved on foot with two platoons of Afghan National Army and border police into the village of Ganjgal for a pre-dawn meeting with village elders. Moving into the village, the patrol was ambushed by more than 50 enemy fighters firing rocket-propelled grenades, mortars, machine guns from four to five positions on the slopes above. Hearing over the radio that four U.S. team members were cut off, Corporal Meyer seized the initiative.

With a fellow Marine driving, Corporal Meyer took the exposed gunner's position in a gun truck as they drove down the steeply terraced terrain in a daring attempt to disrupt the enemy attack and locate the trapped U.S. team. Disregarding intense enemy fire now concentrated on their lone vehicle, Corporal Meyer killed a number of enemy fighters with the mounted machine guns and his rifle—some at near point-blank range—as he and his driver made three solo trips into the ambush area.

During the first two trips, he and his driver evacuated two dozen Afghan soldiers, many of whom were wounded. When one machine gun became inoperable he directed the return to the

rally point to switch to another gun truck for a third trip into the ambush area, where his accurate fire directly supported the remaining U.S. personnel and Afghan soldiers fighting their way out of the ambush.

Despite a shrapnel wound to his arm, Corporal Meyer made two more trips into the ambush area in a third gun truck, accompanied by four other Afghan vehicles, to recover more wounded Afghan soldiers and search for the missing U.S. team members.

Still under heavy enemy fire, he dismounted the vehicle on the fifth trip and moved on foot to locate and recover the bodies of his team members. Corporal Meyer's daring initiative and bold fighting spirit throughout the six-hour battle significantly disrupted the enemy's attack and inspired the members of the command force to fight on. His unwavering courage and steadfast devotion to his U.S. and Afghan comrades, in the face of almost certain death, reflect a great credit upon himself and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

(The medal is presented.) (Applause.)

CHAPLAIN KIBBEN: Let us close in prayer: God, may this ceremony serve as a reminder of the responsibility that comes with receiving the grace gift of freedom. And as we depart this hallowed hall and return to our daily lives, we pray that you would ennoble and enable us, that when called up we would recall the resolute fearlessness of Sergeant Dakota Meyer and all those who wear the stars of valor, and live up to our responsibilities to bring honor to You and to this country.

It is in your holy name we pray. Amen.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all for joining us here today. We are grateful for Dakota. We are grateful for all our men and women in uniform. And I hope that all of you have not only been inspired by this ceremony, but also will enjoy the hospitality of the White House. I hear the food is pretty good. (Laughter.)

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. (Applause.)

END

3:06 p.m. (EST)



SSgt Antonio P. Dominguez (left), a platoon commander for 2d Battalion, 3d Marine's Echo Company, uses an interpreter to tell one of the local elders when and where people can pick up the food brought by Echo Company Marines and Afghan National Police officers on 1 September 2009 at the bazaar in Delaram, Afghanistan.

Photo courtesy of LCpl John P. Hitesman



At Afghan Outpost, Marines Gone Rogue or Leading the Fight Against Counterinsurgency?

by Rajiv Chandrasekaran

The Washington Post, 14 March 2010

DELARAM, AFGHANISTAN—Home to a dozen truck stops and a few hundred family farms bounded by miles of foreboding desert, this hamlet in southwestern Afghanistan is far from a strategic priority for senior officers at the international military headquarters in Kabul. One calls Delaram, a day's drive from the nearest city, “the end of the Earth.” Another deems the area “unrelated to our core mission” of defeating the Taliban by protecting Afghans in their cities and towns.

U.S. Marine commanders have a different view of the dusty, desolate landscape that surrounds Delaram. They see controlling this corner of remote Nimruz Province as essential to promoting economic development and defending the more populated parts of southern Afghanistan.

The Marines are constructing a vast base on the outskirts of town that will have two airstrips, an advanced combat hospital, a post office, a large convenience store, and rows of housing trailers stretching as far as the eye can see. By this summer, more than 3,000 Marines—one-tenth of the additional troops authorized by President [Barack H.] Obama in December—will be based here.

With Obama's July 2011 deadline to begin reducing U.S. forces looming over the horizon, the Marines have opted to wage the war in their own way.

"If we're going to succeed here, we have to experiment and take risks," said Brigadier General Lawrence D. Nicholson, the top Marine commander in Afghanistan. "Just doing what everyone else is doing isn't going to cut it."

The Marines are pushing into previously ignored Taliban enclaves. They have set up a first-of-its-kind school to train police officers. They have brought in a Muslim chaplain to pray with local mullahs and deployed teams of female Marines to reach out to Afghan women.

The Marine approach—creative, aggressive and, at times, unorthodox—has won many admirers within the military. The Marine emphasis on patrolling by foot and interacting with the population, which has helped to turn former insurgent strongholds along the Helmand River valley into reasonably stable communities with thriving bazaars and functioning schools, is hailed as a model of how U.S. forces should implement counterinsurgency strategy.

But the Marines' methods, and their insistence that they be given a degree of autonomy not afforded to U.S. Army units, also have riled many up the chain of command in Kabul and Washington, prompting some to refer to their area of operations in the south as "Marineistan." They regard the expansion in Delaram and beyond as contrary

to the population-centric approach embraced by General Stanley A. McChrystal, the U.S. and NATO commander in Afghanistan, and they are seeking to impose more control over the Marines.

The U.S. ambassador in Kabul, Karl W. Eikenberry, recently noted that the international security force in Afghanistan feels as if it comprises 42 nations instead of 41 because the Marines act so independently from other U.S. forces.

"We have better operational coherence with virtually all of our NATO allies than we have with the U.S. Marine Corps," said a senior Obama administration official involved in Afghanistan policy.

Some senior officials at the White House, at the Pentagon, and in McChrystal's headquarters would rather have many of the 20,000 Marines who will be in Afghanistan by summer deploy around Kandahar, the country's second-largest city, to assist in a U.S. campaign to wrest the area from Taliban control instead of concentrating in neighboring Helmand Province and points west. According to an analysis conducted by the National Security Council, fewer than 1 percent of the country's population lives in the Marine area of operations.

They question whether a large operation that began last month to flush the Taliban out of Marjah, a poor farming community in central Helmand, is the best use of Marine resources. Although it has unfolded with fewer-than-expected casualties and helped to generate a perception of momentum in the U.S.-led military campaign, the mission probably will tie up two Marine battalions and hundreds of Afghan security forces until the summer.

"What the hell are we doing?" the senior official said. "Why aren't all 20,000 Marines in the population belts around Kandahar city right now? It's [Taliban leader] Mullah Omar's capital. If you want to stuff it to Mullah Omar, you make progress in Kandahar. If you want to communicate to

the Taliban that there's no way they're returning, you show progress in Kandahar."

Marines Support Marines

Until earlier this month, McChrystal lacked operational control over the Marines, which would have allowed him to move them to other parts of the country. That power rested with a three-star Marine general at the U.S. Central Command. He and other senior Marine commanders insisted that Marines in Afghanistan have a contiguous area of operations—effectively precluding them from being split up and sent to Kandahar—because they think it is essential the Marines are supported by Marine helicopters and logistics units, which are based in Helmand, instead of relying on the Army.

Concern about the arrangement reached the White House. In early March, General David H. Petraeus, who heads Central Command, issued an order giving McChrystal operational control of Marine forces in Afghanistan, according to senior defense officials. But the new authority vested in McChrystal—the product of extensive negotiations among military lawyers—still requires Central Command approval for any plan to disaggregate infantry units from air and logistics support, which will limit his ability to move them, the defense officials said.

"At the end of the day, not a lot has changed," said a Marine general, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, as did several other senior officers and officials, to address sensitive command issues. "There's still a caveat that prevents us from being cherry-picked."

The Marine demand to be supported by their own aviators and logisticians has roots in the World War II battles for Guadalcanal and Tarawa. Marines landing on the Pacific islands did not receive the support they had expected from Navy ships and aircraft. Since then, Marine commanders have

insisted on deploying with their own aviation and supply units. They did so in Vietnam and in Iraq.

Despite the need to travel with an entourage, the Marines are willing to move fast. The Commandant of the [Marine] Corps, General James T. Conway, offered to provide one-third of the forces Obama authorized in December, and to get them there quickly. Some arrived within weeks. By contrast, many of the Army units that comprise the new troop surge have yet to leave the United States.

"The Marines are a double-edged sword for McChrystal," one senior defense official said. "He got them fast, but he only gets to use them in one place."

Marine commanders note that they did not choose to go to Helmand—they were asked to go there by McChrystal's predecessor, General David D. McKiernan, because British forces in the area were unable to contain the intensifying insurgency. But once they arrived, they became determined to show they could rescue the place, in much the same way they helped to turn around Anbar Province in Iraq.

They also became believers in Helmand's strategic importance. "You cannot fix Kandahar without fixing Helmand," Nicholson said. "The insurgency there draws support from the insurgency here."

"Mullahpalooza Tour"

The Marine concentration in one part of the country—as opposed to Army units, which are spread across Afghanistan—has yielded a pride of place. As it did in Anbar, the Corps is sending some of its most talented young officers to Helmand.

The result has been a degree of experimentation and innovation unseen in most other parts of the country. Although they account for half of the Afghan population, women had been avoided by military forces, particularly in the conservative south, because it is regarded as taboo for women to

interact with males with whom they are not related. In an effort to reach out to them, the Marines have established “female engagement teams.”

Made up principally of female Marines who came to Afghanistan to work in support jobs, the teams accompany combat patrols and seek to sit down with women in villages. Working with female translators, team members answer questions, dispense medical assistance and identify reconstruction needs.

Master Sergeant Julia L. Watson said the effort has had one major unexpected consequence. “Men have really opened up after they see us helping their wives and sisters,” she said.

The Marines have sought to jump into another void by establishing their own police academy at Camp Leatherneck in Helmand instead of waiting for the U.S. military’s national training program to provide recruits. The Marines also are seeking to do something that the military has not been able to do on a national scale: reduce police corruption by accepting only recruits vouched for by tribal elders.

“This is a shame culture,” said Terry [L.] Walker, a retired Marine drill instructor who helps run the academy. “If they know they are accountable to their elders, they will be less likely to misbehave.”

Then there’s what Marines call the “mullah-palooza tour.” Although most U.S. military units have avoided direct engagement with religious leaders in Afghanistan, Nicholson has brought over Lieutenant Commander Abuhena Saifulislam, one of only two imams [Islamic leader] in the U.S. Navy, to spend a month meeting—and praying with—local mullahs, reasoning that the failure to interact with them made it easier for them to be swayed by the Taliban.

At his first session with religious leaders in Helmand, the participants initially thought the clean-shaven Saifulislam was an impostor. Then

he led the group in noontime prayers. By the end, everyone wanted to take a picture with him.

“The mullahs of Afghanistan are the core of society,” he said. “Bypassing them is counterproductive.”

Reviving a Ghost Town

In December, columns of Marine armored vehicles punched into the city of Now Zad in northern Helmand. Once the second-largest town in the province, it had been almost completely emptied of its residents over the past four years as insurgents mined the roads and buildings with hundreds of homemade bombs. Successive units of British and U.S. troops had been largely confined to a Fort Apache-like base in the town. Every time they ventured out, they’d be shot at or bombed.

To Nicholson and his commanders, reclaiming the town, which the Marines accomplished within a few weeks, has been a crucial step in demonstrating to Helmand residents that U.S. forces are committed to getting rid of the Taliban. To other military officials in Afghanistan, however, the mission seemed contrary to McChrystal’s counterinsurgency strategy.

“If our focus is supposed to be protecting the population, why are we focusing on a ghost town?” said a senior officer at the NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] regional headquarters in Kandahar.

Nicholson notes that Helmand’s governor supported the operation, as did many local tribal leaders. Hundreds of residents have returned in recent weeks, and at least 65 shops have reopened, according to Marine officers stationed in Now Zad.

“Protecting the population means allowing people to return to their homes,” he said. “We’ve taken a grim, tough place, a place where there was no hope, and we’ve given it a future.”

Nicholson now wants Marine units to push through miles of uninhabited desert to establish

control of a crossing point for insurgents, drugs, and weapons on the border with Pakistan. And he wants to use the new base in Delaram to mount more operations in Nimruz [Province], a part of far southwestern Afghanistan [east of Iran] deemed so unimportant that it is one of the only provinces where there is no U.S. or NATO reconstruction team.

“This is a place where the enemy are moving in numbers,” he said, referring to increased Taliban activity along a newly built highway that bisects the province. “We need to clean it up.”

Nicholson contends that if his forces were kept only in key population centers in Helmand, insurgents would come right up to the gates of towns.

Other U.S. and NATO military officials say that what the Marines want to do makes sense only if there were not a greater demand for troops elsewhere. Because the Marines cannot easily be moved to Kandahar, U.S. and British military and diplomatic officials have begun discussions to expand the Marine footprint into more populous parts of Helmand with greater insurgent activity

where British forces have been outmatched. That shift could occur as soon as this summer, when a Marine-run NATO regional headquarters is established in Helmand.

Until then, however, Marine commanders want to keep moving.

“The clock is ticking,” Nicholson told members of an intelligence battalion that recently arrived in Afghanistan. “The drawdown will begin next year. We still have a lot to do—and we don’t have a lot of time to do it.”

Note

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About the Author

Rajiv Chandrasekaran is a senior correspondent and associate editor with *The Washington Post* and author of *Imperial Life in the Emerald City* (Knopf, 2006) about the American-led Iraqi reconstruction program.



President Barack H. Obama delivers remarks to an audience of Marines and sailors during a visit to Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Florida.

Photo courtesy of PO2 Kevin S. O'Brien, USN



Remarks by the President in an Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan

by President Barack H. Obama

The White House
Office of the Press Secretary
For Immediate Release
1 December 2009

**Eisenhower Hall Theatre, United States
Military Academy at West Point,
West Point, New York**

8:01 p.m. (EST)

THE PRESIDENT: Good evening. To the United States Corps of Cadets, to the men and women of our Armed Services, and to my fellow Americans: I want to speak to you tonight about our effort in Afghanistan—the nature of our commitment there, the scope of our interests, and the strategy that my administration will pursue to bring this war to a successful conclusion. It’s an extraordinary honor for me to do so here at West Point—where so many men and women have prepared to stand up for our security, and to represent what is finest about our country.

To address these important issues, it's important to recall why America and our allies were compelled to fight a war in Afghanistan in the first place. We did not ask for this fight. On 11 September 2001, 19 men hijacked four airplanes and used them to murder nearly 3,000 people. They struck at our military and economic nerve centers. They took the lives of innocent men, women, and children without regard to their faith or race or station. Were it not for the heroic actions of passengers onboard one of those flights, they could have also struck at one of the great symbols of our democracy in Washington, and killed many more.

As we know, these men belonged to al-Qaeda—a group of extremists who have distorted and defiled Islam, one of the world's great religions, to justify the slaughter of innocents. Al-Qaeda's base of operations was in Afghanistan, where they were harbored by the Taliban—a ruthless, repressive, and radical movement that seized control of that country after it was ravaged by years of Soviet occupation and civil war, and after the attention of America and our friends had turned elsewhere.

Just days after 9/11, Congress authorized the use of force against al-Qaeda and those who harbored them—an authorization that continues to this day. The vote in the Senate was 98 to nothing. The vote in the House was 420 to 1. For the first time in its history, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization invoked Article 5—the commitment that says an attack on one member nation is an attack on all. And the United Nations Security Council endorsed the use of all necessary steps to respond to the 9/11 attacks. America, our allies, and the world were acting as one to destroy al-Qaeda's terrorist network and to protect our common security.

Under the banner of this domestic unity and international legitimacy—and only after the Taliban refused to turn over Osama bin Laden—we

sent our troops into Afghanistan. Within a matter of months, al-Qaeda was scattered and many of its operatives were killed. The Taliban was driven from power and pushed back on its heels. A place that had known decades of fear now had reason to hope. At a conference convened by the UN, a provisional government was established under President Hamid Karzai. And an International Security Assistance Force was established to help bring a lasting peace to a war-torn country.

Then, in early 2003, the decision was made to wage a second war in Iraq. The wrenching debate over the Iraq War is well known and need not be repeated here. It's enough to say that, for the next six years, the Iraq War drew the dominant share of our troops, our resources, our diplomacy, and our national attention—and that the decision to go into Iraq caused substantial rifts between America and much of the world.

Today, after extraordinary costs, we are bringing the Iraq War to a responsible end. We will remove our combat brigades from Iraq by the end of next summer, and all of our troops by the end of 2011. That we are doing so is a testament to the character of the men and women in uniform. (Applause) Thanks to their courage, grit, and perseverance, we have given Iraqis a chance to shape their future, and we are successfully leaving Iraq to its people.

But while we've achieved hard-earned milestones in Iraq, the situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated. After escaping across the border into Pakistan in 2001 and 2002, al-Qaeda's leadership established a safe haven there. Although a legitimate government was elected by the Afghan people, it's been hampered by corruption, the drug trade, an underdeveloped economy, and insufficient security forces.

Over the last several years, the Taliban has maintained common cause with al-Qaeda, as they

both seek an overthrow of the Afghan government. Gradually, the Taliban has begun to control additional swaths of territory in Afghanistan, while engaging in increasingly brazen and devastating attacks of terrorism against the Pakistani people.

Now, throughout this period, our troop levels in Afghanistan remained a fraction of what they were in Iraq. When I took office, we had just over 32,000 Americans serving in Afghanistan, compared to 160,000 in Iraq at the peak of the war. Commanders in Afghanistan repeatedly asked for support to deal with the reemergence of the Taliban, but these reinforcements did not arrive. And that's why, shortly after taking office, I approved a longstanding request for more troops. After consultations with our allies, I then announced a strategy recognizing the fundamental connection between our war effort in Afghanistan and the extremist safe havens in Pakistan. I set a goal that was narrowly defined as disrupting, dismantling, and defeating al-Qaeda and its extremist allies, and pledged to better coordinate our military and civilian efforts.

