

Major Megan McClung was a dear friend, she was also a Warrior – a Marine.

In every sense of the word.

A United States Naval Academy graduate, she could outrun all but four people in the entire camp.

She could outshoot everyone not wearing the expert rifle or pistol badge.

She could do dead hang Marine Corps pull ups.

She finished her Masters Degree while here in Iraq, and after that she initiated, planned and organized the 1st Marine Corps Marathon race in Iraq.

She did all this late into the night after completing a tremendous work load that involved strategic issues:

Helped to change the casualty press release policy,

Developed an aggressive media embed program that focused on the courage of the individual Marine, Soldier, and Sailor.

She traveled to Fallujah to meet with Iraqi women in the women's engagement program.

Helped develop the public affairs plan for the surge operations into Ramadi.

And finally volunteered to go to Ramadi herself to be the Brigade public affairs officer. She was the public affairs officer for the Brigade in the most lethal combat in Iraq, where the counterinsurgency is at its worst.

As you can see, her running ability, her athleticism, was a metaphor for everything in her life: she took it to the wall, she ran hard to the finish line, and was always a winner.

I first met Megan when she was a young lieutenant at MCRD Parris Island about 7 years ago. I knew of her professional reputation as she worked in another office on the depot.

After that she got out of the Marine Corps and spent a year in Iraq working for KBR as their public relations officer.

Then she came back to the United States and rejoined the Marines as a reservist working special projects. She agreed to work with me in Norfolk, VA as the deputy public affairs officer. There she disobeyed a direct order. There would be no farewell gifts for the outgoing director. She bought one anyway. Most important was her fellowship and company at the farewell luncheon. She was always a class act.

I moved to I MEF that year and began preparing for deployment, I head-hunted Megan to join the I MEF (FWD) public affairs team as it went to Fallujah.

So I was asking Megan to go back to Iraq with the Marines in less than a year from returning from her KBR job.

Despite taking a 50% pay cut from her contractor job, she jumped at the chance to serve as a Marine. We often joked that the Corps got one of the best PAO's in Iraq for half the price. Of course, to her, serving with the Marines in Iraq was an extreme privilege.

As we began the preparations for deployment, she relayed to me that she had grown closer to her parents in the last few months than ever before. She had also fallen in love, I met this new man in her life who she had met in Norfolk.

She said that he was a keeper. She was dismissed from unit PT that week to spend time with him and her family before she deployed. But, athletic to the end, instead of missing PT, she brought him to the 6 a.m. run, and he ran with us. Now that is true love.

As soon as we arrived in Iraq, she guided me to Baghdad to meet with our higher headquarters. Everything took twice as long to complete, because she was always stopped by her former colleagues and friends from her past work there. They reached out to her magnetic personality.

Once here she did a tremendous job in the office. As the Army public affairs team in Ramadi was scheduled to rotate in the coming months she lobbied me hard to pick her to fill the job as the 1st brigade, 1st armored division public affairs officer.

A week later she got her chance when their PAO had to leave unexpectedly. I called her in and told her she had 40 minutes to get on the general's helicopter to Ramadi. So she deployed to Ramadi with 40 minutes notice. Awaiting her that week was a national network news crew, and a satellite news video conference with the Pentagon press corps. Of course both events were a tremendous success because of her ability to conduct detailed multi-tasking.

For the next few months she escorted media around Ramadi, supported more satellite news conferences, and trained the rotating soldiers that joined her team every month.

On the 6th of December she had escorted Fox News to the Governance Center, had lunch with a good friend, Capt "Hamoodi" Hilton at Blue Diamond, met with an Anbar Sheik, and was dropping a Newsweek Magazine reporter off at a combat outpost. The Newsweek article was published yesterday.

There her vehicle was hit. Inside with her, who also perished, were Capt Travis Patriquin and Specialist Vincent Pomante. She and Capt Patriquin were close friends who worked together. Spc Pomante was part of the public affairs team there.

So she was with her close friends when she died.

Many of her close friends, including LtCol Doc Church, a former public affairs officer – now with the CAG, helped honor her as her Hero's flight left Camp Ramadi.

GySgt Ellerbrock, the Public Affairs Chief who worked with her at Camp Pendleton, was there to meet her.

Lt's Antony Andrious and Brian Donnelly, who worked with her here in Fallujah the first 6 months, met her at Dover.

So she was never alone - as she made her way home.

This is the lesson that Maj McClung shares with us all: In the Marine Corps we don't grow old in the same town, with the same neighbors and friends close by. Instead, our neighbors are those Marines that serve with us, some through our entire adult life. We grow old together in the Corps – watch each other's children grow. Cherish those friendships you make with the Marines sitting next to you. They will become one of the most important things in your life.

Megan was a cherished friend. I miss her tremendously.

Before we deployed, the public affairs office ran many times up “radar” hill at camp Pendleton. Running up the ridge at dawn, you can see through the morning fog - a beautiful view of the sun coming up over the mountains. Mainside and the base headquarters building lay off in the distance.

Inside the base headquarters is the consolidated public affairs office – where all the combat correspondents and PAO's work.

I mentioned to Gunny Ellerbrock during our runs - I told him that if I died this would be the perfect place to be remembered, memorialized. Able to oversee the public affairs office for all eternity!

-from a beautiful spot on Camp Pendleton,
-listening to Marines sing cadence as they run up the mountain every day.

When we get back to California, we will have an all-hands formation - in the pre-dawn hours.

We will run to the top of the mountain,
singing at the top of our lungs.

On that spot, we will pause for a while.
There I will relay to the next generation of Marines.
The next generation of combat correspondents,
So that they will never forget,

the story of Major Megan McClung

– Colleague, Friend... Athlete, Scholar, Warrior – Marine!

Semper fidelis!