

NGA celebrated the 242nd birthday of the United States Marine Corps on November 7 with special guest speaker, Brigadier General Dimitri Henry, the director of intelligence for the Marine Corps. In this position, Gen. Henry serves as the Commandant's principle intelligence staff officer and is a functional manager for intelligence and cryptologic activities for the Marine Corps. He formulates policy for intelligence, counterintelligence and electronic warfare.

While he was here, he took some time to chat with us about his leadership style, his views on national security and how GEOINT fits into the evolving intelligence landscape.

Stay tuned for Geointeresting.

One quick note: the clicking noise you may hear is our agency's photographer, Tony. It won't last too long — we promise.

NGA: Well, sir, thank you so much for joining us today. I just want to say thanks for visiting our Springfield campus and for taking the time to sit and chat with us. And, of course, happy birthday to the Marine Corps.

BG Henry: Thank you. Thank you.

NGA: We're very happy to have you here today. I wanted to start looking back at the beginning of your career as an enlisted Marine to now, as a brigadier general and the director of national intelligence for the Marine Corps. How did being an enlisted marine influence your leadership style?

BG Henry: I think I had a lot of good examples. And, unfortunately, I had some leaders who did not set a good example. And for me, I got a chance to see it and experience it from junior marine level to staff and NCO [non-commissioned officer] level, and I got a chance to take the good, and now I get to exercise the good. So, I think more than anything else it just gave me an ability to see other leadership forms, and I picked what I thought was the best of the leaderships that were displayed and try to utilize that in my day-to-day time as a leader.

NGA: Because you had a bit of a different perspective, maybe?

BG Henry: Yes. It does give you that bit of perspective. Typically, when you ask somebody this, the next question, which may or may not be on your sheet, is usually: do you think it benefits folks to be enlisted and then become an officer? And I can tell you some of the great leaders I saw did not have enlisted time. And some of the great leaders had enlisted time. So, I'm not sure what the jury is on that. I think it's still out. But, I tell you, watching and then being able to see demonstrated leadership is what matters — seeing the example. Good examples help you navigate your way through different situations. And so, for me, that's what the enlisted time allowed me to do.

NGA: And speaking of different perspectives, you had positions at both the National Security Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency— so two different perspectives of the intelligence community. What did those different experiences teach you about national security and intelligence, and how important is collaboration across the community?

BG Henry: Well, first and foremost, I've learned that there are professionals serving our country in all of those areas you just talked about: NSA, DIA, NGA — even though I haven't served here, I've worked with just true professionals — and, really, just doing the things that are necessary to keep us safe and to help the decision-makers make a better decision. I've been out in the operating forces, and a lot of times we shake our fists back at Washington. And reality; having served in those organizations and having served with members of this organization, I can tell you that's a skewed look because the professionals are there, and they do a great job. So, for me, serving at those two agencies just reinforced the idea that service is what it's all about. To a man and woman in those organizations, I've never run across anyone who didn't give 100 percent. Even though they may have come to me with problems, those problems were always trying to help make the organization better. That's what I saw in my time at those two organizations.

NGA: And did you see the collaboration? I mean, have you seen an increase over the years?

BG Henry: Oh, certainly an increase; definitely an increase in collaboration. I mean, the millennials and the baby boomers; they all, I think, understand that; the millennials more than anything. They enjoy collaboration. They enjoy being able to sit — actually they don't like sitting with each other because they do it kind of spread apart; they can do it all over the world, and they're very comfortable with it. So, I think the collaboration has taken off because of that. And, of course, technology helps quite a bit, actually. So, the collaboration is definitely there. Could it be better? I can tell you it can always be better. One of the things that I've found in all the organizations I've ever served is a lot of times so much is going on that individuals can't raise their heads up enough to see what's happening to their left and their right. And if they could do that just once or twice a week to try to get a feel for what else is happening in their organization, the organization will be much better off because of it.

NGA: And I think sometimes it's easier to understand that when you've spent time in that organization, when you're sitting alongside them. And I think that's why, especially here at NGA — our leadership encourages external assignments. NGA has support teams all over the world sitting with the warfighter, for example, and helping with geospatial analysis in the field.

BG Henry: Right.

NGA: How important is geospatial intelligence to the Marine Corps, and do you have any examples of how NGA products or analysis have impacted your operations?

BG Henry: Well, certainly, geospatial products are the bedrock of what we — I mean, we walk the Earth, the Marine Corps, and we fly over it, and we float on the surface. So, anything we do is always; we always have a map, we always have a map-type product, we always have something that is going to show us the way. Without a doubt, NGA's ability to ... the different phenomenologies that we've been able to encounter in the Marine Corps, certainly, as we go ashore, and we get to see the different things that can be determined off of geospatial products; it is just the staple of what we do. Everything from not having maps as you close into an objective area like we didn't in Grenada. You're probably not old enough, which is a good thing, to remember the Grenada operation. One of the things that we learned on the intel side was we needed to find a way to distribute mapping products; not just mapping products, but all intel. And, particularly for us, the Marine Corps, it was all about maps because that's what we needed at the time. We didn't have any digital products, but we had maps. And we were using tourist maps, by the way, for that operation because that's all we had. Now, I would tell you that

because of NGA's growth and because of all the work of the professionals here, that everywhere I've been since I'm pretty sure we've been able to have products that were produced here or if not produced here, produced by someone forward that had been trained here.

NGA: Working with you.

BG Henry: Right. So, it's been a great experience.

NGA: Well, that's certainly good to hear.

BG Henry: Yes, it is. And everything I'm saying may be flattering, but it's because it's true, though. The thing that most agencies get hit on is timeliness and that, but in reality, as I sit back and think about the products that I've used, those products were always available. And there were things we did to modify the product to fit the need of the unit.