Since then, we've made progress on some important objectives. High-ranking al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders have been killed, and we've stepped up the pressure on al-Qaeda worldwide. In Pakistan, that nation's army has gone on its largest offensive in years. In Afghanistan, we and our allies prevented the Taliban from stopping a presidential election, and—although it was marred by fraud—that election produced a government that is consistent with Afghanistan's laws and constitution.

Yet huge challenges remain. Afghanistan is not lost, but for several years it has moved backward. There's no imminent threat of the government being overthrown, but the Taliban has gained momentum. Al-Qaeda has not reemerged in Afghanistan in the same numbers as before 9/11, but they retain their safe havens along the

border. And our forces lack the full support they need to effectively train and partner with Afghan security forces and better secure the population. Our new commander in Afghanistan—General [Stanley A.] McChrystal—has reported that the security situation is more serious than he anticipated. In short: the status quo is not sustainable.

As cadets, you volunteered for service during this time of danger. Some of you fought in Afghanistan. Some of you will deploy there. As your commander-in-chief, I owe you a mission that is clearly defined and worthy of your service. And that's why, after the Afghan voting was completed, I insisted on a thorough review of our strategy. Now, let me be clear: there has never been an option before me that called for troop deployments before 2010, so there has been no delay or denial of resources necessary for the conduct of the war during this review period. Instead, the review has allowed me to ask the hard questions and to explore all the different options, along with my national security team, our military and civilian leadership in Afghanistan, and our key partners. And given the stakes involved, I owed the American people—and our troops—no less.

This review is now complete. And as commander-in-chief, I have determined that it is in our vital national interest to send an additional 30,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan. After 18 months, our troops will begin to come home. These are the resources that we need to seize the initiative, while building the Afghan capacity that can allow for a responsible transition of our forces out of Afghanistan.

I do not make this decision lightly. I opposed the war in Iraq precisely because I believe that we must exercise restraint in the use of military force, and always consider the long-term consequences of our actions. We have been at war now for eight years, at enormous cost in lives and resources.

Years of debate over Iraq and terrorism have left our unity on national security issues in tatters, and created a highly polarized and partisan backdrop for this effort. And having just experienced the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, the American people are understandably focused on rebuilding our economy and putting people to work here at home.

Most of all, I know that this decision asks even more of you—a military that, along with your families, has already borne the heaviest of all burdens. As president, I have signed a letter of condolence to the family of each American who gives their life in these wars. I have read the letters from the parents and spouses of those who deployed. I visited our courageous wounded warriors at Walter Reed [National Military Medical Center]. I've traveled to Dover [Air Force Base, Delaware] to meet the flag-draped caskets of 18 Americans returning home to their final resting place. I see firsthand the terrible wages of war. If I did not think that the security of the United States and the safety of the American people were at stake in Afghanistan, I would gladly order every single one of our troops home tomorrow.

So, no, I do not make this decision lightly. I make this decision because I am convinced that our security is at stake in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This is the epicenter of violent extremism practiced by al-Qaeda. It is from here that we were attacked on 9/11, and it is from here that new attacks are being plotted as I speak. This is no idle danger; no hypothetical threat. In the last few months alone, we have apprehended extremists within our borders who were sent here from the border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan to commit new acts of terror. And this danger will only grow if the region slides backward, and al-Qaeda can operate with impunity. We must keep the pressure on al-Qaeda, and to do that, we must

increase the stability and capacity of our partners in the region.

Of course, this burden is not ours alone to bear. This is not just America's war. Since 9/11, al-Qaeda's safe havens have been the source of attacks against London and Amman [Jordan] and Bali. The people and governments of both Afghanistan and Pakistan are endangered. And the stakes are even higher within a nuclear-armed Pakistan, because we know that al-Qaeda and other extremists seek nuclear weapons, and we have every reason to believe that they would use them.

These facts compel us to act along with our friends and allies. Our overarching goal remains the same: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to prevent its capacity to threaten America and our allies in the future.

To meet that goal, we will pursue the following objectives within Afghanistan. We must deny al-Qaeda a safe haven. We must reverse the Taliban's momentum and deny it the ability to overthrow the government. And we must strengthen the capacity of Afghanistan's security forces and government so that they can take lead responsibility for Afghanistan's future.

We will meet these objectives in three ways. First, we will pursue a military strategy that will break the Taliban's momentum and increase Afghanistan's capacity over the next 18 months.

The 30,000 additional troops that I'm announcing tonight will deploy in the first part of 2010—the fastest possible pace—so that they can target the insurgency and secure key population centers. They'll increase our ability to train competent Afghan security forces, and to partner with them so that more Afghans can get into the fight. And they will help create the conditions for the United States to transfer responsibility to the Afghans.

Because this is an international effort, I've asked

that our commitment be joined by contributions from our allies. Some have already provided additional troops, and we're confident that there will be further contributions in the days and weeks ahead. Our friends have fought and bled and died alongside us in Afghanistan. And now, we must come together to end this war successfully. For what's at stake is not simply a test of NATO's credibility—what's at stake is the security of our allies and the common security of the world.

But taken together, these additional American and international troops will allow us to accelerate handing over responsibility to Afghan forces, and allow us to begin the transfer of our forces out of Afghanistan in July 2011. Just as we have done in Iraq, we will execute this transition responsibly, taking into account conditions on the ground. We'll continue to advise and assist Afghanistan's security forces to ensure that they can succeed over the long haul. But it will be clear to the Afghan government—and, more importantly, to the Afghan people—that they will ultimately be responsible for their own country.

Second, we will work with our partners, the United Nations, and the Afghan people to pursue a more effective civilian strategy, so that the government can take advantage of improved security.

This effort must be based on performance. The days of providing a blank check are over. President Karzai's inauguration speech sent the right message about moving in a new direction. And going forward, we will be clear about what we expect from those who receive our assistance. We'll support Afghan ministries, governors, and local leaders that combat corruption and deliver for the people. We expect those who are ineffective or corrupt to be held accountable. And we will also focus our assistance in areas—such as agriculture—that can make an immediate impact in the lives of the Afghan people.

The people of Afghanistan have endured violence for decades. They've been confronted with occupation—by the Soviet Union, and then by foreign al-Qaeda fighters who used Afghan land for their own purposes. So tonight, I want the Afghan people to understand—America seeks an end to this era of war and suffering. We have no interest in occupying your country. We will support efforts by the Afghan government to open the door to those Taliban who abandon violence and respect the human rights of their fellow citizens. And we will seek a partnership with Afghanistan grounded in mutual respect—to isolate those who destroy; to strengthen those who build; to hasten the day when our troops will leave; and to forge a lasting friendship in which America is your partner, and never your patron.

Third, we will act with the full recognition that our success in Afghanistan is inextricably linked to our partnership with Pakistan.

We're in Afghanistan to prevent a cancer from once again spreading through that country. But this same cancer has also taken root in the border region of Pakistan. That's why we need a strategy that works on both sides of the border.

In the past, there have been those in Pakistan who've argued that the struggle against extremism is not their fight, and that Pakistan is better off doing little or seeking accommodation with those who use violence. But in recent years, as innocents have been killed from Karachi to Islamabad, it has become clear that it is the Pakistani people who are the most endangered by extremism. Public opinion has turned. The Pakistani army has waged an offensive in Swat and South Waziristan. And there is no doubt that the United States and Pakistan share a common enemy.

In the past, we too often defined our relationship with Pakistan narrowly. Those days are over. Moving forward, we are committed

to a partnership with Pakistan that is built on a foundation of mutual interest, mutual respect, and mutual trust. We will strengthen Pakistan's capacity to target those groups that threaten our countries, and have made it clear that we cannot tolerate a safe haven for terrorists whose location is known and whose intentions are clear. America is also providing substantial resources to support Pakistan's democracy and development. We are the largest international supporter for those Pakistanis displaced by the fighting. And going forward, the Pakistan people must know America will remain a strong supporter of Pakistan's security and prosperity long after the guns have fallen silent, so that the great potential of its people can be unleashed.

These are the three core elements of our strategy: a military effort to create the conditions for a transition; a civilian surge that reinforces positive action; and an effective partnership with Pakistan.

I recognize there are a range of concerns about our approach. So let me briefly address a few of the more prominent arguments that I've heard, and which I take very seriously.

First, there are those who suggest that Afghanistan is another Vietnam. They argue that it cannot be stabilized, and we're better off cutting our losses and rapidly withdrawing. I believe this argument depends on a false reading of history. Unlike Vietnam, we are joined by a broad coalition of 43 nations that recognizes the legitimacy of our action. Unlike Vietnam, we are not facing a broad-based popular insurgency. And most importantly, unlike Vietnam, the American people were viciously attacked from Afghanistan, and remain a target for those same extremists who are plotting along its border. To abandon this area now—and to rely only on efforts against al-Qaeda from a distance—would significantly hamper our ability to keep the pressure on al-Qaeda, and create

an unacceptable risk of additional attacks on our homeland and our allies.

Second, there are those who acknowledge that we can't leave Afghanistan in its current state, but suggest that we go forward with the troops that we already have. But this would simply maintain a status quo in which we muddle through, and permit a slow deterioration of conditions there. It would ultimately prove more costly and prolong our stay in Afghanistan, because we would never be able to generate the conditions needed to train Afghan security forces and give them the space to take over.

Finally, there are those who oppose identifying a time frame for our transition to Afghan responsibility. Indeed, some call for a more dramatic and open-ended escalation of our war effort—one that would commit us to a nation-building project of up to a decade. I reject this course because it sets goals that are beyond what can be achieved at a reasonable cost, and what we need to achieve to secure our interests. Furthermore, the absence of a time frame for transition would deny us any sense of urgency in working with the Afghan government. It must be clear that Afghans will have to take responsibility for their security, and that America has no interest in fighting an endless war in Afghanistan.

As president, I refuse to set goals that go beyond our responsibility, our means, or our interests. And I must weigh all of the challenges that our nation faces. I don't have the luxury of committing to just one. Indeed, I'm mindful of the words of President [Dwight D.] Eisenhower, who—in discussing our national security—said, “Each proposal must be weighed in the light of a broader consideration: the need to maintain balance in and among national programs.”

Over the past several years, we have lost that balance. We've failed to appreciate the connection

between our national security and our economy. In the wake of an economic crisis, too many of our neighbors and friends are out of work and struggle to pay the bills. Too many Americans are worried about the future facing our children. Meanwhile, competition within the global economy has grown more fierce. So we can't simply afford to ignore the price of these wars.

All told, by the time I took office, the cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan approached a trillion dollars. Going forward, I am committed to addressing these costs openly and honestly. Our new approach in Afghanistan is likely to cost us roughly \$30 billion for the military this year, and I'll work closely with Congress to address these costs as we work to bring down our deficit.

But as we end the war in Iraq and transition to Afghan responsibility, we must rebuild our strength here at home. Our prosperity provides a foundation for our power. It pays for our military. It underwrites our diplomacy. It taps the potential of our people and allows investment in new industry. And it will allow us to compete in this century as successfully as we did in the last. That's why our troop commitment in Afghanistan cannot be open-ended, because the nation that I'm most interested in building is our own.

Now, let me be clear: none of this will be easy. The struggle against violent extremism will not be finished quickly, and it extends well beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan. It will be an enduring test of our free society and our leadership in the world. And unlike the great power conflicts and clear lines of division that defined the twentieth century, our effort will involve disorderly regions, failed states, diffuse enemies.

So as a result, America will have to show our strength in the way that we end wars and prevent conflict—not just how we wage wars. We'll have to be nimble and precise in our use of military power.

Where al-Qaeda and its allies attempt to establish a foothold—whether in Somalia or Yemen or elsewhere—they must be confronted by growing pressure and strong partnerships.

And we can't count on military might alone. We have to invest in our homeland security, because we can't capture or kill every violent extremist abroad. We have to improve and better coordinate our intelligence, so that we stay one step ahead of shadowy networks.

We will have to take away the tools of mass destruction. And that's why I've made it a central pillar of my foreign policy to secure loose nuclear materials from terrorists, to stop the spread of nuclear weapons, and to pursue the goal of a world without them—because every nation must understand that true security will never come from an endless race for ever more destructive weapons; true security will come for those who reject them.

We'll have to use diplomacy, because no one nation can meet the challenges of an interconnected world acting alone. I've spent this year renewing our alliances and forging new partnerships. And we have forged a new beginning between America and the Muslim world—one that recognizes our mutual interest in breaking a cycle of conflict, and that promises a future in which those who kill innocents are isolated by those who stand up for peace and prosperity and human dignity.

And finally, we must draw on the strength of our values—for the challenges that we face may have changed, but the things that we believe in must not. That's why we must promote our values by living them at home, which is why I have prohibited torture and will close the prison at Guantanamo Bay [Cuba]. And we must make it clear to every man, woman, and child around the world who lives under the dark cloud of tyranny that America will speak out on behalf of their human

rights, and tend to the light of freedom and justice and opportunity and respect for the dignity of all peoples. That is who we are. That is the source, the moral source, of America's authority.

Since the days of Franklin [Delano] Roosevelt and the service and sacrifice of our grandparents and great-grandparents, our country has borne a special burden in global affairs. We have spilled American blood in many countries on multiple continents. We have spent our revenue to help others rebuild from rubble and develop their own economies. We have joined with others to develop an architecture of institutions—from the United Nations to NATO to the World Bank—that provide for the common security and prosperity of human beings.

We have not always been thanked for these efforts, and we have at times made mistakes. But more than any other nation, the United States of America has underwritten global security for over six decades—a time that, for all its problems, has seen walls come down, and markets open, and billions lifted from poverty, unparalleled scientific progress, and advancing frontiers of human liberty.

For unlike the great powers of old, we have not sought world domination. Our union was founded in resistance to oppression. We do not seek to occupy other nations. We will not claim another nation's resources or target other peoples because their faith or ethnicity is different from ours. What we have fought for—what we continue to fight for—is a better future for our children and grandchildren. And we believe that their lives will be better if other peoples' children and grandchildren can live in freedom and access opportunity. (Applause)

As a country, we're not as young—and perhaps not as innocent—as we were when Roosevelt was president. Yet we are still heirs to a noble struggle for freedom. And now we must summon all

of our might and moral suasion to meet the challenges of a new age.

In the end, our security and leadership does not come solely from the strength of our arms. It derives from our people; from the workers and businesses who will rebuild our economy; from the entrepreneurs and researchers who will pioneer new industries; from the teachers that will educate our children and the service of those who work in our communities at home; from the diplomats and Peace Corps volunteers who spread hope abroad; and from the men and women in uniform who are part of an unbroken line of sacrifice that has made government of the people, by the people, and for the people a reality on this Earth. (Applause) This vast and diverse citizenry will not always agree on every issue—nor should we. But I also know that we, as a country, cannot sustain our leadership, nor navigate the momentous challenges of our time, if we allow ourselves to be split asunder by the same rancor and cynicism and partisanship that has in recent times poisoned our national discourse.

It's easy to forget that when this war began, we were united—bound together by the fresh memory of a horrific attack, and by the determination to defend our homeland and the values we hold dear. I refuse to accept the notion that we cannot summon that unity again. (Applause) I believe with every fiber of my being that we—as Americans—can still come together behind a common purpose. For our values are not simply words written into parchment; they are a creed that calls us together, and that has carried us through the darkest of storms as one nation, as one people.

America—we are passing through a time of great trial. And the message that we send in the midst of these storms must be clear: that our cause is just, our resolve unwavering. We will go forward with the confidence that right makes might, and

with the commitment to forge an America that is safer, a world that is more secure, and a future that represents not the deepest of fears but the highest of hopes. (Applause)

Thank you. God bless you. May God bless the United States of America. (Applause) Thank you very much. Thank you. (Applause)
END 8:35 p.m. (EST)

Appendix A:

Command and Staff List

Naval Expeditionary Task Force 58 (November 2001–February 2002)

Commanding General: BGen James N. Mattis
Deputy: Capt William E. Jezierski, USN (until January 2002)
Capt Kenneth M. Rome, USN
Chief of Staff: Col Peter T. Miller (until January 2002)
Col Ronnell R. McFarland

- N-1: SSgt Benny A. Rodriguez
- N-2: Lt Col Steven P. Martinson (until February 2002)
Maj Timothy J. Oliver
- N-3/5: Capt Richard Hascup, USN (until February 2002)
LtCol Clarke R. Lethin
- N-4: LtCol John J. Broadmeadow
- N-6: Maj Scott F. Stebbins

Attachments:*

Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 133 Detachment: LCdr Leonard W. W. Cooke, USN
[NMCB-133]

Task Force 64 (Australian Special Air Service): LtCol Peter Gilmore, ADF [TF-64]

Task Force K-Bar (Naval Special Warfare): Capt Robert S. Haward Jr., USN

I Marine Expeditionary Force Shock Trauma Platoon: Cdr Bruce C. Baker, USN

II Marine Expeditionary Force Shock Trauma Platoon: Cdr Robert P. Hinks, USN

21st Special Tactics Squadron Detachment: Capt Michael J. Flatten, USAF

*To present a comprehensive order of battle for the entire period covered by this anthology (2001–9) would require a volume unto itself. The goal of this appendix is to give as comprehensive a list as possible within the space provided. Consequently, not every attached unit is represented.

Amphibious Squadron 1 [COMPHIBRON 1]

Commodore: Capt William E. Jezierski, USN

15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) [15th MEU (SOC)]

(September 2001–January 2002)

Commanding Officer: Col Thomas D. Waldhauser

Executive Officer: LtCol Kevin P. Spillers

Sergeant Major: SgtMaj Hubert O. Caloud

S-1: Capt James A. McLaughlin

S-2: Maj James B. Higgins Jr.

S-3: LtCol Gregg P. Olson

S-4: Maj Mikel E. Stroud

S-6: Maj Stephen O. Vidaurri

Battalion Landing Team 1st Battalion, 1st Marines [BLT 1/1]

Commanding Officer: LtCol Christopher M. Bourne

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163 [HMM-163]

Commanding Officer: LtCol James K. LaVine

MEU Service Support Group 15 [MSSG-15]

Commanding Officer: LtCol Carl D. Matter

Amphibious Squadron 8 [PHIBRON 8]

Commodore: Capt Kenneth M. Rome, USN

26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) [26th MEU (SOC)]

(November 2001–March 2002)

Commanding Officer: Col Andrew P. Frick

Executive Officer: LtCol Gary R. Oles

Sergeant Major: SgtMaj William McKnight Jr.

