

## Part 12: The Speed of Trust

2nd MEB-A's genius lay in its adaptability, as reflected in the MEB's Brigade Headquarters Group, air support, civil affairs Marines, Female Engagement Teams and others. Companies that were traditionally called on to perform certain duties were thrown into the deep end with a choice to sink or swim.

Being Marines and Sailors, naturally, they swam. Adapting to those changes as they came, however, was greatly aided by coalition allies.

Traditional cannon companies, like 5th Battalion 10th Marine Regiment, were suddenly operating completely free of cannons. 5-10's Fox Battery commander, then Lt. Col. Bob McCarthy, recalls that transition and working alongside Afghan forces.

"We didn't employ artillery during this deployment," McCarthy said. "This was the beauty of the BHG. 5/10 was a traditional cannon (M777A2) battalion. It was tasked with the BHG mission which included running Camp Leatherneck, providing quick reaction forces, perimeter and internal security, partnering with Afghan Security forces and maintaining security and internal camp functions at Camp Dwyer. The Battalion quickly transitioned its traditional role and embraced the complexities of the BHG in a short amount of time. This is the great lesson of the BHG - leadership, vision, competence, and flexibility governed the BHG and serves as a great example of how any unit with the right mindset can achieve great things."

Marines were also partially responsible for training Afghan soldiers at Leatherneck, ensuring their marksmanship and physical training.

"We had heard so much about police being corrupt and predatory," said retired Lt. Gen. Larry Nicholson, commanding officer for 2nd MEB-A. "We set up a boot camp of sorts and ensured they had to graduate from our course to serve. We had a 60 percent graduation rate. Leatherneck became the site for training, which we called Leatherneck

Boot Camp, to become soldiers and police. Over six weeks they learned what we saw they needed to be soldiers.”

McCarthy believes working with allies was one of the biggest lessons he took away from the deployment, one that all Marines should focus on.

“Coalition Warfare moves at the speed of trust,” McCarthy said. “The amount of energy we spent developing, growing, and sustaining our relationships with the British, Afghans, Danes, Estonians, and US Joint Forces was exhausting. I never expected how much of my time would be consumed by those relationships. A fantastic lesson that served me well when I went back to Leatherneck in 2014... You couldn’t come in heavy handed and say ‘my way or the highway.’”

According to McCarthy, the lessons learned by Marines adapting to new duties is reflected in the modern Marine Corps as well.

“It is about being able to take core competencies and adapt them to whatever job needs doing,” McCarthy said. “For instance, the modern Marine Corps is seeing changes in equipment. We see the cannons being done away with in favor of rocket capabilities. Certain infantry units are shifting their specialties to littoral operations. That is what (then Lt. Col. Chris) Naler (commanding officer for the MEB’s BHG) did.”

Every Marine and Sailor, from seabees laying marston matting for air strips to women Marines conducting aid missions in Afghan villages, the mission was focused on aiding locals and supporting warfighters. Outside the lines of Leatherneck and Dwyer, Marines were engaging the enemy on their own turf. While the installation provided some measure of security, infantry Marines were under near constant fire. McCarthy saw the interoperability between Marines inside and outside the lines as a major challenge the MEB faced.

“In the early stages, how do you create the ability to sustain operations between Marines who were eating MRE’s and (using the bathroom) in tubes compared to Marines getting three hot meals a day?” McCarthy said. “I think that was a problem Gen. Nicholson had to tackle.”