NGA: Tailor them to you.

BG Henry: Right. And that's what our marines forward and those teams that you send forward — that's what they would do for us. They would take a product and make it better. Better in a sense that it was more tailored to our use. And so, that's what I've seen over the years, and I think it's only getting better now.

NGA: Great. Now, over the summer you spoke at a defense conference talking about changes in the battle space over the years, particularly in the cyber realm. What are the biggest changes you've seen, and how do you think geospatial intelligence fits into cyber warfare?

BG Henry: I think the biggest change that I've seen is really just proliferation of communication types. Crowdsourcing — being able to; as an event is occurring, you're seeing it real-time. That to me is probably one of the biggest changes; is the instantaneous communications. And NGA and actually all of the combat support agencies rely on comms; otherwise, you couldn't get your product to the warfighter. So, I think geospatial intelligence fits in because in this cyber world, there's still hardware associated with it. It's not this mythical thing. The Cloud is what it is, but there are servers on the ground.

NGA: It still has a location.

BG Henry: It still has a location. And there are still people that influence what goes through cyberspace. And so, you still need to understand the environment and your ability to overlay data onto human geography, not just Earth. And geospatial — but all the other attributes — that helps us greatly to visualize what we're up against. When cyber becomes the norm, which I think it is in some way, the ability to characterize the ground, the earth, on where something could be, whether we know it to be there or not, helps. And I think geospatial products certainly helped us do that in the '90s and into the 2000s, and I think it will be able to help us do that in the future as well.

NGA: And as the world becomes more and more data-centric, NGA's been working on improving our data capabilities, including workforce training. So, as intelligence challenges evolve, how important do you think data analytic skills are, and what other tools or training do you think analysts of the future will need?

BG Henry: That's a good question. I've discussed this with Lt. General Stewart. We were talking more about OSINT [open-source Intelligence: data collected from publically available sources and used for intelligence purposes] and whether an all-source analyst should be doing OSINT. It's just another "INT" that they use, and because of the proliferation of technology and the proliferation of sources and ability to capture all this data — the big data that you just talked about — I think we're both convinced now that we need to somehow lessen the analytical load on the individual analyst. So, what I would say is that as technology proliferates, as data proliferates, we really need to be able to go through with some type of analytic software that allows the analysts to think about what is being collected and not actually sift through what is being collected. How we do that is a whole other story. I don't think we've come to any conclusion there other than we need to be able to lift the cognitive burden from the individual analyst. Geospatial products, when you look at what NGA does; I mean, a visual helps that immensely. I can take in a lot of information just by seeing it as opposed to listening to it or reading it. So, what the tools that I think analysts are going to need in the future, whether it's geospatial or all-source or signals intelligence analysts, are going to be tools that can actually help sift through the data; the big data, as you mentioned. And right now, the near term that everyone is using is algorithmic warfare: using algorithms to pull out the coherent data and information so that a human being can think about and actually render some type of decision or build some type of product.

NGA: Leave the more complex problems maybe to the ...

BG Henry: Right. Let the machine do that for us. Let the computer do it so that you can think about what it just did and what the implications of that are. We'll never get past our ability to look at disparate things and make a connection. Computers can do it, but we may see something from our knowledge in the past or our experiences and go, "It couldn't be that because ..." And I think we're close now. NGA; I think you do that by the visual. You deliver the data in a visual format, and I can make sense of it because I can see it and absorb it a lot quicker than I can by reading it. So, you still need contextual data. You still need that for the deep think and for posterity. But, being able to see it is just — you know the old saying 'a picture is worth a thousand words?' I think it's probably worth a lot more than a thousand.

NGA: So, as the new director of intelligence for the Marine Corps, what are your biggest priorities moving forward, and how can we support you best?

BG Henry: So, my number one priority is education and professionalization of our workforce. Not that they are not educated and professional now, but I think moving forward, for some of the reasons that I spoke about earlier — big data, having such a cognitive load on us right now — the more education, more experience, more knowledge I can get into our workforce, the better off we'll be. I believe, and I think the Marine Corps in general believes, that you make decisions at the lowest level possible. But to do that, you actually have to allow a junior marine in our case, or a junior civilian; you have to allow them to exercise some decision-making at some point. And if you do that early in their career, then you build their confidence. You also gain confidence in their decision-making ability, and you can give them more responsibility earlier. And with the way the world is moving now — you'll keep hearing me say proliferation of information; I can't afford to not have a corporal understand what's going on — and then make a decision based on their knowledge and based on their responsibilities. And the workforce to me is the most important part of that. When you look at our enemy or our potential enemies, they can take something right off the shelf and start working with it. They are not bounded by some of the laws and legal things we have in place. And, quite frankly, their moral compass may be a little bit

different than ours. So, if I'm not there, someone needs to make a decision. I need to have already given them as much experience as possible, tested their judgment out, helped them build their judgment ability and then just let them make decisions. You speed up tempo that way, and you just have a better organization. And I don't think anybody can prove me any different on that. The more your employees know, the more they understand what you're trying to do, the more opportunities they'll see and the better off the organization will be if you allow them to do that.

NGA: I think that's good advice for any organization, really.

BG Henry: Yes. Not just the military, but any organization. If you're trying to make money, I guarantee you if your employees understand what you are trying to do — why you are trying to do it — and you give them good training, good education and opportunity, they'll make decisions, and they'll speed up your sales; they'll speed up your product, and they'll speed up decision-making so that you can be, in my case, more lethal and more transparent.

NGA: Thanks everyone for listening, and special thanks to General Henry for sitting down with us today. Geointersting is produced by NGA's Office of Corporate Communications. You can like NGA on Facebook, follow us on Twitter, and never miss an episode of this podcast by subscribing on iTunes and SoundCloud.