S-1: Capt Darren S. Boyd

S-2: Maj Gregory G. Koziuk

S-3: LtCol Daniel D. Yoo

S-4: LtCol Andrew N. Killion

S-6: Maj David B. Parks

Battalion Landing Team 3d Battalion, 6th Marines [BLT 3/6]
Commanding Officer: LtCol Jerome M. Lynes

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365 [HMM-365]
Commanding Officer: LtCol Kevin M. Devore

MEU Service Support Group 26 [MSSG-26]
Commanding Officer: LtCol William M. Faulkner

13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) [13th MEU (SOC)]
(January 2002–May 2002)

Commanding Officer: Col Christopher J. Gunther
Executive Officer: LtCol Timothy W. Fitzgerald
Sergeant Major: SgtMaj Jeffrey A. Morin

S-1: Capt Heather J. Cotoia
S-2: Maj Joseph D. Sinicrop Jr.
S-3: LtCol Richard C. McMonagle
S-4: LtCol Joseph N. Raferty
S-6: Maj Robert M. Flowers

Battalion Landing Team 1st Battalion, 4th Marines [BLT 1/4]
Commanding Officer: LtCol Robert O. Sinclair

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 165 [HMM-165]
Commanding Officer: LtCol Gregg A. Sturdevant

MEU Service Support Group 13 [MSSG-13]
Commanding Officer: LtCol Rodman D. Sansone

2d Battalion, 8th Marines [2d Bn, 8th Mar]
(November 2003–May 2004)

Commanding Officer: LtCol Robert G. Petit
Executive Officer: Maj James D. Bracken
Sergeant Major: 1stSgt William F. Squires

22d Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) [22d MEU (SOC)]
(March 2004–July 2004)

Commanding Officer: Col Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr.
Executive Officer: LtCol Joseph E. George
Sergeant Major: SgtMaj George H. Mason II

S-1: Capt Marisa P. Serano
S-2: Maj Christopher L. Phelps
S-3: LtCol Michael P. Killion
S-4: Maj Mark D. Light
S-6: Maj William C. Berris (until June)
Maj Robert L. Shea

Battalion Landing Team 1st Battalion, 6th Marines [BLT 1/6]
Commanding Officer: LtCol Asad A. Khan

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 266 [HMM-266]
Commanding Officer: LtCol Joel R. Powers

MEU Service Support Group 22 [MSSG-22]
Commanding Officer: LtCol Benjamin R. Braden

Task Force Bobcat/2d Battalion, 5th Regiment, 3d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division (USA)**
Commanding Officer: LtCol Terry L. Sellers

3d Battalion, 6th Marines [3d Bn, 6th Mar]
(April 2004–December 2004)

Commanding Officer: LtCol Julian D. Alford
Executive Officer: Maj Peter D. Huntley
Sergeant Major: SgtMaj Michael S. Johnston

3d Battalion, 3d Marines [3d Bn, 3d Mar]
(November 2004–June 2005)

Commanding Officer: LtCol Norman L. Cooling
Executive Officer: Maj Patrick A. Beckett
Sergeant Major: SgtMaj William T. Stables

**Task Force Bobcat was assigned operational control (OPCON) to 22d MEU from 18 June to 10 July 2004.

2d Battalion, 3d Marines [2d Bn, 3d Mar]

(June 2005–January 2006)

Commanding Officer: LtCol Andrew R. MacMannis (until 15 July 2005)

LtCol James E. Donnellan

Executive Officer: LtCol Robert R. Scott

Sergeant Major: SgtMaj Robert J. Lafleur Jr.

1st Battalion, 3d Marines [1st Bn, 3d Mar]

(January 2006–June 2006)

Commanding Officer: LtCol James W. Bierman Jr.

Executive Officer: Maj Michael T. Miller

Sergeant Major: SgtMaj Michael D. Berg

24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) [24th MEU (SOC)]

(January 2008–November 2008)

Commanding Officer: Col Peter Petronzio

Executive Officer: LtCol Kent W. Hayes

Sergeant Major: SgtMaj Jessie J. Cordes

S-1: Capt Linda D. Long

S-2: Maj Carl L. McLeod

S-3: LtCol Matthew G. Trollinger

S-4: Maj Clifton B. Carpenter (until 31 August)

Maj Michael F. Olness

S-6: Capt Michael T. Hlad (until 31 August)

Maj David R. Stengrim

Battalion Landing Team 1st Battalion, 6th Marines [BLT 1/6]

Commanding Officer: LtCol Anthony M. Henderson

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365 (Reinforced) [HMM-365]

Commanding Officer: LtCol John C. Vara

Combat Logistics Battalion 24 [CLB-24]

Commanding Officer: LtCol Ricky F. Brown

2d Battalion, 7th Marines (Reinforced) [2d Bn, 7th Mar]/Task Force 2/7

(March 2008–November 2008)

Commanding Officer: LtCol Richard D. Hall

Executive Officer: Maj Lee G. Helton

Sergeant Major: SgtMaj Matthew B. Brookshire

Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force–Afghanistan [SPMAGTF–A]

(November 2008–May 2009)

Commanding Officer: Col Duffy W. White

Executive Officer: LtCol Patrick C. Byron

Sergeant Major: SgtMaj Paul G. McKenna

S-1: Capt Mark D. Nicholson

S-2: Maj John S. Davidson

S-3: LtCol Jeffrey C. Holt

S-4: Maj George W. Markert V

S-6: Maj Matthew D. McBroom

3d Battalion, 8th Marines (Reinforced) [3d Bn, 8th Mar]

Commanding Officer: LtCol David L. Odom

Aviation Combat Element

Commanding Officer: LtCol Richard T. Ostermeyer (until February 2009)

LtCol Michael E. Watkins

Combat Logistics Battalion 3 [CLB-3]

Commanding Officer: LtCol Michael J. Jernigan

2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade [2d MEB]

(May 2009–April 2010)

Commanding General: BGen Lawrence D. Nicholson

Deputy: Col George S. Amland

Chief of Staff: Col William P. McLaughlin

Sergeant Major: SgtMaj Ernest K. Hoopii

G-1: LtCol John W. Bicknell Jr.

G-2: LtCol Scott T. Derkach

- G-3: Col Eric M. Mellinger (until July 2009)
Col Michael P. Killion
- G-4: Col Christopher B. Edwards
- G-6: Col Allan M. Faxon

Command Element

Brigade Headquarters Group
Commanding Officer: LtCol Christopher L. Naler

Ground Combat Element

Regimental Combat Team 3 [RCT-3]
Commanding Officer: Col Duffy W. White

Regimental Combat Team 7 [RCT-7]
Commanding Officer: Col Randall P. Newman

Aviation Combat Element

Marine Aircraft Group 40 [MAG-40]
Commanding Officer: Col Kevin S. Vest

Marine Combat Service Support Element

Combat Logistics Regiment 2 [CLR-2]
Commanding Officer: Col John W. Simmons

Appendix B:

Unit List

U.S. Marines in Operation Enduring Freedom October 2001–December 2002

U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command

Embassy Security¹

3d Battalion, 8th Marines [3d Bn, 8th Mar]

3d Battalion, 6th Marines [3d Bn, 6th Mar]

Marine All-Weather Fighter Attack Squadron 121 [VMFA(AW)-121]²

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 212 (-) (Reinforced) [VMFA-212]³

Marine Attack Squadron 513 (-) (Reinforced) [VMA-513]⁴

Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 234 (-) [VMGR-234]⁵

Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 352 (-) [VMGR-352]

Marine Air Control Squadron 2 (-) (Reinforced) [MACS-2]⁶

Marine Air Control Squadron 4 (-) [MACS-4]⁷

United States Naval Forces Central Command/U.S. Fifth Fleet

Naval Expeditionary Task Force 58 [TF-58]

15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) [15th MEU (SOC)]

Command Element

Battalion Landing Team 1st Battalion, 1st Marines [BLT 1/1]

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163 (Reinforced) [HMM-163]

Marine Expeditionary Unit Service Support Group 15 [MSSG-15]

26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) [26th MEU (SOC)]

Command Element

Battalion Landing Team 3d Battalion, 6th Marines [BLT 3/6]

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365 (Reinforced) [HMM-365]

Marine Expeditionary Unit Service Support Group 26 [MSSG-26]

USS *Theodore Roosevelt* [CVN 71], Carrier Air Wing 1 [CVW-1]

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 251 [VMFA-251]

USS *John C. Stennis* [CVN 74], Carrier Air Wing 9 [CVW-9]
Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 314 [VMFA-314]

Combined Joint Task Force Mountain [CJTF-Mountain]

13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) [13 MEU (SOC)]
Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 165 (Reinforced) [HMM-165]⁸

**U.S. Marines in Operation Enduring Freedom
2003**

U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command

Embassy Security
3d Battalion, 6th Marines [3d Bn, 6th Mar]
3d Battalion, 2d Marines [3d Bn, 2d Mar]

Combined Joint Task Force 180 [CJTF-180]

Marine Ground Units

2d Battalion, 8th Marines [2d Bn, 8th Mar]⁹

Marine Aviation Units

Marine Attack Squadron 513 (-) (Reinforced) [VMA-513]¹⁰
Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 773 (-) (Reinforced) [HMLA-773]¹¹

**U.S. Marines in Operation Enduring Freedom
2004**

U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command

Embassy Security
3d Battalion, 2d Marines [3d Bn, 2d Mar]
2d Battalion 6th Marines [2d Bn, 6th Mar]

United States Naval Forces Central Command/U.S. Fifth Fleet

22d Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) [22d MEU (SOC)]
Command Element
Battalion Landing Team 1st Battalion, 6th Marines [BLT 1/6]
Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 266 (Reinforced) [HMM-266]
Marine Expeditionary Unit Service Support Group 22 [MSSG-22]

Combined Joint Task Force 180/76 [CJTF-180/76]¹²

Marine Ground Units

2d Battalion, 8th Marines [2d Bn, 8th Mar]
Headquarters Company, 6th Marines [HqCo, 6th Mar]¹³
3d Battalion, 6th Marines [3d Bn, 6th Mar]
3d Battalion, 3d Marines [3d Bn, 3d Mar]

Marine Aviation Units¹⁴

Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 773 (-) (Reinforced) [HMLA -773]¹⁵
Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 769 [HMH-769]
Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 462 [HMH-462]

U.S. Marines in Operation Enduring Freedom 2005

U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command

Embassy Security
2d Battalion, 6th Marines [2d Bn, 6th Mar]

Office of Security Cooperation-Afghanistan [OSC-A]

Embedded Training Team [ETT]¹⁶

Combined Joint Task Force 76 [CJTF-76]

Marine Ground Units

3d Battalion, 3d Marines [3d Bn, 3d Mar]¹⁷
2d Battalion, 3d Marines [2d Bn, 3d Mar]

Marine Aviation Units

Marine Air Control Squadron 2 [MACS-2]
Marine Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron 3 [VMAQ-3]
Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 773 (-) (Reinforced) [HMLA -773]
Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 462 [HMH-462]

U.S. Marines in Operation Enduring Freedom 2006

United States Naval Forces Central Command/U.S. Fifth Fleet

USS *Enterprise* [CVN 65], Carrier Air Wing 1 [CVW-1]

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 251(-) [VMFA-251]¹⁸

Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan [CSTC-A]

Embedded Training Team [ETT]¹⁹

Combined Joint Task Force 76 [CJTF-76]

Marine Ground Units

1st Battalion, 3d Marines [1st Bn, 3d Mar]

Marine Aviation Units

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365 (Reinforced) [HMM-365]²⁰

U.S. Marines in Operation Enduring Freedom 2007

United States Naval Forces Central Command/U.S. Fifth Fleet

USS *Enterprise* [CVN 65] Carrier Air Wing 1 [CVW-1]

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 251 [VMFA-251]

USS *Nimitz* [CVN 68] Carrier Air Wing 11 [CVW 11]

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 232 [VMFA-232]

Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan [CSTC-A]

Embedded Training Team [ETT]²¹

Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan [CJSOTF-A]

Company F, Marine Special Operations Command [Co F, MARSOC]

Company A, Marine Special Operations Command [Co A, MARSOC]

Company G, Marine Special Operations Command [Co G, MARSOC]

U.S. Marines in Operation Enduring Freedom 2008

Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan [CSTC-A]

Embedded Training Team [ETT]²²

Task Force 2/7

2d Battalion, 7th Marines (Reinforced) [2d Bn, 7th Mar]

Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 269 (-) [HMLA-269]²³

Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 466 (-) [HMH-466]

Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan [CJSOTF-A]

Marine Special Operations Team 5 [MSOT-5]

Company I, Marine Special Operations Command [Co I, MARSOC]

International Security Assistance Force, Theater Tactical Force [ISAF TTF]²⁴

24th Marine Expeditionary Unit [24th MEU]²⁵

Command Element

Battalion Landing Team 1st Battalion, 6th Marines [BLT 1/6]

Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365 (Reinforced) [HMM-365]

Combat Logistics Battalion 24 [CLB-24]

U.S. Marines in Operation Enduring Freedom 2009

U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command

Marine Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron 1 [VMAQ-1]

Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan [CSTC-A]

Embedded Training Team [ETT]²⁶

Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan [CJSOTF-A]

Company D, Marine Special Operations Command [Co D, MSOC]

Company I, Marine Special Operations Command [Co I, MSOC]

International Security Assistance Force, Regional Command-South [ISAF RC-S]

Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force-Afghanistan [SPMAGTF-A]

Command Element

3d Marine Regiment Headquarters
Battery D, 2d Battalion, 14th Marines [Btry D, 2d Bn, 14th Mar]²⁷

Marine Ground Combat Element

3d Battalion, 8th Marines (Reinforced) [3d Bn, 8th Mar]

Marine Aviation Combat Element²⁸

Marine Wing Headquarters Squadron 3 (-) [MWHS-3]
Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 466(-) [HMH-466]
Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 252 (-) [VMGR-252]
Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 269 (-) [HMLA-269]
Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 16 (-) [MALS-16]
Marine Wing Support Squadron 371 (-) [MWSS 371]

Marine Logistics Combat Element

Combat Logistics Battalion 3 [CLB-3]

2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade-Afghanistan (-) (Reinforced) [2d MEB-A]²⁹

Command Element

2d MEB Brigade Headquarters Group
5th Battalion, 10th Marines [5th Bn, 10th Mar]
2d Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company (-) (Reinforced) [2d ANGLICO]

Marine Ground Combat Element

Regimental Combat Team 3 (Reinforced) [RCT-3]
1st Battalion, 5th Marines [1st Bn, 5th Mar]
2d Battalion, 8th Marines [2d Bn, 8th Mar]
2d Battalion, 3d Marines [2d Bn, 3d Mar]
3d Battalion, 11th Marines [3d Bn, 11th Mar]
2d Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion [2d LAR]
1st Combat Engineer Battalion [1st CEB]

Marine Aviation Combat Element

Marine Aircraft Group 40 [MAG-40]
Marine Air Control Group 28 (-) [MACG-28]
Marine Attack Squadron 214 [VMA-214]
Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 362 [HMH-362]
Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 772 (-) (Reinforced) [HMH-772 (-) Rein]

Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 352 (-) [VMGR-352]
Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 169 (-) [HMLA-169]
Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 2 (-) [VMU-2]
Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 40 [MALS-40]
Marine Wing Support Squadron 371 [MWSS-371]

Marine Logistics Combat Element

Combat Logistics Regiment 2 [CLR-2]
Combat Logistics Battalion 8 [CLB-8]
8th Engineer Support Battalion [8th ESB]

Notes

1. The 4th MEB(AT) provided the sourcing for Task Force Kabul/Marine Security Force Kabul; it provided one company from the Antiterrorism Battalion on a rotating basis until 2005 for the U.S. embassy.
2. Squadron provided close air support for Operation Enduring Freedom from Manas, Kyrgyzstan.
3. Squadron provided Advanced Tactical Reconnaissance System (ATARS) and FAC(A) missions for OEF. Though based from al-Jaber, Kuwait, aerial refueling enabled the squadron to support missions from Kabul and Gardez in the north to the southern Pakistani border on missions that routinely exceeded 10 hours. VMFA-212 composited with VMFA(AW)-332 and elements of Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 12 (MALS-12). The squadron deployed eight McDonnell-Douglas F/A-18C Hornets and four Boeing F/A-18D Hornets. The F/A-18D aircraft allowed the squadron to support missions over Afghanistan using ATARS.
4. Bagram, Afghanistan.
5. Four plane detachments deployed beginning in November 2001 and provided assault support for the initial assault into Afghanistan and also for Operation Anaconda in early 2002. The detachments were based out of Jacobabad, Pakistan, and flew into Khandahar and Bagram.
6. MACS-2 operated detachments in Manas, Kyrgystan, from 2002 to 2003.
7. MACS-4 operated detachments throughout the region to provide positive air space control. Detachments operated from Karshi-Khanabad, Uzbekistan, and Khandahar, Afghanistan, among others.
8. During Operation Anaconda (4–26 March 2002), HMM-165 deployed with Task Force 165 to Bagram, Afghanistan, including 80 Marines, five Bell AH-1W Super Cobras, three Sikorsky CH-53E Super Stallion helicopters along with two Lockheed-Martin KC-130s and daily McDonnell Douglas AV-8B Harrier combat sorties from the USS *Bonhomme Richard* (LHD 6).
9. The 2/8 deployed in late November 2003 to relieve U.S Army Task Force 2-87 at Bagram, Afghanistan. It assumed three standing missions: Bagram Airfield security, CJTF-180 Bagram Airfield Quick Reaction Force, and security for mission support site in Asadabad.
10. Bagram, Afghanistan.
11. Ibid.
12. CJTF-180 transitioned to CJTF-76 in April 2004.

13. HqCo, 6th Marines, deployed to Afghanistan in late February and early March to provide command and control to various combat and operating forces in Bagram, Afghanistan.
14. Bagram, Afghanistan.
15. Squadrons were supported by detachments from MALS-42 and MWSS-471, 472, and 473.
16. Three embedded training teams deployed in 2005, each consisting of 16 Marines.
17. Marine Corps infantry battalions deployed from 2005 to mid-2006 and provided the core of Task Force KOA, which operated in the vicinity of Jalabad Airfield. They also provided support to Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Jalalabad, a joint civil-military operation (CMO).
18. Most of the squadron aircraft (nine) redeployed for 67 days from USS *Enterprise* to al-Asad Airbase in western Iraq, leaving only a division of aircraft (three) aboard ship. However, the squadron detachment still managed 187 sorties, totaling 493.5 hours in support of OEF as part of CVW-1.
19. The number of ETTs deployed rose from three to six by December 2006.
20. The AV-8B Harrier component of the 24th MEU's HMM-365 flew a short but productive stint in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. HMM-365 flew 136 combat missions over Afghanistan in just 13 days, dropping a total of 17 precision-guided bombs.
21. The Marine Corps provided 7 embedded training teams consisting of 16 Marines each to the Afghan National Army. One corps-level and six battalion-level teams to train and mentor the Afghan National Army.
22. Ibid.
23. Both detachments from HMLA-269 and HMMH-466 arrived in mid-August 2008; until that time, TF 2/7 was forced to rely on NATO aircraft for support. After TF 2/7 departed, both squadron detachments continued their deployment as part of the Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force–Afghanistan (SPMAGTF–A).
24. The commander for ISAF held 24th MEU as the theater tactical force for both Regional Command-South and Regional Command-West for the 2008 campaign named Operation Shamshir.
25. In addition to becoming the NATO main effort for the 2008 campaign season, from September to the end of October, the MEU provided the bridge and nucleus for the evolving Marine buildup of forces that would become SPMAGTF–A. The MEU command and aviation combat elements also provided support for TF 2/7 and HMLA-269/HMMH-466 assigned to support 2/7.
26. The Marine Corps provided seven embedded training teams consisting of 16 Marines each to the Afghan National Army. One corps-level and six battalion-level teams to train and mentor the Afghan National Army.
27. Battery D, 2d Battalion, 14th Marines, deployed to Afghanistan in general support of the SPMAGTF–A in January 2009. The deployment marked the first time that a Marine rocket artillery-equipped battery operated in Afghanistan. Capitalizing on the range and accuracy of the HIMARS system allowed the battery to be employed using split battery operations, a new concept at the time, with one section based at Delaram and the other at Camp Bastion.
28. The SPMAGTF ACE rotated squadrons with the following units, relieving those listed above: Marine Wing Headquarters Squadron 2 (-) [MWHS-2], Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 361 [HMH-361], Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 362 [HMH-362], Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 352 (-) [VMGR-352], Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 167 (-) [HMLA-167], and Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 26 (-) [MALS-26] later redesignated as MALS-40.

29. The 2d MEB–A conducted a transfer of authority from SPMAGTF–A on 29 May 2009. Due to continual rotation of both ground and aviation units, the 2d MEB order of battle most closely represents the MEB as it stood just prior to Operation Khanjar to secure major population centers in Helmand Province ahead of Afghan national elections from July to August 2009.

Appendix C:

Selected Terms and Abbreviations from Operation Enduring Freedom

ABV	(M1) Assault Breacher Vehicle
ACE	Aviation Combat Element
al-Qaeda	“The base”; an international militant Islamic terrorist organization
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANGLICO	Air-Naval Gunfire Liaison Company
ANP	Afghan National Police
AOR	Area of responsibility
ArCent	U.S. Army Forces Central Command
ARG	Amphibious Ready Group
AT	Antiterrorism
BLT	Battalion Landing Team
<i>burqa</i>	A loose enveloping garment worn by some Muslim women to cloak their faces and bodies in public places
CAAT	Combined Anti-Armor Team
CAG	Civil Affairs Group
CAS	Close Air Support
CATF	Commander Amphibious Task Force
CEB	Combat Engineer Battalion
CENTCOM	U.S. Central Command
CERP	Commander’s Emergency Response Program
CFLCC	Coalition Forces Land Component Command
CFACC	Coalition Forces Air Component Commander
CFMCC	Coalition Forces Maritime Component Command
CFSOCC	Coalition Forces Special Operations Component Command
CG	Commanding General
CJSOTF	Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force
CJTF	Combined Joint Task Force
CLB	Combat Logistics Battalion
CLF	Commander Landing Force
CLR	Combat Logistics Regiment

CMOC	Civil-Military Operations Center
COP	Combat Outpost
COIN	Counterinsurgency
ComdC	Command Chronology
ConPlan	Concept of Operations Plan
CSAR	Combat Search and Rescue
CSTC	Combined Security Transition Command
CVN	Aircraft Carrier, Nuclear (fixed-wing aircraft)
CVW	Carrier Air Wing
D-Day	Day on which operations are scheduled to commence
DASC	Direct Air Support Center
DOD	Department of Defense
DON	Department of the Navy
EODMU	Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit
ESB	Engineer Support Battalion
ETT	Embedded Training Team
FAC	Forward Air Controller
FAC(A)	Forward Air Controller (Airborne)
FARP	Forward Arming and Refueling Point
<i>fatwa</i>	Islamic religious ruling
FET	Female Engagement Team
FOB	Forward Operating Base
GBOSS	Ground-Based Operational Surveillance System
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
GMTI	Ground Moving Target Indicator
GRC	Gray Research Center
H-Hour	Hour when operation is scheduled to commence
HESCO	A multi-cellular wall system manufactured from wire mesh and lined with a heavy-duty material then filled with earth to provide a semi-permanent barrier for military installations
HIMARS	High Mobility Artillery Rocket System
HMH	Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron
HMLA	Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron
HMM	Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron
HMMWV (Humvee)	High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle

HQMC	Headquarters Marine Corps
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IO	Information Operations
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISI	The Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (Pakistan)
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JDAM	Joint Direct Attack Munition
JIC	Joint Intelligence Center
<i>jihad</i>	Holy war waged as an Islamic religious duty
JSTARS	Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System
<i>Kandak</i>	Afghan National Army Battalion
LAAD	Low Altitude Air Defense
LAV	Light Armored Vehicle
LTD	Laser Target Designator
LHA	Landing Helicopter Assault (general purpose amphibious assault ship)
LHD	Landing Helicopter Dock (multipurpose amphibious assault ship)
LD	Line of departure
<i>loya jirga</i>	Traditional meeting of tribal elders to solve problems
LPD	Landing Platform Dock (amphibious transport dock)
LPH	Landing Platform Helicopter (amphibious assault ship)
LSA	Logistics Support Area
LSD	Dock Landing Ship (amphibious assault ship)
LVS	Logistics Vehicle System
MACG	Marine Air Control Group
MACS	Marine Air Control Squadron
<i>madrassa</i>	Islamic religious school
MAG	Marine Aircraft Group
MAGTF	Marine Air-Ground Task Force
MALS	Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron
MarCent	U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command
MARSOC	Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command
MARCORSYSCOM	Marine Corps Systems Command
MCCDC	Marine Corps Combat Development Command
MCHD	Marine Corps History Division
MEB	Marine Expeditionary Brigade

MEF	Marine Expeditionary Force
MEU	Marine Expeditionary Unit
MICLIC	Mine-Clearing Line Charge
MLG	Marine Logistics Group
MPF	Maritime Prepositioning Force
MRAP	Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected
MSOB	Marine Special Operations Battalion
MSOT	Marine Special Operations Team
MSSG	Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) Service Support Group
MTVR	Medium Tactical Vehicle Replacement
<i>mujahideen</i>	Those who wage a jihad; holy warriors
<i>mullah</i>	Male religious teacher or leader who is schooled in Islamic law
MWHS	Marine Wing Headquarters Squadron
MWSS	Marine Wing Support Squadron
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NavCent	U.S. Naval Forces Central Command
nm	Nautical mile
NMCB	Naval Mobile Construction Battalion
ODA	Operational Detachment Alpha
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OP	Observation Post
OSC–A	Office of Security Cooperation–Afghanistan
PA	Public Affairs
<i>Pashtunwali</i>	A way of life and system of customary laws that stress honor above all else
PB	Patrol Base
PR	Public Relations
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
QRF	Quick Reaction Force
RC	Regional Command
RCT	Regimental Combat Team
RIP	Relief in place
RPG	Rocket-propelled grenade
Sangar	Used by British forces to describe a watchtower
Seabee	U.S. Navy Construction Battalion

SEAL	Sea, Air, and Land (U.S. Navy Special Operations force)
<i>sharia</i>	Islamic law
<i>shura</i>	A town hall-style council of decision making by consultation and deliberation
SIPRNET	Secret Internet Protocol Router Network
SOC	Special Operations Capable
SOF	Special Operations Forces (generic)
SPMAGTF	Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force
SORTS	Status of Resources and Training System
SWAN	Support Wide Area Network
Taliban	“Seekers, religious students”; an Islamic-based, Afghan political military organization that emerged during 1994 and that ruled large parts of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001
TF	Task Force
TIC	Troops in contact (with the enemy)
TTF	Theater Tactical Force
TOA	Transfer of authority
TOW	Tube-Launched, Optically Tracked, Wire-Guided Missile
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USA	United States Army
USAF	United States Air Force
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USMC	United States Marine Corps
USN	United States Navy
USNS	United States Naval Ship
USO	United Service Organizations
USS	United States Ship
VMA	Marine Attack Squadron
VMAQ	Marine Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron
VMFA	Marine Fighter Attack Squadron
VMFA(AW)	Marine All-Weather Fighter Attack Squadron
VMGR	Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron
VMM	Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron
VMU	Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron

Appendix D:

Chronology of Events, 2001–9

2001

- 11 September Nineteen militants associated with the Islamic extremist group al-Qaeda hijack four commercial airliners and carry out suicide attacks against targets in the United States. Two of the planes flew into the towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, a third plane hit the Pentagon just outside Washington, DC, and the fourth plane crashed in a field in Pennsylvania. Often referred to as 9/11, the attacks resulted in the death of more than 3,000 people, triggering major U.S. initiatives to combat terrorism.
- 15–17 September President George W. Bush convenes a war cabinet meeting at Camp David, Maryland, to review national security developments. The consensus is to negotiate with the Taliban, attack al-Qaeda, and then address other state sponsors of terrorism at a time of the administration's choosing. The group agrees that military options presented by Gen Henry H. Shelton, USA, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, are obsolete and that the Pentagon needs to pursue unconventional approaches. The State Department delivers an ultimatum to the Taliban, demanding they extradite Osama bin Laden.
- 7 October President Bush announces the start of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).
- 10 October The 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (15th MEU [SOC]) deploys to Pakistan in support of OEF.
- 18 October Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 251 became the first Marines to be engaged in combat in Afghanistan supporting OEF. The Marines, piloting F/A-18 Hornets, took off from the deck of the aircraft carrier USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71) and flew several bombing missions, including the destruction of a bridge in northern Afghanistan.
- 20 October Two CH-53 Super Stallion helicopters from the 15th MEU (SOC) execute a tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel (TRAP) to salvage the wreckage of a U.S. Army UH-60 Black Hawk that crashed in Pakistan during a raid on a Taliban compound the night before. The Black Hawk was abandoned on the return trip

when, while refueling, the Stallions came under enemy fire. The Marines returned to the refueling site and recovered the Black Hawk on 24 October.

- 3 November The 15th MEU (SOC), aboard the USS *Peleliu* (LHA 5), flies its first bombing missions as part of OEF. Harrier pilots with the 15th MEU (SOC) dropped 500-pound MK-82 bombs on Taliban and al-Qaeda targets located in southern Afghanistan.
- 22–24 November The 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit's (26th MEU), aboard the USS *Bataan* (LHD 5), amphibious ready group (ARG) arrive in the Arabian Sea after receiving orders to deploy from the Mediterranean Sea.
- 25 November The 15th MEU air assaults from amphibious shipping off the coast of Pakistan 400 miles inland to Afghanistan. Encountering no resistance, the MEU sets up a fortified base, Camp Rhino, at an airport south of Kandahar. The mission, code-named Swift Freedom, aimed to cut off incoming supplies and escape routes for the Taliban and al-Qaeda.
- 4 December Elements of the 26th MEU land in Afghanistan to reinforce the 15th MEU at Camp Rhino located south of Kandahar.
- 7 December Marines from the 15th MEU (SOC) engage a seven-vehicle convoy attempting to flee Kandahar. A firefight erupts when the first vehicle attempts to run a Marine roadblock and the passengers fire upon the Marines. The rest of the convoy heads in another direction only to be destroyed by supporting aircraft. The Marines suffered no casualties, while enemy casualty estimates varied between 50 and 150.
- 13 December Elements of the 15th and 26th MEUs secure the Kandahar International Airport after anti-Taliban forces flushed the Taliban out of the city just days before. Four days later, a Marine color guard at the airport raises an American flag, which had been sent and signed by rescue workers and friends and family of victims of the 11 September terrorist attacks.
- 17 December The U.S. embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, ceremoniously reopens as Marines raise the same flag that was hastily lowered by Marine security guards when the embassy was evacuated on 31 January 1989. A detention facility was set up at the Marine Corps base at Kandahar International Airport in Afghanistan to house suspected Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters.

19 December Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen James L. Jones, accompanied by Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, Alford L. McMichael, travels to Kandahar International Airport to visit Marines stationed in the area.

25 December Cpl Christopher T. Chandler, the Marine who lost his left foot in a mine explosion at Kandahar Airport on 16 December, becomes the first Marine to be awarded a Purple Heart during Operation Enduring Freedom.

2002

1 January The American flag is ceremoniously raised alongside the Afghanistan national flag as a display of strengthened U.S. and Afghan relations. The 26th MEU participated in the ceremony outside of the recently secured Kandahar International Airport.

9 January Seven Marine crewmen are killed when their Lockheed Martin KC-130R crashes near a forward operating base at Shamsi, Pakistan. The Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 352 (VMGR-352) Marines are the first to die in the global war on terrorism.

10 January Marines from the 26th MEU (SOC) take defensive positions and return fire at the Kandahar International Airport after shots were fired near the northern perimeter. The gunfire erupted shortly after a C-17 transport plane carrying 20 detainees en route to Camp X-Ray, Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, Cuba, departed.

18 January Marines relinquish control of the largest U.S. base in Afghanistan to the Army's 101st Airborne Division located at the Kandahar International Airport.

8 February The 26th MEU (SOC) completes its back load onto the *Bataan*. The MEU extended the perceived operational reach of a deployed amphibious force by conducting combat operations deep into northern Afghanistan at distances of 750 miles from naval shipping.

3 March At the direction of U.S. Forces Central Command, the 13th MEU forms Task Force 165 (TF-165) in support of Operation Anaconda in the Shah-i-Kot Valley near Gardez, Afghanistan. The task force included 80 Marines, five AH-1W Super Cobras, three CH-53E Super Stallion helicopters, and KC-130 Hercules aircraft in addition to daily AV-8B Harrier sorties from the deck of the USS *Bonhomme Richard* (LHD 6).

- 4 March Five AH-1W Cobras from the 13th MEU provide close air support during Operation Anaconda to Coalition Joint Task Force-Mountain.
- 24 March Marine LtCol Gregg A. Sturdevant, commanding officer of the 13th MEU (SOC)'s Aviation Combat Element, Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 165, is awarded the Bronze Star for "exceptionally meritorious achievement" while serving as the commanding officer of TF-165, in the Coalition Joint Task Force-Mountain at Bagram, Afghanistan, in direct support of Operation Anaconda. Thirteen other Marines from the unit were also presented awards from the U.S. Army. Six AH-1W Super Cobra pilots were awarded the Air Medal with combat "V" designation and seven Marines received the Army Commendation Medal.
- 26 March TF-165 concludes operations ashore in Afghanistan.
- 13 April About 100 members of the 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade-Antiterrorism (4th MEB-AT) return to Camp Lejeune after helping reopen the U.S. embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan.
- 15 April Six F/A-18D Hornets of Marine All-Weather Fighter Attack Squadron 121 (VMFA [AW]-121), "Green Knights," are the first U.S. aircraft to arrive at the Coalition air base in Kyrgyzstan in support of OEF.
- 18 June Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 212 (-) Reinforced (VMFA-212) completes a three-month deployment at Ahmed al-Jaber Air Base, Kuwait. The squadron flew missions over Afghanistan, which routinely exceeded 10 hours in length due to the extreme distances involved in transit from Kuwait to Afghanistan.
- 5 July AV-8B Harriers from the 22d MEU fly combat missions over Afghanistan from the amphibious assault ship USS *Wasp* (LHD 1).
- 11 September Members of the 4th MEB (AT) bury a piece of the World Trade Center on the grounds of the U.S. embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan.
- 20 September Task Force India, comprised mostly from Company I, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, return to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, after spending months providing security at the U.S. embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan. The Marines were part of 4th MEB (AT) and were relieved by Company L, 3d Battalion, 6th Marines.
- 2 October VMFA(AW)-121, the Green Knights, return to MCAS Miramar, California, after a more than five-month deployment to Manas, Kyrgyzstan.

__ October Six AV-8B Harriers from Marine Attack Squadron 513 (VMA-513), based out of Yuma, Arizona, deployed late in the month to Bagram Airfield, north of Kabul, provided close air support, armed reconnaissance, combat escort, and precision strike capability for American and Coalition units.

14 November A VMA-513 AV-8B Harrier joins other aviation assets in engaging enemy forces during a firefight near a U.S. special operations base.

2003

21 May Marines mistakenly shoot and kill four Afghan soldiers outside the U.S. embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan. The slain soldiers were part of a disarmament team unloading weapons at a collection depot in an intelligence agency complex across from the embassy. Conflicting reports claimed the Marines were returning fire after being fired upon. Embassy officials blamed the incident on “heightened tensions.”

1 October Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 773 (-) Reinforced (HMLA-773) arrives at Bagram, Afghanistan, for a seven-month deployment in support of CJTF-180. The squadron was later designated as Task Force Red Dog.

17 November HMLA-773 provides close air support for during Operation Mountain Resolve.

23 November Marines with 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, leave Camp Lejeune for a seven-month deployment to Afghanistan and become the first active duty Marine unit in Afghanistan since the 2001 campaign to topple the Taliban regime.

28 November Marines from 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, join the Coalition forces of CJTF-180 in pursuit of al-Qaeda and Taliban forces in Afghanistan.

1 December HMLA-773 provides close air support for elements of the U.S. Army’s 10th Mountain Division during Operation Avalanche.

4 December The 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, conduct relief in place with U.S. Army Task Force 2-87 to assume three standing missions: Bagram Airfield (BAF) Security, CJTF-180 BAF quick reaction force, and security for mission support site Asadabad.

14–16 December The 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, conduct Operation Ring Road to protect Afghan President Hamid Karzai during ceremonies to open the Ring Road from Kabul to Kandahar.

- __ December Company E (Rein), 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, supports Operation Winter Strike by establishing blocking positions and vehicle checkpoints near Asadabad in Kunar Province.
- 2004**
- 2 January Elements of 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, conduct a joint cordon-and-search raid on a suspected Taliban and drug trade suspect with FBI agents in the vicinity of Wardak Province.
- 16 January Elements of 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, conduct recovery of a weapons cache in Loy Rod located in Parwan Province.
- __ February Headquarters Company, 6th Marines, deploys to Afghanistan in late February and early March to provide command and control to various combat and operating forces based at Bagram Airfield.
- 12 March Operation Mountain Blizzard concludes. The 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, conducted supporting missions that began in January 2004. During the operation, the Coalition conducted 1,731 patrols and 143 raids and cordon-and-search operations. They killed 22 enemy combatants and discovered weapons caches with 3,648 rockets, 3,202 mortar rounds, 2,944 rocket-propelled grenades, 3,000 rifle rounds, 2,232 mines, and tens of thousands of rounds of small-arms ammunition.
- __ April HMLA-773 supports Operation Dragonfly by providing convoy escort, quick reaction force, and medevac escort.
- 10–13 April The 2d Battalion, 8th Marines (-) (Rein), conducts cooperative medical assistance (CMA) with Task Force Victory and Parwan PRT in Surobi, Jegdelek, and Dagona, Afghanistan.
- 14 April The 22d MEU (SOC) completes its move to Kandahar, Afghanistan, and begins operations as CJTF-180's main effort for Operation Mountain Storm. The operation was designed to preempt a long-anticipated Taliban "spring offensive" and help set the conditions for successful voter registration and national-level elections. The 22d MEU was redesignated as Task Force Linebacker with the addition of joint attachments.
- 25 April The 22d MEU commences Operation El Dorado to rapidly seize the Tarin Kowt valley from anti-Coalition militia. The MEU then established Forward Operating Base Ripley to support combat and civil-military operations in Oruzgan Province.

- __ June HMLA-773 is assigned tactical control (TACON) of three U.S. Army UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, marking the first time since the Vietnam War that a Marine squadron has operational control of a joint service aviation unit in combat.
- 1–18 June The 22d MEU (TF Linebacker) commences Operation Asbury Park in the Deh Chopan District of Zabul Province. The operation marks the heaviest sustained combat of the deployment over a period of 10 days.
- 3 June While on a cordon-and-knock operation in Zabul Province, SSgt Anthony L. Viggiani's Battalion Landing Team, 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, 22d MEU (SOC) destroys a cave occupied by three enemy fighters firing a machine gun at a Marine fireteam. Although wounded, SSgt Viggiani continues on in pursuit of the enemy, leading his Marines to eventually kill more than a dozen insurgents. For his actions, SSgt Viggiani received the Navy Cross.
- 21 June The 22d MEU (TF Linebacker) is granted a larger area of operations spreading into Deh Copan and Deh Rawod districts historically known for anti-Coalition militia activity. Task Force Bobcat (U.S. Army's 2d Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment) was under operational control of 22d MEU.
- 22 July The 22d MEU (SOC) redeploys out of Afghanistan.
- 1 August HMLA-773 engages an estimated 300 anti-Coalition militia fighters intent on over-running a remote border control point manned by some 75 Coalition and Afghan troops along the Pakistan/Afghan border. The timely arrival of Marine Super Cobras results in more than 140 enemy casualties and relief of the besieged garrison.
- 9 October The people of Afghanistan vote in massive numbers in the country's first democratic election.
- 31 October The 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, from MCAS Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, begin deploying to Afghanistan to relieve 3d Battalion, 6th Marines.

2005

- 7 February The 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, complete Operation Spurs. Marines inserted into different parts of the snow-covered Korangal Valley in northeastern Afghanistan to search for terrorists and provide the local villagers with medical care and supplies.

- 5 April The 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, conclude Operation Mavericks. The Marines successfully rounded up suspected insurgents and confiscated several weapons caches in the snow-covered mountains of eastern Afghanistan.
- 9 May Marines clash with a band of insurgents in eastern Afghanistan after receiving a tip about insurgents operating in Laghman, an opium-producing area 60 miles east of Kabul. The insurgents opened fire with small arms and rocket-propelled grenades before splitting into two groups. The five-hour fight left two Marines and two dozen enemy dead.
- 31 May The 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, return to the Tora Bora mountains in search of the Taliban and conduct civil-military operations as part of Operation Celtics.
- __ June The 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, relieve 3d Battalion, 3d Marines.
- 27 June U.S. Navy SEALs and the Army's 160th Special Operations Air Regiment conduct the opening phases of 2d Battalion, 3d Marines's Operation Red Wings to capture insurgent cell leader Ahmad Shah in Kunar Province. Friction integrating Special Forces and 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, leads the special operations task force to take over planning and command and control of the opening phases of Operation Red Wings. Tragically, shortly after its insert, a U.S. Navy SEAL fireteam was ambushed by Amad Shah's fighters, killing three of the four, and a rescue helicopter with 16 aboard was shot down trying to rescue the team.
- 13 August The 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, launch Operation Whalers again targeting insurgent cell leader Ahmad Shah in the remote Afghanistan Korengal Valley. The Marines' success helped secure the country ahead of the fall elections.
- 16–23 October The 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, conduct Operation Pil in the Watapor Valley in Kunar Province to help improve security and stabilize the local government.
- 12–22 November The 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, conduct Operation Sorkh Khar (Red Donkey) in Afghanistan's Korengal Valley to disrupt al-Qaeda-backed insurgents in their staging grounds near the Pakistan border.

2006

- 5 January The 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, deploy to Afghanistan in relief of 2d Battalion, 3d Marines.

- 11 April The 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, take part in Operation Mountain Lion, a brigade-size Afghan and U.S. operation in Kunar Province.
- 18 May The Marine Corps announces its plans to pull out the majority of its troops serving in Afghanistan. The 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, start arriving home from Afghanistan after completing a five-month deployment in support of OEF.
- 24 August The Thunderbolts of VMFA-251 redeploy from the USS *Enterprise* (CVN 65) into al-Asad Airbase, Iraq, leaving only 3 of the squadron's 12 aircraft aboard ship. The three-plane detachment continues shipboard operations and flies 187 sorties, totaling 493.5 hours in support of OEF while the rest of the squadron flew in support of OIF ashore in Iraq. At no other time in history did a Marine squadron support two campaigns simultaneously.
- 21 September The 24th MEU's Harriers launch from the deck of the USS *Iwo Jima* (LHD 7), flying 136 combat missions over Afghanistan in just 13 days and dropping a total of 17 precision-guided bombs.

2007

- 4 March Marines with Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC) open fire, killing at least eight Afghan civilians in eastern Afghanistan. Different versions of the events lead to tensions between U.S. forces and the local population, with the Marine unit being expelled from the country later in the month by the U.S. Army general in charge. The incident also sparked an investigation into whether the Marines responded with appropriate force to an ambush or if they had opened fire without provocation.
- 17 May The Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen James T. Conway, rebuke Army officials for offering premature apologies for the actions of special operations Marines after they were struck by a car bomb in Afghanistan on 4 March. The Marines' reaction to the attack is still under investigation by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, prompting Gen Conway to state, "As has historically been the case, a service member under investigation or undergoing trial is innocent until proven guilty. And too much in the terms of declaration of guilt and apologies has already been said." Lawyers for a few of the Marines under investigation also submitted formal letters to the Army requesting its leadership cease making prejudicial statements.

6 November VMFA-251 aboard the *Enterprise* supports OEF for a total of 10 days, flying 277.3 combat hours in 42 sorties.

17 November The 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion (1st MSOB), U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command, returns to Camp Pendleton, California.

2008

15 January Marine Corps officials announce that the 24th MEU and 2d Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, will deploy in spring 2008 to Afghanistan in response to a request for additional forces from the NATO-International Security Assistance Force commander.

29 January Testimony ends in a special court of inquiry into the allegations that a Marine special operations unit opened fire on Afghanistan civilians in March 2007, killing several people.

7 March The special court of inquiry commissioned to hear testimony regarding Marines killing 19 Afghani civilians in March 2007 delivers its report to LtGen Samuel T. Helland, commander of Marine Corps Forces, Central Command.

17 March The 24th MEU begins arriving in southern Afghanistan for a scheduled seven-month deployment in support of OEF.

29 April The 24th MEU launches Operation Azada Wosa to secure the Garmsir District, Helmand Province. BLT 1/6 storms into the Taliban-held town of Garmsir in the first major American operation in the region in years. Over the next 35 days, Marines fought the Taliban in more than 170 engagements.

23 May LtGen Helland decides not to bring criminal charges against two officers whose special operations unit was accused of killing 19 Afghanistan civilians in March 2007. The general made the decision after reviewing the findings of a special tribunal that had spent three weeks hearing testimony in the case in January.

28 May BLT 1/6 assaults the historic nineteenth-century British Jugroom Fort. Converted by the Taliban, the mud brick fort not only served as a headquarters but was also heavily fortified with tunnels, machine-gun bunkers, minefields, and IEDs. The day also saw Marine combat engineers employ the mine-clearing line charge (MICLIC) for the first time in Afghanistan to create a breach in the mud brick walls of the fort.

- 26 June GySgt John S. Mosser, team sergeant for Marine Special Operations Company H, 2d Marine Special Operations Battalion, comes under heavy fire while conducting a night-time combat reconnaissance patrol to apprehend a high value target and an enemy security element. The team comes upon two vehicles, one of which was blocking the path. The Marines dismount their vehicles only to come under intense enemy fire. Mosser braves enemy fire on multiple occasions to direct accurate return fire on enemy positions and drag wounded to a place of relative safety. For his actions, he received the Navy Cross in December 2009.
- 8 July While on foot patrol in Sangin District, Helmand Province, LCpl Richard S. Weinmaster, Company E, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, engages enemy positions with his squad automatic weapon when the patrol came under fire. He then spots two hand grenades thrown into the midst of his patrol. Without hesitation, he places himself between the grenades and his fireteam leader and several other Marines. Using himself as a shield, he prevents the fireteam leader from being hit by the deadly shrapnel though sustaining critical wounds himself. Despite his wounds, LCpl Weinmaster continues to engage the enemy with accurate fire, compelling the enemy to withdraw, until he finally collapses from his wounds. For his actions, he received the Navy Cross.
- 13 July Marines of ETT 5-3 and Afghan soldiers aid U.S. Army soldiers of the 503d Infantry Regiment in repelling an attack by about 200 insurgents on the small U.S. outpost at Vehicle Patrol Base Wanat in eastern Afghanistan. Cpl Jason D. Jones, who was subsequently awarded the Silver Star, and a fellow Marine sprint through enemy fire with machine guns and ammunition to repel the attack. Jones also sprints 35 yards through enemy fire in a separate action during the battle to rescue a seriously wounded Afghan soldier.
- 21 July The Taliban ambush elements of Company G, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, in Shewan, a known Taliban base of operations, in Farah Province, Afghanistan. During the ambush, then-LCpl Brady A. Gustafson, turret gunner in the lead mine-resistant, ambush protected (MRAP) vehicle, which is part of a four-vehicle mounted patrol, is hit by a rocket-propelled grenade. The impact incapacitates the driver and partially severs Gustafson's right leg. Despite his life threatening injury, he continues to man his M240B machine gun to engage enemy positions only yards away. While another Marine applies a tourniquet to his wound, Gustafson reloads his weapon, twice firing more than 600 rounds as the vehicles extracted themselves from the danger area. Not until the patrol reaches a safe area and the other Marines evacuate the burning vehicle does he allow himself to be treated and evacuated. For his actions, LCpl Gustafson later received the Navy Cross.

- __ August The Pentagon orders Task Force 2/7, comprised of 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, to extend their deployment an extra 30 days. Task Force 2/7 was the Marine Corps' first battalion-size unit assigned to train, mentor, and advise the Afghanistan National Police.
- 8 August Marines from 2d Force Reconnaissance Platoon and elements of Company G, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, engage in the Battle of Shewan in Farah Province. The platoon of Marines interrupt a meeting of Taliban commanders, inadvertently trapping them in their compound. The Marines are ambushed and outnumbered almost 8 to 1, facing some 250 insurgents who repeatedly attacked their position. Volleys of intense rocket-propelled grenades (RPG) and machine-gun fire and skillfully adjusted airburst mortar rounds disable one of the platoon's vehicles and trap several Marines in the kill zone. An intense eight-hour battle ensues after the initial engagement. Led by GySgt Brian M. Blonder, the Marines begin a series of flanking attacks that gain ground, forcing the Taliban out of the entrenched positions. Meanwhile, designated marksman Cpl Franklin M. Simmons makes 20 well-aimed shots that demoralize and defeat a company-size enemy RPG and machine-gun ambush by killing 20 enemy fighters despite intense return fire on his exposed position. At the end of the day, the Marines not only broke the enemy's hold on a key supply route in the Bala Baluk District, Farah Province, but also broke the enemy's spirit, forcing them to flee the battlefield weaponless while leaving behind more than 50 of their dead. For their actions, GySgt Blonder later received the Navy Cross and Cpl Simmons the Silver Star.
- 8 September U.S. Marines from the 24th MEU turn over responsibility for Garmsir in Helmand Province to the British and Afghans.
- 13 October Marines with the 24th MEU begin cycling out of Afghanistan after an eight-month deployment in support of OEF.
- 14 November Col Duffy W. White, 3d Marine Regiment commander, assumes command of Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force–Afghanistan from Col Peter Petronzio, 24th MEU.
- 26 November 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, relieve 2d Battalion, 7th Marines.
- 2009**
- 17 Feb Secretary of Defense Gates orders the deployment of the 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade (2d MEB) from Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, to Afghanistan with approximately 8,000 Marines in late Spring 2009.

- 22 March While on a foot patrol in the Now Zad District of Helmand Province, Cpl Michael W. Ouellette, Lima Company, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, is mortally wounded by the detonation of an IED. Despite his wounds, Cpl Ouellette calmly organizes his squad's reaction to enemy fire, calling in supporting fires and evacuation helicopters. After ensuring his assistant squad leader had control of the situation, he allows himself to be evacuated. For his action, he posthumously received the Navy Cross.
- 5 May Marines from Marine Wing Support Squadron 371 and sailors from Navy Mobile Construction Battalion 5 begin work on a 2.2-million-square-foot helicopter parking expansion at Camp Bastion in Afghanistan. The historic project was the largest airfield constructed of aluminum matting ever in a combat zone.
- 29 May Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB)–Afghanistan commanded by BGen Lawrence D. Nicholson assumes command from SPMAGTF–A commanded by Col Duffy W. White.
- 2 July Operation Khanjar conducts clearing operations in key population centers along the Helmand River valley in an effort to secure the local population ahead of national elections. Nearly 4,000 Marines and sailors from MEB–Afghanistan (MEB–A) constitute the bulk of the U.S. forces conducting the operation, along with approximately 650 Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) forces.
- 2 July Marine helicopters from Marine Aircraft Group 40 along with the U.S. Army's 82d Combat Aviation Brigade insert more than 2,000 Marines into the Helmand River valley in the Marines largest heliborne operation since Vietnam.
- 12 August MEB–A launches Operation Eastern Resolve II in the Now Zad District of Helmand Province in an effort to disrupt insurgent violence and intimidation campaigns ahead of provincial and national elections.
- 26 August LCpl Donald J. Hogan, Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, Regimental Combat Team 7, identifies an imminent command detonated IED attack against his squad while on a foot patrol in Helmand Province. He hurls himself into the nearest Marine to shield him from the effects and then places himself in the road to warn the remainder of the patrol. In the ensuing blast, LCpl Hogan suffers a mortal wound. For his actions, he was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross.

- 8 September Approximately 15 kilometers south in the village of Ganjgal, Kunar Province, Afghanistan, Embedded Training Team (ETT) 2-8, Regional Corps Advisory Command 3-7, joins with elements of ANA and Afghan Border Police for an operation to conduct a key leader engagement with village elders to discuss security development plans. As they approach the village, approximately 50 insurgents in well-fortified positions, ambush the patrol along a premeditated one-kilometer-long, U-shaped kill zone. Over the course of a six-hour firefight, Capt Ademola D. Fabayo, SSgt Juan Rodriguez-Chavez, and Cpl Dakota L. Meyer, without regard for their own personal safety, enter the kill zone four separate times to provide cover fire for Marines and Afghan soldiers fighting their way out of the ambush. On his fifth trip into the kill zone, Meyer moves on foot under heavy enemy fire to recover the bodies of four missing Marine advisors. For their actions, Capt Fabayo and SSgt Rodriguez-Chavez were presented with the Navy Cross by Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus in June 2011. In a separate ceremony, Meyer received the Medal of Honor from President Barack H. Obama in September 2011.
- 30 September HMH-772 (-) (Rein) provides assault support for Operation Azadi South by airlifting approximately 300 British troops into the Lakari Bazaar.
- 5 November Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 261 [VMM-261] becomes the first tiltrotor squadron to deploy to Afghanistan when it departs for Camp Bastion, Helmand Province.
- 1 December President Obama announces plans to send 30,000 additional troops to Afghanistan for a planned 18-month surge followed by a gradual drawdown.
- 4 December VMM-261 inserts 80 reconnaissance Marines into multiple landing zones in vicinity of Now Zad. Marines from 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, then storm the Taliban-controlled town during Operation Cobra's Anger.
- 7 December Responding to President Obama's surge plan, the Marine Corps announce the deployment of an additional 8,500 Marines and sailors to expand MEB-Afghanistan to a full Marine expeditionary force (MEF-Forward) composed of more than 19,400 Marines and sailors.

Appendix E:

Medal of Honor Citation

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pleasure in presenting the
MEDAL OF HONOR to

Corporal Dakota L. Meyer
United States Marine Corps

For service as set forth in the following

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving with Marine Embedded Training Team 2-8, Regional Corps Advisory Command 3-7, in Kunar Province, Afghanistan, on 8 September 2009. Corporal Meyer maintained security at a patrol rally point while other members of his team moved on foot with two platoons of Afghan National Army and Border Police into the village of Ganjgal for a pre-dawn meeting with village elders. Moving into the village, the patrol was ambushed by more than 50 enemy fighters firing rocket propelled grenades, mortars, and machine guns from houses and fortified positions on the slopes above. Hearing over the radio that four U.S. team members were cut off, Corporal Meyer seized the initiative. With a fellow Marine driving, Corporal Meyer took the exposed gunner's position in a gun-truck as they drove down the steeply terraced terrain in a daring attempt to disrupt the enemy attack and locate the trapped U.S. team. Disregarding intense enemy fire now concentrated on their lone vehicle, Corporal Meyer killed a number of enemy fighters with the mounted machine guns and his rifle, some at near point blank range, as he and his driver made three solo trips into the ambush area. During the first two trips, he and his driver evacuated two dozen Afghan soldiers, many of whom were wounded. When one machine gun became inoperable, he directed a return to the rally point to switch to another gun-truck for a third trip into the ambush area where his accurate fire directly supported the remaining U.S. personnel and Afghan soldiers fighting their way out of the ambush. Despite a shrapnel wound to his arm, Corporal Meyer made two more trips into the ambush area in a third gun-truck accompanied by four other Afghan vehicles to recover more wounded Afghan soldiers and search for the missing U.S. team members. Still under heavy enemy fire, he dismounted the vehicle on the fifth trip and moved on foot to locate and recover the bodies of his team members. Corporal Meyer's daring initiative and bold fighting spirit throughout the 6-hour battle significantly disrupted the enemy's attack and inspired the members of the combined force to fight on. His unwavering courage and steadfast devotion to his U.S. and Afghan comrades in the face of almost certain death reflected great credit upon himself and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

Barack H. Obama
President of the United States of America

Appendix F:

Selected Sources and Annotated Bibliography

(Selections in bold type appear in this anthology.)

Published Sources

Bleu, Christian. "The Afghanistan Analyst Bibliography, 6th Edition." PhD candidate, Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies (Middle East and Central Asia), The Australian National University, July 2011. <http://afghanistan-analyst.org/bibliography.aspx>.

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Bush, George W. "Address to the Nation on Operations in Afghanistan, 7 October 2001." *Selected Speeches of President George W. Bush 2001–2008*. http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected_Speeches_George_W_Bush.pdf.

Presidential speech to the nation announcing the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Cassidy, Robert M. *War, Will, and Warlords: Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, 2001–2011*. Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2012.

Author provides both a historical framework and an in-depth scholarly analysis of the insurgency on both sides of the Afghan/Pakistan border. It also looks at efforts and outcomes of Coalition actions to combat the insurgency to provide recommendations for future improvement.

Crecca, Thomas W. *United States Marine Corps Reserve Operations: 11 September 2001 to November 2003*. New Orleans, LA: U.S Marine Forces Reserve, 2005.

A pictorial history of U.S. Marine Reserve operations in the global war on terrorism.

Crews, Robert D., and Amin Tarzi, eds. *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.

The book is organized into a series of essays that explore the Taliban—its development, rise to power, fall after the U.S.-led campaign, and resurgence.

Darack, Edward. *Victory Point: Operations Red Wings and Whalers—The Marine Corps Battle for Freedom in Afghanistan*. New York: Berkley Trade, 2009.

The embedded reporter details 2d Battalion, 3d Marines' (2/3's), participation in Operations Red Wings and Whalers during its 2005 tour in Kunar Province.

DeLong, Michael, and Noah Lukeman. *Inside CentCom: The Unvarnished Truth About the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq*. Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2004.

This book by retired Marine LtGen Michael DeLong details CentCom's plans and inner workings to conduct the global war on terrorism after 9/11 from an insider's viewpoint.

Fay, Michael D., Ainsley Fay, and W. Stephen Hill. *Fire and Ice: Marine Corps Combat Art from Afghanistan and Iraq: Art Work*. Quantico, VA: History Division, Marine Corps University, 2007.

A booklet that displays the combat artwork of Marine reservist CWO2 Michael D. Fay. Most of the art depicts combat operations in Iraq; however, there are several renderings that depict Marines guarding the U.S. embassy in Kabul.

Friedman, Norman. *Terrorism, Afghanistan, and America's New Way of War*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2003.

The author discusses the rise of al-Qaeda, adapting the U.S. military to meet twenty-first century threats, and America's early response to 9/11, including Task Force 58 and Operation Anaconda.

Grau, Lester W., trans. *The Bear Went Over the Mountain: Soviet Combat Tactics in Afghanistan*. Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1996.

This discussion of Soviet tactics in Afghanistan is based on self-assessments and after-action reports at the company and battalion level arranged in a series of vignettes. The author built on an original work by the Soviet Frunze Military Academy and added additional commentary based on extensive conversations with veterans of the Soviet Union's Afghan campaign.

———. *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost; the Russian General Staff*. Michael A. Gress, ed. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002.

This text offers a complete history of the Soviet experience as written by the Soviet general staff and focused on the operational level of war.

Holmes-Eber, Paula, Patrice M. Scanlon, and Andrea L. Hamlen. *Applications in Operational Culture: Perspectives from the Field*. Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2009.

Through a series of essays, the publication stresses the importance of cultural awareness and incorporating it into operations based on Marine Corps experiences in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Jalali, Ali Ahmad, and Lester W. Grau. *The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War*. Quantico, VA: U.S. Marine Corps, Studies and Analysis Division, 1999.

This title provides an in-depth study of tactics from the perspective of the insurgent.

Jones, Seth G. *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2009.

The Rand Corporation political scientist argues that Afghanistan's political corruption and exploding drug trade could add America to the list of empires that failed in the Central Asian country.

Jones, Seth G., and Arturo Muñoz. *Afghanistan's Local War: Building Local Defense Forces*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2010. http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2010/RAND_MG1002.pdf.

The authors argue that the top-down security approach used by the Afghan central government is not effective and largely ignores existing local structures that could be leveraged by taking a bottom-up approach to engage the people and isolate insurgents.

Kilcullen, David. *Counterinsurgency*. Oxford University Press, 2010.

Kilcullen, one of world's leading authorities on combating insurgencies, was the key senior counterinsurgency advisor to Gen David H. Petraeus, USA, in Iraq and later an advisor to Gen Stanley A. McChrystal, USA, in Afghanistan. The book presents much of Kilcullen's work "as a unified body of thought" with updated notes as of late 2009.

Lowrey, Nathan S. *U.S. Marines in Afghanistan, 2001–2002: From the Sea*. Washington, DC: United States Marine Corps, History Division, 2011.

Lowrey covers the Marine Corps' initial participation in Operation Enduring Freedom. Focusing primarily on the development and rapid employment of the provisional Marine expeditionary brigade known as Naval Expeditionary Task Force 58, Lowrey provides a comprehensive look at Marine operations in Afghanistan from the seizure of Camp Rhino through Operation Anaconda in early 2002. The book also outlines later Marine support for U.S. and NATO operations from 2003 onward.

Luttrell, Marcus, and Patrick Robinson. *Lone Survivor: The Eyewitness Account of Operation Redwing and the Lost Heroes of SEAL Team 10*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2007.

Luttrell's account documents that of the sole survivor of the Navy SEAL team sent to take down an al-Qaeda leader in a Taliban stronghold in which 19 sailors and soldiers died trying to rescue the Navy SEAL team. Ed Darack, embedded reporter with 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, dismisses the book as it was "written in its entirety by a British writer, Patrick Robinson, who penned primarily military fiction titles. In an article written by Robinson in February 2010, he states that the Navy chose him to be the ghostwriter of *Lone Survivor* based on his series of novels involving SEALs."

Magnus, Ralph H., and Eden Naby. *Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx, and Mujahid*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998.

This title offers a history of Central Asia and Afghanistan through to modern times and a detailed account of this tribal society.

Malkasian, Carter, and Gerald Meyerle. *How Is Afghanistan Different from Al Anbar?* Alexandria, VA: CNA Corporation, 2009.

The authors highlight major differences between al-Anbar, Iraq, and southern Afghanistan and their impact on Marine Corps operations.

Meyerle, Jerry, Megan Katt, and James A. Gavrillis. *On the Ground in Afghanistan: Counterinsurgency in Practice*. Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press and CNA Corporation, 2012.

This study looks at how small units from differing services and Coalition forces adapted and defeated insurgents in remote parts of Afghanistan. Three vignettes about Marines detail Task Force 2/7's efforts in 2008, then battalion ops in Helmand Province in 2009, and finally Marine advisors embedded with ANA forces in Tagab Valley, east of Kabul, in 2008.

Meyerle, Jerry, Nilanthi Samaranayake, Mike Markowitz, Lon Waters, Hilary Zarin, Brian Ellison, Chris Jehn, and Bill Rosenau. *Conscription in the Afghan Army: Compulsory Service versus an All Volunteer Force*. Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analysis and Solutions, 2011. <http://www.cna.org/research/2011/conscription-afghan-army>.

The authors discuss the historical aspects of the Afghan military and current efforts to develop a national army. The final analysis argues that Afghanistan is best suited to developing an all-volunteer force vice a conscript army.

Munro, Gale, and Joan Thomas. *Afghanistan and Iraq: Combat Art: From the United States Navy and United States Marine Corps Combat Art Programs*. Washington, DC: Naval Historical Center, 2008.

Naylor, Sean. *Not a Good Day to Die: The Untold Story of Operation Anaconda*. New York: Berkley Books, 2005.

Naylor recounts the details of Operation Anaconda and the command-and-control issues with the operation.

Norman, Catherine. *What do Afghans want from the Police? Views from Helmand Province*. Alexandria, VA: CNA Corporation, 2012. <http://www.cna.org/research/2012/what-do-afghans-want-police-views-helmand-province>.

This study was conducted at the behest of Regional Command-Southwest (RC-SW) to make police training more effective and more accurately reflect Afghans values and needs. Marine leaders at RC-SW understood that the Western ideal of a police force is a foreign concept sure to lose support following a withdrawal of Coalition forces. The study's data came from information collected from Helmand Province in late 2010. It recommends focusing training to develop a literate and functional staff for district police chiefs, police engagement with the local population, and continued support for police trainers once the military withdraws.

Obama, Barack H. "Remarks by the President in an Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan, 01 December 2009." <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan>.

Presidential speech that announced the "surge" of an additional 30,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan.

———“Remarks by the President Awarding the Medal of Honor to Sergeant Dakota Meyer, 15 September 2011.” <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/09/15/remarks-president-awarding-medal-honor-sergeant-dakota-meyer>.

Presidential remarks during the award ceremony for Sgt Dakota Meyer whereby Meyer was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions in Kunar Province, Afghanistan, on 8 September 2009.

Perito, Robert M. “The U.S. Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: Lessons Identified.” *United States Institute of Peace Special Report*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2005. <http://www.usip.org/publications/us-experience-provincial-reconstruction-teams-afghanistan-lessons-identified>.

This report was created as part of USPI’s Afghanistan Experience Project. The report used interviews conducted with American and foreign officials, soldiers, and nongovernmental organizations that worked directly with PRTs and Marine battalions in Afghanistan.

Rashid, Ahmed. *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000.

This pre-9/11 study of the Taliban and Islamic fundamentalism explains its origins, its impact on Afghanistan, and how the country became the nerve center for Islamic terrorism.

Rosenau, William. *Acknowledging Limits: Police Advisors and Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*. Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press and CNA Corporation, 2011.

This work relates experiences, challenges, and limitations of the police training and mentoring program in Afghanistan from 2007 to 2009. The publication is organized in a series of 10 vignettes based on the experiences of British, U.S. Army, and U.S. Marine Corps advisors.

Schlosser, Nicholas J., and James M. Caiella, eds. *Counterinsurgency Leadership in Afghanistan, Iraq and Beyond*. Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2011.

Dr. Schlosser’s and Mr. Caiella’s work documents topics discussed at a 2009 symposium, “Counterinsurgency Leadership in Afghanistan, Iraq and Beyond.” Section topics focus on the development and importance of leadership at each level from company grade to general officer in combating insurgencies based on experiences in America’s recent wars.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Afghanistan Opium Survey, 2009*. New York, 2009. http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Afghanistan_opium_survey_2009_summary.pdf.

This annually revised report provides data on opium production in 2009, which centers around Helmand Province as a major source of income for the Taliban.

U.S. Army. *Afghanistan Provincial Reconstruction Team Handbook*. Handbook No. 11-16. Fort Leavenworth, KS: Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2011.

This handbook provides current U.S. government interagency lessons learned and the most effective practices for PRT administration in Afghanistan.

———. *Wanat: Combat Action in Afghanistan, 2008*. Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2010.

Wanat is a battle study detailing combat actions of U.S. Army soldiers and Marines from Embedded Training Team 5-3 along with Afghan National Army soldiers against approximately 200 insurgents forces at a small combat outpost in the Waygal Valley, Nuristan Province.

U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps. *Counterinsurgency*. FM 3-24, MCWP 3-33.5. Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army and Headquarters Marine Corps Combat Development Command, December 2006.

Counterinsurgency serves as a doctrinal manual that was developed by the U.S. Army and Marine Corps for conducting COIN. The author and the leading counterinsurgency expert, David Kilcullen, called it “the most important initiative” undertaken by the Services and sponsored jointly by Army Gen David H. Petraeus and Marine Corps Gen James N. Mattis.

U.S. Department of Defense. News briefing with Gen Conway from the Pentagon. 27 August 2008. <http://www.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=4279>.

This 2008 press conference by Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen James T. Conway covers the drawdown in Iraq and buildup of Marine Corps forces in Afghanistan that was originally proposed in 2007.

———. DOD News Briefing with MajGen Toolan via teleconference from Afghanistan. 16 June 2011. <http://www.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=4844>.

A 2011 press conference with RC-Southwest commander MajGen John A. Toolan about the 2011 campaign and transition to civilian/ANA security forces with RC-SW.

West, Bing. *The Wrong War: Grit, Strategy, and the Way Out of Afghanistan*. New York: Random House Inc., 2012.

West’s book argues that Afghanistan is not a good fit for the counterinsurgency strategy adopted by U.S. and Coalition forces. He also details the events that led to Sgt Dakota L. Meyers’ Medal of Honor. However, McClatchy DC News’ embedded field correspondent wrote firsthand accounts of that fateful day and disputes West’s version of events.

Wise Jr., James E., and Scott Baron. *The Silver Star: Navy and Marine Corps Gallantry in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Conflicts*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008.

The authors discuss the origins of the Silver Star Medal and list Marine Corps recipients with summaries of action and citation. At the date of publication, only four Marines thus far have received the medal from Operation Enduring Freedom.

Unpublished Sources

Albano, Major Lou. Transcript of interview by Operational Leadership Experiences in the global war on terrorism. Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combined Arms Research Library, 29 January 2009.

A project of the Combat Studies Institute, the Operational Leadership Experiences Interview Collection archives firsthand, multiservice accounts from military personnel who planned, participated in, and supported operations in the global war on terrorism. Albano's account details his experiences as a Marine Sikorsky CH-53E Super Stallion pilot during the seizure of Camp Rhino and follow-on operations in late 2001 to early 2002.

Barber, Capt Robert G. Transcript of interview by Marine Corps History Division. Quantico, VA: Oral History Collection, Marine Corps History Division, 10 September 2010.

Barber describes his experience as the Combat Logistics Battalion 3 (CLB-3) operations officer for SPMAGTF-A. The interview details the organization and global sourcing to field the logistics element of the SPMAGTF and also discusses tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs), such as "honesty traces" to counter IEDs. Honesty traces were a technique used by Marines in the field to trace their routes and potentially predict where insurgents might distribute IEDs.

Clinton Jr., Maj Thomas. Transcript of interview by Operational Leadership Experiences in the global war on terrorism. Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combined Arms Research Library, 12 March 2007.

Maj Clinton was deployed to Afghanistan in 2004 and led a 13-man embedded training team (ETT) to mentor 1st Battalion, 3d Afghan National Army Brigade.

Nicholson, BGen Lawrence D. Transcript of interview by Marine Corps History Division. Quantico, VA: Oral History Collection. Marine Corps History Division, 9 June 2010.

A wide-ranging interview with the 2d MEB-A commanding general about the development and employment of the MEB to Afghanistan. The interview covers many topics, including Nicholson's views on how Marine Corps amphibious warfare doctrine is still relevant even in a landlocked country like Afghanistan, COIN, logistics, and Operation Khanjar.

Runkle, LCdr Michael. Transcript of interview by Operational Leadership Experiences in the global war on terrorism. Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combined Arms Research Library, 17 April 2007.

LCdr Runkle recalls his time as the explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) officer in charge of a joint Marine/Navy EOD team at Kandahar International Airport.

Stengrim, Maj David. Transcript of interview by Operational Leadership Experiences in the global war on terrorism. Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combined Arms Research Library, 3 November 2010.

Stengrim served as the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit communications officer (S-6) during 2008 in support of OEF. Maj Stengrim discusses the MEU organization and the communications department's efforts to establish communications assets at forward operating bases in Afghanistan.

Vest, Col Kevin S. Transcript of interview by Marine Corps History Division. Quantico, VA: Oral History Collection, Marine Corps History Division, 3 December 2010.

Col Kevin S. Vest served as the ACE commander for 2d MEB–Afghanistan. This interview covers Operation Khanjar, the Marine Corps' largest heliborne operation since Vietnam, as well as the sourcing and deployment of the MAG.

U.S. Marine Corps. *Aviation Combat Element (ACE)-Forward (FWD) Battle Staff Operations: Lessons and Best Practices from 3d Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW) in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)*. Quantico, VA: Center for Marine Corps Lessons Learned.

Official document that describes many details of how 3d MAW staffed and integrated combined staff to support operations in Regional Command-Southwest. Lessons are broken down by functional area within the staff.

———. **Marine Light Attack Squadron 773 (-) Reinforced, Summary of Action, 1 October 2003–31 May 2005. Quantico, VA: Unit Award File Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division.**

The unit award files contain detailed information on unit-specific participation in various operations as well as chronological records of actions in the award summaries.

———. *Meyer, Dakota L.* Quantico, VA: Subject Files, Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division.

Files related to Sgt Meyer's service and actions related to him receiving the Medal of Honor.

———. *Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: Tactical Units with Strategic Impact.* Quantico, VA: Center for Marine Corps Lessons Learned.

This document offers observations and lessons based mainly on information from three PRTs primarily in southeastern Afghanistan.

———. *Report of the Afghanistan Marine Energy Assessment Team, December 2009.* Washington, DC, 2011. <http://www.worldcat.org/title/report-of-the-afghanistan-marine-energy-assessment-team/oclc/703167366>.

The Marine Energy Assessment Team (MEAT) report was driven by the Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC) to address the energy and logistical challenges of operating in austere environments with a pervasive asymmetric threat.

———. *USMC Tank Operations In Afghanistan: Delta Co, 1 Tank Battalion After Action Report.*

Quantico, VA: Center for Marine Corps Lessons Learned.

This report provides a detailed description of how the first U.S. main battle tanks to operate in-country successfully adapted to the counterinsurgency role.

———. Quantico, VA: Oral History Collection, Marine Corps History Division.

The Marine Corps Oral History Collection contains numerous interviews with current and retired Marines of varying grade and specialty. Databases can be searched and researchers can view a summary of the data contained in the interview, however, most are not yet transcribed.

———. *22d MEU Unit File*. Quantico, VA: Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division.

———. *24th MEU Unit File*. Quantico, VA: Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division.

The History Division Reference Branch contains a mix of primary and secondary source material related to specific unit awards, history, and deployments.

Articles

Alfonso, Sgt Juan D. “Afghanistan deployed aviation combat element performs above, beyond expectations.” Defense Video and Imagery Distribution System, 24 May 2009. <http://www.dvidshub.net/news/34018/afghanistan-deployed-aviation-combat-element-performs-above-beyond-expectations#.UnEg4u0gIqY>.

This article discusses the 2d MEB–Afghanistan aviation combat element of the MAGTF, providing the type/model/series breakdown of missions and units participating.

Allison, Dr. Fred H. “Bagram Nightmares.” *U.S. Marines in Battle, Afghanistan, 2001–2009: Anthology and Annotated Bibliography*. Quantico, VA: Marine Corps History Division, 45–53, 2014.

Article by Dr. Fred Allison covers the first AV-8B Harrier deployment to Bagram, Afghanistan. An edited version of this article was previously located at <http://www.sldinfo.com>.

———. **“Thunderbolts: Strike First Marine Corps Blow Against Taliban.”** *Leatherneck* 85, no. 11, 28–31, November 2002.

The article discusses VMFA-251 sorties over Afghanistan while based aboard USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71) in the opening days of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Ardolino, Bill. “On Patrol in Karamanda: Scenes from the War in Afghanistan.” *The Weekly Standard Online Edition*, 11 July 2010. <http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/patrol-karamanda>.

The embedded reporter follows 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, in northern Helmand Province.

Bailey, Timothy J. “Why Not Afghanistan?” *Marine Corps Gazette* 91, no. 8, 14–17, August 2007.

The author argues that “Afghanistan represents a perfect ‘small war’ situation—a type of combat for which Marines are exceptionally well suited.”

Baker, William T., and Mark L. Evans. "The Year in Review." *Naval Aviation News* 85, no. 5, 24–32, July/August 2003.

The article briefly describes Navy/Marine Corps contributions to Operation Anaconda.

Barno, LtGen David W. (USA). "Fighting 'The Other War': Counterinsurgency Strategy in Afghanistan, 2003–2005." *Military Review* 87, no. 5, 32–44, September/October 2007.

Gen Barno, USA, outlines changes to U.S. strategy in Afghanistan to create a counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign against al-Qaeda and Taliban remnants to allow national elections and reconstruction efforts to move forward followed by a summary of events and situational update as of 2007.

Biggio, Frank. "Afghanistan Can Be Won." *The Weekly Standard Online Edition*, 2 July 2010. <http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/afghanistan-can-be-won>.

This blog post was written by a Marine reservist who argues that the bottom-up implementation of COIN by Marines is working.

Brill Jr., Arthur P. "Afghanistan Diary, Corps Considerations: Lessons Learned in Phase One." *Seapower* 45, no. 4, 75–79, April 2002.

The author recounts the initial introduction of Task Force 58 into Afghanistan.

Brinkley, C. Mark. "Business as Usual?—Despite Predictions, Marine Action in War on Terror May Be Limited." *Marine Corps Times*, 8 October 2001.

This article reports the opinions of some analysts who wrongly predicted that the Marine Corps would play little part in Afghanistan due to its distance from the coast as a landlocked country.

Broberg, Scott E. "Are We Properly Prepared for Helicopter Operations in Afghanistan?" *Marine Corps Gazette* 86, no. 5, 70–74, May 2002.

The author discusses the capabilities and limitations of Marine Corps helicopters in Afghanistan.

Bumiller, Elisabeth. "Letting Women Reach Women in Afghan War." *The New York Times*, 6 March 2010. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/07/world/asia/07women.html?_r=0.

Bumiller covers the efforts of Female Engagement Teams to interact with "the other 50 percent of the Afghan population."

Burgess, Richard R. "Limiting Exposure." *Seapower* 54, no. 3, 40, March 2011.

This article discusses Marine Corps experiments with unmanned cargo delivery systems in Afghanistan, using the Kaman K-Max helicopter and the Boeing A160T Hummingbird unmanned aerial helicopter, to resupply isolated combat outposts vice relying on vulnerable vehicle convoys.

———. “Navy and Marine Corps Units Continue Hunt for Terrorists.” *Seapower* 45, no. 2, 19–21, February 2002.

The author discusses the Navy/Marine Corps team’s initial and continued contributions to the fight in Afghanistan during 2001–2.

———. “The Yankees are Coming.” *Seapower* 52, no. 11, 34, November 2009.

The article discusses the arrival of the new Bell UH-1Y Venom utility helicopter to Afghanistan.

Cannon, Christopher J., and Christian B. Peterson. “Expeditionary Logistics in the Mountainous Environment.” *Marine Corps Gazette* 88, no. 11, 30, 32, and 34, 2004.

The article discusses the logistical challenges that the 22d MEU Service Support Group faced in the mountainous terrain of central Afghanistan.

Carroll, LtCol Patrick J., and CW05 Terry Walker. “Victory in Afghanistan.” *Marine Corps Gazette* 94, no. 7, 22–25, July 2010.

The authors describe Joint Security Academy Shorabak (JSAS), a Marine Corps-led academy at Camp Shorabak, Helmand Province, where, in addition to core skills, the Marines teach marksmanship and combat patrolling to develop a police force capable of routine patrolling and defeating insurgents through superior tactics and training.

Cavan, Joshua, and Bob Bullard. “The Next Decade.” *Marine Corps Gazette* 88, no. 11, 21–23, November 2004.

This article outlines Marine Corps operations in Afghanistan.

Chandrasekaran, Rajiv. “At Afghan Outpost, Marines Gone Rogue or Leading the Fight Against Counterinsurgency?” *The Washington Post*, 14 March 2010. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/13/AR2010031302464.html>.

Better known as the “Marineistan article,” the author investigates Marine Corps counterinsurgency efforts and arguments to conduct the war as a MAGTF in relative autonomy compared with Army units. Chandrasekaran cites the Marine way of war as having “riled many up the chain of command in Kabul and Washington, prompting some to refer to their area of operations in the south as ‘Marineistan.’” They viewed Helmand Province as a Marine Corps fiefdom and sought to “impose more control over the Marines.”

———. **“Marines Launch Mission in Afghanistan’s South Focused on Security and Governance.” *The Washington Post*, 2 July 2009. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/07/01/AR2009070103202.html?hpid=topnews&utm_source=wordtwit&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=wordtwit.**

This article describes MEB–Afghanistan’s initial thrust into Helmand Province during Operation Khanjar (Strike of the Sword) ahead of Afghan elections.

Chivers, C. J. "Afghans Voice Their Fears Among Marja Campaign." *The New York Times*, 21 February 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/22/world/asia/22civilian.html>.

Chivers' article discusses a Marine/Afghan civilian "shura" in the wake of the Marine-led assault into Marja.

———. "Marines Do Heavy Lifting as Afghan Army Lags in Battle." *The New York Times*, 20 February 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/21/world/asia/21afghan.html?pagewanted=all>.

The author questions official assertions from Coalition headquarters in Kabul that the Afghan National Army "is planning the missions and leading both the fight and the effort to engage with Afghan civilians."

Cooke, LCdr Leonard W. W. "A Deployment To Remember: The Navy's Seabees in Afghanistan." *Seapower* 45, no. 10, 55–57, October 2002.

The article recounts the deployment of Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 133 to Afghanistan in support of Task Force 58 to provide a contingency engineering capability.

Cooling, Norman, Dale Alford, Chip Bierman, and James Donnellan. "Retooling for Afghanistan." *Marine Corps Gazette* 93, no. 10, 10–16, October 2009.

This article was written by battalion commanders previously deployed to Afghanistan.

Cuomo, Scott A. "Embedded Training Teams." *Marine Corps Gazette* 90, no. 6, 62–67, June 2006.

The author discusses problems with ETT selection, training, employment, and ways to improve their effectiveness.

Curvin, Cpl Michael. "Bomb Materials and Narcotics Seized in Afghanistan Bazaar." Defense Video and Imagery Distribution System, 23 July 2009. <http://www.dvidshub.net/news/36697/bomb-materials-and-narcotics-seized-afghanistan-bazaar>.

The article discusses Marine efforts to stem poppy production, which provides a major source of the Taliban's funding, and to interrupt IED networks.

Darack, Ed. "From Bridgeport to Blessing." *Marine Corps Gazette* 90, no. 8, 54–57, August 2006.

This freelance reporter, who later wrote about Operation Red Wings, shares his experiences going through mountain warfare training with 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, then on deployment to Afghanistan.

———. "Operation Red Wings." *Marine Corps Gazette* 95, no. 1, 62–67, January 2011.

Until 2008, Marine battalions most often deployed not as part of a MAGTF but as an infantry battalion integrated into a combined joint task force (CJTF). Darack's article details the friction between successive Marine units and Special Operations Forces sharing the same operational area and its contribution to the failure and loss of life during Operation Red Wings.

Decotiis, 2dLt Art G. “Le Petit Beourge du Decotiis.” *Marine Corps Gazette* 86, no. 7, 36–38, July 2002.

Decotiis discusses Kilo Company’s 1st Platoon defense in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

Drwiega, Andrew. “USMC and JHF(A) Unite in War on Taliban.” *Aviation Today*, 1 August 2010. http://www.aviationtoday.com/regions/mideast/USMC-and-JHFA-Unite-in-War-on-Taliban_70361.html.

The article discusses integration of UK rotary-wing aircraft into 3d MAW (FWD) in 2010.

Ducar, Matthew S., James B. Hunt, and James K. McBride. “Joint Aviation in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM V.” *Marine Corps Gazette* 88, no. 11, 35–37, November 2004.

The authors recount that success in Operation Enduring Freedom V was due, in part, to the joint aviation that Marines relied on in addition to their own organic aircraft.

Dunham, Oliver H. “Elections in Small Wars.” *Marine Corps Gazette* 93, no. 8, 46–51, August 2009.

Dunham details not only the importance of elections to establishing a legitimate government, but how the U.S. military can be better prepared to support them.

Dunlap Jr., Charles J. “Making Revolutionary Change: Airpower in COIN Today.” *Parameters* 38, no. 2, Summer 2008. <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/parameters/Articles/08summer/dunlap.pdf>.

Dunlap argues that, despite (COIN) FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5’s relative lack of emphasis on airpower, ground commanders came to rely on it extensively because of advances in precise targeting.

Falivene, Jason T. “A Tour in the Life.” *Marine Corps Gazette* 92, no. 3, 37–39, March 2008.

The article discusses effective command and control in combat from the perspective of a battalion S-6 (communications).

Fick, Nathaniel, and John Nagle. “The ‘Long War’ May Be Getting Shorter.” *The New York Times*, 20 February 2011. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/21/opinion/21nagl.html?_r=1.

The authors argue that U.S. COIN strategy has placed Afghanistan at a tipping point.

Hastings, Michael. “King David’s War.” *Rolling Stone*, 2 February 2011. <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/king-davids-war-20110202>.

The author critiques then-ISAF commander Gen David Petraeus’ efforts to implement COIN strategy in Afghanistan.

Henderson, Clayton. “Weapons Platoon in the Defense of Kandahar.” *Marine Corps Gazette* 86, no. 7, 42–45, July 2002.

Henderson discusses obstacles the platoon overcame to effectively employ the weapons platoon, while still adhering to traditional defensive fundamentals and crew-served weapons techniques.

Henderson, Kristin. “A Change in Mission: Marines Battle Insurgents in Afghanistan.” *The Washington Post Magazine*, 21 June 2009. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/12/AR2009061202123.html>.

The article focuses on Task Force 2/7’s 2008 deployment to Afghanistan with an embedded reporter with F Company, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines.

Hilburn, Matt. “Beans and Bullets.” *Seapower* 49, no. 8, 46–47, August 2006.

The 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines, experiment with distributed operations to test the latest in communication equipment to link various elements to higher and supporting fires. The experiment conducted under tactical conditions also highlighted logistical constraints where both the rugged terrain and the Taliban are considerations to conducting resupply operations.

———. “Onto the Battlefield.” *Seapower* 49, no. 8, 44–45, August 2006.

When 1st Platoon, Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, deployed to Afghanistan, it tested the Marine Corps’ new concept of distributed operations (DO) where squad-size units operate independently of each other while still linked to higher through advanced communications equipment.

Hodge, Nathan. “How To: Run an ‘Honesty Trace’ to Counter Roadside Bombs.” In Danger Room in Afghanistan Blog, *Wired Magazine Online Edition*, 25 August 2009. <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2009/08/how-to-run-an-honesty-trace-to-counter-roadside-bombs/#more-16382>.

A blog article about how former *Wall Street Journal* reporter turned Marine intel officer, 1stLt Matthew Pottinger, developed a system for CLB-3 using handheld GPS data to create “honesty traces.” The system allows a patrol/convoy to plot its actual path vice the planned route to look for areas that naturally canalize troops and that are likely ambush areas.

Hoffman, Maj Randall S. “The Way Ahead: Reclaiming the Pashtun Tribes through Joint Tribal Engagement.” In *Applications in Operational Culture: Perspectives from the Field*. Paula Holmes-Eber, Patrice M. Scanlon, and Andrea L. Hamlen, eds., 79–116. Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2009.

Maj Hoffman’s article is part of a larger work on the importance of understanding culture and incorporating that knowledge into current and future operations.

Hogberg, Col James A. “The Chai Patrols-Conducting Stability Operations in Afghanistan.” *U.S. Marines in Battle, Afghanistan, 2001–2009: Anthology and Annotated Bibliography*. Quantico, VA: Marine Corps History Division, 99–109, 2014.

Col Jim Hogberg, PRT commander in Helmand Province, reflects on lessons learned, successes, and difficulties experienced on his 2005 tour.

Holterman, Jay M. “The 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit’s Seizure of Camp Rhino.” *Marine Corps Gazette* 86, no. 6, 41–43, June 2002.

Jay Holterman is the assault flight leader for the six CH-53Es that executed the longest amphibious airfield seizure in the history of the U.S. Marine Corps.

Hough, Mike. "Aviation Command and Control Transformation." *Aviation Command and Control Transformation: Wings of Gold* 29, no. 3, 24 and 31, Fall 2004.

The author discusses the expeditionary nature of Marine forces, particularly how Marines from the 15th MEU's Marine Air Control Group 38 detachment were among the first in-country and enabled follow-on positive air space control for air assault forces into Camp Rhino.

Jackson, Joseph A. "Moving Artillery Forward: A Concept for the Fight in Afghanistan." *Fires*, 19–24, March–April 2011.

This article discusses the "artillery gap" that existed, especially early in the Afghan War, and argues for the adoption of a smaller 75mm mountain howitzer similar to those that saw service in WWII and the Korean War.

Jaffe, Gregg. "LtGen John Kelly, Who Lost Son to War, Says U.S. Largely Unaware of Sacrifice." *The Washington Post*, 2 March 2011. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/03/01/AR2011030106355.html>.

Gregg describes the personal loss of Gen Kelly along with the military's own worries that the American public is isolated and detached from both the war and the men and women of the Armed Services.

Jansen, John M., Nicolas Dienne, William T. Bufkin, James B. Sisler, et al. "The Tower of Babel: Joint Close Air Support Performance at the Operational Level." *Marine Corps Gazette* 87, no. 3, 33–38, March 2003.

The authors offer a discussion and critique of joint close air support (JCAS) performance in Afghanistan during Operation Anaconda by aviators from different Services.

Jarvis, James D. "Kabul, Afghanistan Marines Return to Reclaim Their Post." 26th MEU Public Affairs, 11 December 2001. <http://www.marines.mil/unit/26thmeu/Pages/2001/Kabul,%20Afghanistan%20Marines%20return%20to%20reclaim%20their%20post.aspx>.

Jarvis describes Marines from the 26th MEU and their return to the U.S. embassy that had been left shuttered for more than a decade.

Kemp, Robert E. "Local Governance and COIN in Eastern Afghanistan 2004–2008." *Military Review* 91, no. 1, 54–63, January/February 2011.

Kemp discusses local governance and PRTs in eastern Afghanistan during 2004–8, where Marine battalions and ETTs provided security for reconstruction efforts and trained Afghan security forces.

- Khan, Asad. "Pakistan—An Enduring Friend." *Marine Corps Gazette* 86, no. 6, 34–37, June 2002.
LtCol Asad L. Khan, who would later command BLT 1/6 during the 22d MEU's successful COIN operations in 2004, relates the importance of Pakistan's cooperation to transit from ship-to-shore movement of logistics.
- Kreisher, Otto. "Ethos of Energy Efficiency," *Seapower* 54, no. 6, 14, June 2011.
The article describes 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, actions in Sangin District, Helmand Province, while testing experimental renewable energy sources to reduce expeditionary forces reliance on fossil fuels, such as diesel, which are expensive and make easy targets for asymmetric attacks on vulnerable convoys.
- . "MARSOC Evolves." *Seapower* 53, no. 6, 10, June 2010.
The author discusses MARSOC's evolving role from its inception in 2006 to its current focus in Afghanistan training the ANA and protecting the civilian population.
- Kugler, Richard. "Operation ANACONDA in Afghanistan: A Case Study of Adaptation in Battle." In *Case Studies in Defense Transformation*, no. 5. Fort McNair, Washington, DC: National Defense University, 2007.
Among other aspects, Dr. Kugler's investigation highlights the competing chains of command and lack of coordination with regards to joint air assets as learning points that the U.S. military took away from the battle.
- Kummer, David. "MoonLancers." *Leatherneck*, 32–36, May 2012.
The article discusses VMFA-212's historic deployment as an F/A-18 Hornet composite squadron made up of two different type/model/series aircraft. It also details the squadron's little-known contributions to Operation Enduring Freedom from its base in Kuwait, which required a grueling nine-hour flight for each mission.
- Lamothe, Dan. "Ambush Survivor Up for Medal of Honor." *Marine Corps Times*, 8 November 2010. <http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/article/20101108/NEWS/11080310/>.
- . "MoH Nominee Says He Does Not Feel Like a Hero." *Marine Corps Times*, 23 November 2010. <http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/article/20101123/NEWS/11230318/MoH-nominee-says-he-does-not-feel-like-a-hero>.
- . "Obama OKs Medal of Honor for Living Marine." *Marine Corps Times*, 19 July 2011. <http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/article/20110719/NEWS/107190308/Obama-OKs-Medal-of-Honor-for-living-Marine>.
- These articles cover the nomination of Sgt Dakota L. Meyer for the Medal of Honor.

———. “Outnumbered But Not Outgunned: Marines Overcome 8-to-1 Odds During an 8-Hour Battle.” *Military Times*, 21 December 2008. http://www.militarytimes.com/news/2008/12/marine_20Kills_122108w/.

This article covers the Battle of Shewan, where elements of Task Force 2/7 were attacked by more than 250 enemy fighters.

Landay, Jonathan S. “‘We’re Pinned Down’: 4 U.S. Marines Die in Afghan Ambush.” *McClatchy Newspapers*, 8 September 2009. <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2009/09/08/75036/were-pinned-down-4-us-marines.html>.

A primary account posted by embedded reporter Jonathan S. Landay about the ambush in Ganjgal, Afghanistan, in which four Marines of ETT 2-8 were killed and the heroic attempts by several Marines to rescue their comrades, which led to then-Cpl Dakota Meyer eventually receiving the Medal of Honor.

Landis, 1stLt Jeff. “Leatherneck Air on Target During Operation Anaconda.” *Leatherneck 85*, no. 6, 20–21, June 2002.

This article briefly describes Marine close air support during Operation Anaconda.

Legree, Larry. “Thoughts on the Battle for the Minds: IO and COIN in the Pashtun Belt.” *Military Review* 90, no. 5, 21–31, September/October 2010.

Cdr Larry Legree, USN, offers his perspective on COIN from that of a Kunar Province PRT commander.

Lewis, Ray. “Task Force 2/7 Aids in Training Afghan Police Recruits.” 20 June 2008. <http://www.1stmardiv.marines.mil/News/NewsArticleDisplay/tabid/8585/Article/88567/task-force-27-aids-in-training-afghan-police-recruits.aspx>.

This short news report describes the mission of Task Force 2/7.

Lowe, Christian. “A Mission Ends: As Army, NATO Troops Take Over in Afghanistan, Marines Reflect on a Tour that ‘you never forget’.” *Marine Corps Times*, 29 May 2006.

The article discusses the Marine pullout from Afghanistan in 2006 and provides an overview of Marine operations to date.

———. “On Watch in Kabul.” *Marine Corps Times*, 8 July 2002.

The author discusses 4th MEB (AT) duties to secure the U.S. embassy in early 2002.

Lubin, Andrew. “Afghanistan—The War Escalates.” *Proceedings* 134, no. 9, 24–28, September 2008.

The article highlights 24th MEU, which deployed to Afghanistan in early 2008 before the surge.

———. **“Arty in Afghanistan: We’re Here to Shoot.”** *Leatherneck* 93, no. 1, 38–42, January 2010.

The author describes the employment of the first USMC artillery battalion to deploy to Afghanistan in support of the larger Marine Corps mission.

MacMannis, Andrew R., and Robert B. Scott. “Operation RED WINGS.” *Marine Corps Gazette* 90, no. 12, 14, 16, 18, and 20, December 2006.

The article was written by the commanding officer and executive officer for 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, and highlights unresolved command-and-control and fire support issues in the joint operating environment at the time of Operation Red Wings and its successor.

Marine Corps Gazette 86, no. 7, 42, July 2002.

The entire issue focuses on significant events relating to the Marine Corps’ seizure and defense of the Kandahar International Airport shortly after the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom.

“Marine General Shelves Troop Shift Plan.” FoxNews Network. <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,315460,00.html>.

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates postponed a planned Marine shift from Anbar Province, Iraq, to Afghanistan in 2007 due to concerns that security gains could be reversible.

“Marine receives Silver Star in Okinawa.” *Marine Corps Times*, 4 April 2009. http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/2009/04/marine_silverstar_040309w/.

The article covers the deployment of Cpl Jason Jones with Embedded Training Team, 5th Battalion, 3d Marines. Jones received the Silver Star for his part in fending off a 13 July 2008 attack by approximately 200 insurgents on a small U.S. outpost in eastern Afghanistan.

Maz, Capt Matthew M., 1stLt Jason R. Gibbs, 1stLt David Litkenhaus, and 1stLt Wayne A. Wood. **“Artillery ‘Gruntz’ it Out.”** *Marine Corps Gazette* 88, no. 11, 43, 44, and 46, November 2004.

The authors discuss the 22d MEU’s artillery battery transitioning to conduct provisional rifle company duties.

McKenzie, Col Kenneth F., Maj Roberta L. Shea, and Maj Christopher Phelps. **“Marines Deliver in Mountain Storm.”** *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* 130, no. 11, 48–53, November 2004.

This article covers the 22d MEU’s 2004 deployment to Afghanistan as the theater reserve force that became the Coalition’s main effort for the 2004 campaign season.

McNerney, Michael J. “Stabilization and Reconstruction in Afghanistan: Are PRTs a Model or a Muddle?” *Parameters* 35, no. 4, 32–46, Winter 2005/2006.

McNerney expounds on the Provincial Reconstruction Teams’ (PRTs’) importance to Coalition efforts in Afghanistan. Despite challenges, he argues that PRTs represented the few coordinated civil/military missions undertaking reconstruction in Afghanistan.

Merida, Paul. "Dismounted Infantry Operations." *Marine Corps Gazette* 88, no. 11, 39–41, November 2004.

Merida discusses areas in which an infantry company learned valuable lessons from its experiences in Afghanistan.

Metcalf, Alex S., Jason A. Richardson, Augusto F. Santa Cruz, Antione J. Howell, et al. "Kandahar Ambush Patrols." *Marine Corps Gazette* 86, no. 11, 56–58, November 2002.

The authors discuss Kilo Company, 6th Marines, BLT 3/6, 26th MEU (Special Operations Capable) (26th MEU(SOC)) in Operations Enduring and Swift Freedom. Specifically, an average 24-hour ambush patrol is presented.

Meyer, Maj Samuel L. "Combined Arms in Afghanistan: CAX Was Not That Bad." *Marine Corps Gazette* 93, no. 8, 37–42, August 2009.

Meyer espouses the continuing relevance of combined arms and the MAGTF based on the 24th MEU's 2008 deployment to Afghanistan.

Milks, Keith A. "22d MEU Public Affairs in the Forgotten War." *Marine Corps Gazette* 88, no. 11, 50–51, November 2004.

Milks describes the role and importance of public affairs (PA) to get the story out in Afghanistan.

Naylor, Sean D. "Marines Push to Take Lead in Afghanistan." *Marine Corps Times*, 11 October 2007.

Naylor's article describes the Marine initiative to leave Anbar Province, Iraq, and shift its capabilities to Afghanistan to the concern of some senior Army officials who worried the Marine Corps was too light, lacking both the manpower and infrastructure to lead the mission, while at the same time reviving intraservice rivalry between the Army and Marine Corps.

Nelson, Soraya Sarhaddi. "Woman to Woman: A New Strategy in Afghanistan." *NPR Online*, 7 September 2009. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=112606206>.

Nelson describes the contributions of women Marines serving on Female Engagement Teams (FET) to interact with the other half of the Afghan population as part of COIN strategy.

Nissenbaum, Dion. "For Marines, Marjah market is battleground for Afghans' trust." *McClatchy Newspapers*, 4 April 2010. <http://www.stripes.com/news/for-marines-marjah-market-is-battleground-for-afghans-trust-1.100601>.

The article describes the Marine Corps' ongoing COIN efforts to overcome suspicion and fear of the Taliban to win over local Afghans.

———. "McChrystal calls Marjah a 'bleeding ulcer' in Afghan campaign." *McClatchy Newspapers*, 24 May 2010. <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2010/05/24/94740/mcchrystal-calls-marjah-a-bleeding.html>.

Nissenbaum discusses meetings between then-ISAF commander Gen Stanley McChrystal and Marines on the ground in Marjah to show friction between military realities and the Obama administration's initial plan to begin withdrawing forces from Afghanistan in July 2011.

Nusbaumer, Stewart. "With Special Operations Marines in Afghanistan." *Leatherneck* 92, no. 11, 40–45, November 2009.

Nusbaumer describes his time embedded with Marine Special Operations Teams (MSOTs) from Company F, 2d Marine Special Operations Battalion, in Herat Province.

Osbourne, William V. "Southwestern Afghanistan." *Marine Corps Gazette* 93, no. 7, 47–50, July 2009.

Osbourne describes the physical and human terrain of southern Afghanistan as seen by Task Force 2/7's intel officer.

Perry, LtCol Brian D. "The Embassy: Kabul." *Marine Corps Gazette* 86, no. 12, 34–36, December 2002.

Perry describes his journey through Kabul, Afghanistan, to the U.S. embassy that had been left derelict since the U.S. evacuation a decade earlier.

"Ready to Fight." *Marine Corps Gazette* 88, no. 11, 14–17, November 2004.

This article describes the 22d MEU's 2004 deployment to Afghanistan and the training that enabled it to succeed along with the key lessons learned.

Roberson, Matthew, C. Mark Brinkley, and Gordon Lubold. "4th MEB Lands to Secure Embassy—Anti-Terror Unit Provides Large Force to Relieve 26th MEU Troops." *Marine Corps Times*, 14 January 2002.

The authors discuss the arrival of elements of 4th MEB (AT) that were established shortly after 9/11.

Roberts, Adam. "Counter-terrorism, Armed Force and the Laws of War." *Survival* 44, no. 1, 7–32, Spring 2002.

Roberts discusses enemy prisoner of war (EPW) handling procedures at the outset of the war on terrorism.

Rosen, Nir. "How We Lost the War We Won: *Rolling Stone's* 2008 Journey Into Taliban-Controlled Afghanistan." *Rolling Stone*, 31 January 2011. <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/how-we-lost-the-war-we-won-rolling-stones-2008-journey-into-taliban-controlled-afghanistan-20110131>.

The article follows the reporter's journey into areas reclaimed by the Taliban despite years of U.S. efforts to build up indigenous forces and rebuild infrastructure, both of which were complicated by the United States' inability to legitimize a Karzai government that had largely been sidelined in Kabul and riddled with corruption.

Shachtman, Noah. "Danger Room in Afghanistan: A Close Fight, and a Couple of Miracles." In Danger Room in Afghanistan Blog, *Wired Magazine Online Edition*, 27 August 2009. <http://www.wired.com>

/dangerroom/2009/08/danger-room-in-afghanistan-a-close-range-fight-and-a-couple-of-miracles/.

This blog entry recounts a Marine sniper team's fight against Taliban insurgents.

Stauffer, Ronald. "Corps' artillery rocket system poised to strike in Afghanistan." Defense Video and Imagery Distribution System, 1 March 2009. <http://www.dvidshub.net/news/30584/corps-artillery-rocket-system-poised-strike-afghanistan>.

This article describes the first deployment of the first Marine Corps High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) battery to Afghanistan.

Steele, Jeanette. "Belated Honors for Marines in Fierce Battle." *The San Diego Union-Tribune*. 10 July 2011. <http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2011/jul/10/marine-platoon-gets-belated-honors-for-fierce/>.

Steele's story reports on actions by Marines attached to Task Force 2/7 during a 2008 battle in Farah Province, Afghanistan, better known as "The Battle of Shewan." Several Marines were later recognized for valor, including then-GySgt Brian Blonder who received the Navy Cross in 2011.

Thieme, Don J. "Fighting: Are We Relearning the Same Lessons?" *Marine Corps Gazette* 95, no. 8, 68–69, August 2011.

Thieme's article addresses concerns about preserving the institutional memory of lessons learned the hard way on the battlefield in Afghanistan.

Thompson, Alexs. "Religious Leader Engagement in Southern Afghanistan." *Joint Forces Quarterly* 63, 95–101, 4th Quarter 2011.

The author describes MEB–Afghanistan's highly successful mullah engagement effort that is often referred to as the "mullahpalooza tour."

Treglia, Philip J. "Force Reconnaissance Missions." *Marine Corps Gazette* 86, no. 10, 14–16, October 2002.

The 1st Force Reconnaissance Company Marines of the 15th MEU (SOC) were the best-trained, best-equipped Marines fighting in Afghanistan. During the course of the deployment, the platoon would perform all three of their distinct and separate missions: deep reconnaissance, direct action as a maneuver element, and specialized independent missions as directed.

"USS *Theodore Roosevelt* Pounds Taliban and Terrorist Targets." *Seapower* 44, no. 12, 24, December 2001.

This article discusses Navy and Marine Corps fixed-wing carrier-based airpower as part of the initial U.S. actions to attack al-Qaeda and Taliban in Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks.

Valdespino, Luis P., Jr. "Navy Corpsmen With Special Ops Saves Lives in Combat Zone." *Navy Medicine*, 16–17, May/June 2008.

Valdespino describes how Navy corpsmen skillfully save lives in austere conditions after they receive special training to deploy with Marine Special Operations companies in Afghanistan.

Watson, MSgt Julia. “Female Engagement Teams.” *Marine Corps Gazette* 95, no. 7, 20–24, July 2011.

MSgt Watson discusses the use of FETs in Afghanistan during her tour with 2d MEB–A.

Welan, Capt Justin M. “Cobras Strike in Afghanistan.” *Defense Video and Imagery Distribution System*, 1 January 2009. <http://www.dvidshub.net/news/28917/cobras-strike-afghanistan#.UnFaRu0gIqY>.

The article not only describes the background on TF 2/7 but also HMLA-269, which provided close air support for the task force.

Whittington, Sgt Scott A. “Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force—Afghanistan: Bridge to Marine Corps’ future in Afghanistan.” *Defense Video and Imagery Distribution System*, 1 June 2009. <http://www.dvidshub.net/news/34343/special-purpose-marine-air-ground-task-force-afghanistan-bridge-marine-corps-future-afghanistan>.

Whittington describes the development and employment of SPMAGTF–A as part of the buildup of the Marine presence in southwest Afghanistan.

Williams, Kenneth H., ed. “Right Now We Cannot Just Let Go: An Interview with Amin Tarzi on the Situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan.” *Marine Corps University Journal* 1, no. 1, 26–47, Spring 2010.

Dr. Tarzi, an American of Afghan descent, provides insights into the motivations of Afghans and Pakistanis on either side of the border.

———. “This Will Not Come Quickly: An Interview with Anthony H. Cordsman on the Situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan.” *Marine Corps University Journal* 1, no. 1, 7–25, Spring 2010.

This article presents the author’s interview with well-known international security analyst and professor who holds the Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, DC. Williams interviewed Cordsman while he was part of ISAF commander Gen Stanley A. McCrystal’s strategic assessment group in 2009. A subsequent follow-up interview, conducted just prior to President Obama’s announcement of the surge in December 2009, expands on some of the topics first discussed earlier in the year.

Young, James G. “Lessons from Rhino LZ: How the Afghanistan Invasion Changed Combat Airlift.” *Armed Forces Journal* (online edition), November 2011. <http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/2011/11/7948194/>.

The article discusses the Air Force’s role in providing lift for Task Force 58’s seizure of Camp Rhino. It also relates how the Air Force adapted certain tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP), such as training conventional C-130/C-17 aircrews to conduct night-vision goggle (NVG) landings, normally reserved for crews that specialized in inserting Special Forces.

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