

MAGTF \ˈmag-taff/ *n* [derived from a longstanding naval expeditionary tradition and state of mind]: Marine Air-Ground Task Force. 1: a combination of four military arms -- command, ground, air, and support -- whose whole is exponentially stronger than its parts 2: a self-contained and self-sustained combined arms striking force, capable of operating from land or on a mobile and protected sea base 3: a scalable, modular building-block organization that ensures the most appropriate and cost-effective capabilities are applied to the task at hand 4: an enabler for Joint Task Force operations 5: a rheostat of equally expandable or retractable crisis response options that can be tailored to meet any crisis 6: a unique form of naval expeditionary operations practiced by the United States.

What is a MAGTF?

The Marine Corps responds to crises and generates combat power for joint operations by deploying and employing integrated Marine Air-Ground Task Forces, or MAGTFs.

All MAGTFs, regardless of size, share four common organizational elements, which vary in size and composition according to the mission:

Command Element (CE): As the MAGTF headquarters, the command element provides the command and control necessary for effective, cross-dimensional operational planning and execution. In addition, every MAGTF command element can serve as the basis for a Joint Task Force Headquarters.

Ground Combat Element (GCE): The GCE is a cohesive maneuver and combat team formed around a ground maneuver unit comprising infantry, tanks, or light armored vehicles, reinforced with the necessary artillery, transport, combat engineer, and reconnaissance assets to accomplish its mission. It provides the ground striking power of the MAGTF.

Aviation Combat Element (ACE): The ACE is composed of requisite air control agencies, helicopter and fixed wing squadrons, surface-to-air missile units, and aviation-unique combat service support. It provides the air striking power of, and aerial support to, the MAGTF.

Combat Service Support Element (CSSE): This element provides the full range of combat service support capabilities necessary to sustain and maintain the MAGTF. The CSSE gives a MAGTF the organic ability to operate for extended periods in an austere expeditionary environment.

However, MAGTFs are much more than a simple combination of organizational elements. MAGTFs are organized, trained, and equipped to conduct combined arms warfare across three dimensions: air, land, and sea. Moreover, through a combination of strategic basing and prepositioning of equipment, global forward operations, and an ability to rapidly deploy by air and/or sea, MAGTFs embody both a cost-effective, building-block approach to deploying Marine combat power, and a proven, battle-winning capability.

In summary, then, MAGTFs define a unique form of naval expeditionary operations that allow the regional Commanders-in-Chief to employ Marine forces independently in a crisis response role, as a sustainable first-on-the-scene enabling force for follow-on joint operations, or in support of a larger naval or joint warfighting campaign. ■

Marine Expeditionary Forces: A Reservoir of Combat Power for Independent and Joint Military Operations

Joint Warriors, Soldiers of the Sea

Marines are organized, trained and equipped within the operating forces assigned to Marine Forces, Pacific and Marine Forces, Atlantic. More than 112,000 Marines -- nearly 65% of the 174,000-strong active duty Marine Corps -- are assigned in the *combat and combat support forces* assigned to the two "MARFORs." The Commanders of Marine Forces Atlantic and Pacific provide the regional Commanders-in-Chief (CINCs) with versatile Marine Air-Ground Task Forces with which to shape the environment and to respond to crises, and advise the CINCs on the employment of Marine forces. During combat operations, the MARFORs serve as the Marine operational headquarters, and they provide theater-wide support and sustainment of MAGTFs assigned to the combatant CINCs. As befits their naval character, the commanders of the two MARFORs serve simultaneously as the Commanding Generals of the Fleet Marine Forces assigned to the Commanders of the Atlantic and the Pacific Fleets.

Marine Expeditionary Forces

Marine Expeditionary Forces, or MEFs, are the largest and only "standing" MAGTFs -- that is, they exist in peacetime as well as wartime. The three standing MEFs provide a reservoir of capabilities and combat power from which all smaller MAGTFs are formed according to the task at hand.

There are three Marine Expeditionary Forces, strategically positioned for global coverage (see map). I MEF, based in Southern California, and III MEF, which is forward based on Okinawa, mainland Japan, and Hawaii, fall under the control of Commander, Marine Forces, Pacific. II MEF, located at bases in North and South Carolina, falls under the command of Commander, Marine Forces, Atlantic. All three MEFs are located near major naval bases and excellent airports, railheads, road networks, and seaports -- ensuring the most rapid deployment of Marine combat power worldwide.

In addition to "sourcing" smaller MAGTFs, the MEF is the principal Marine Corps warfighting organization, particularly for a larger crisis or contingency. As a crisis escalates, or in the case of major theater war, smaller MAGTFs and supporting units are sequentially deployed until the entire MEF is in place to support the CINC's campaign plan.

Normally commanded by a lieutenant general, a

MEF can include one or more divisions in its ground combat element, one or more aircraft wings in its air combat element, and one or more force service support groups in its combat service support element. Below is a description for each of these major MEF components:

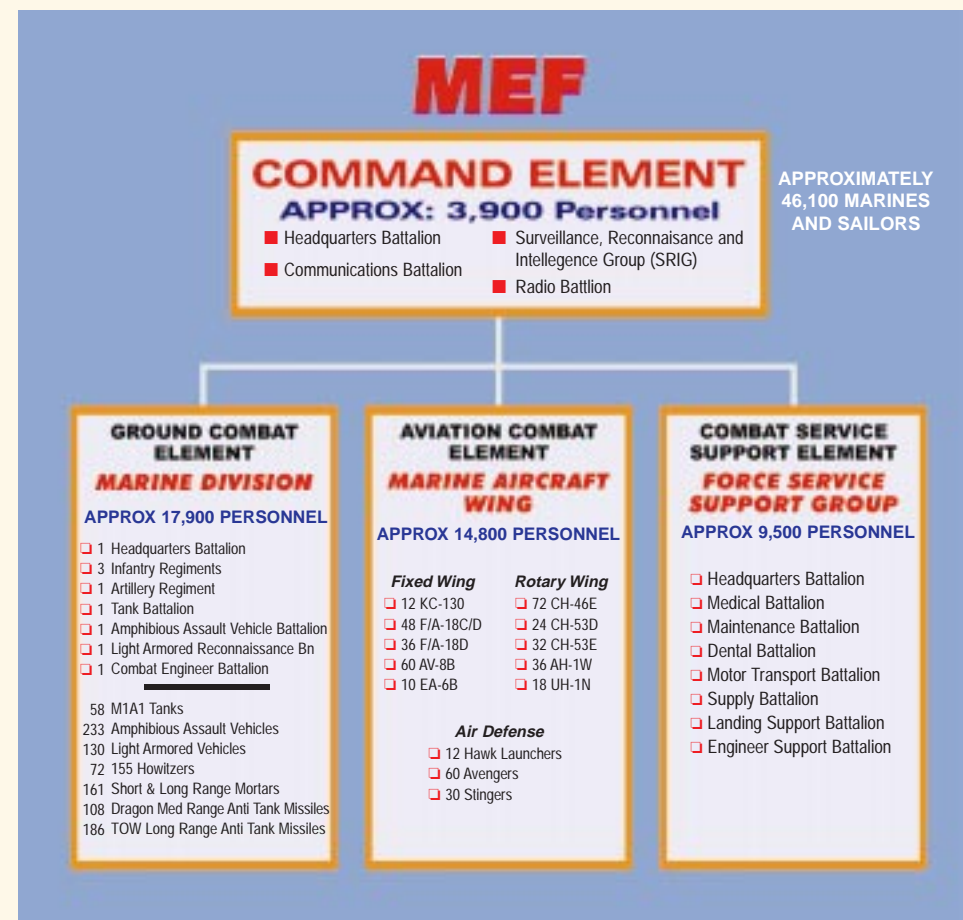
□ **The Marine Division** includes three infantry regiments, an artillery regiment, a tank battalion, an assault amphibious vehicle battalion, a light armored reconnaissance battalion, and a combat engineer battalion. The division fights using combined arms tactics and can tailor itself to meet the demands of any mission - from operations other than war to major theater warfare.

□ **The Marine Aircraft Wing** conducts the complete range of air operations in support of the MEF, to include anti-air warfare, offensive air support, assault support, aerial reconnaissance, electronic warfare (including active and passive electronic countermeasures), and control of aircraft and missiles. As a collateral function, the wing may also provide units that operate as an integral component of Navy carrier air wings onboard aircraft carriers.

□ **The Force Service Support Group** provides sustained combat service support above and beyond the organic capabilities of subordinate MAGTF combat service support elements. It provides a full range of medical, dental, maintenance, supply, motor transport, and engineer capabilities.

A MEF is unlike any other military organization in the world. It is a balanced, powerful, combined arms force, operating under one commander, with 60 days of accompanying supplies. MEFs are capable of both sea-based operations or sustained operations ashore in almost any geographic location, either independently or as part of a joint warfighting team. Accordingly, with appropriate augmentation, the MEF command element can perform the mission of a joint task force headquarters.

Typical MEF manning, organization, and major equipment are depicted on the next page. However, depending on the mission, MEFs can be tailored to emphasize any particular capability. For example, for operations in close terrain such as jungles or cities, the MEF might deploy without its heavier mechanized units. On the other hand, for high intensity operations, it may be reinforced with armored, artillery, and air units. The unique power of the MEF is that it is immediately tailorable to any task at any point on the conflict spectrum. ■



MAGTF Operations: Core Competencies

MAGTF Operations are built upon a foundation of six special core competencies. The direct result of more than 221 years of expeditionary experience, the last 45 of which were spent as the nation's by-law force in readiness, these six core competencies define what Marines do and how they operate.

The first core competency, **expeditionary readiness**, defines an insitutional mindset that is ready to respond instantaneously to world-wide crises, 365 days a year. To Marines, "ready to respond" means much more than being "ready to go." First, it means being ever ready to *win our nation's first battles*. This requires a force that can transition from peacetime to combat operations at a moment's notice, without critical reserve augmentation, and with certain success. Second, it demands a force ready to *flourish under conditions of uncertainty*. Expeditionary readiness is about being ready to adapt to whatever is "out there," improvising and finding unconventional solutions to unconventional problems. As a result, it demands a primary focus on the human rather than technological dimension of battle. And third, it means being ever ready to *defeat the "opponent after next"* -- requiring a relentless commitment to innovation and change.

The next core competency is **combined arms operations**. As specifically demanded by Congress, the nation's naval crisis response force must be capable of acting on short notice and without immediate support from Army and Air Force warfighting forces. In other words, such a force in readiness requires an organic, combined arms capability. For over half a century, MAGTFs have trained so that their ground combat, air combat, and combat service support capabilities are directed by a single commander. *Other services practice combined arms operations -- MAGTF Operations embody them.*

Expeditionary operations are much more than military expeditions on foreign soil. Like expeditionary readiness, expeditionary operations require a special mindset -- one that is constantly prepared for immediate deployment overseas into austere operating environments. As a result, expeditionary operations consider host nation support a luxury, and are designed to bring everything necessary to accomplish the mission -- from individual equipment up to and including airfields and hospitals.

The Marine Corps' naval character is an indispensable attribute for a force in readiness, and forms the basis for its fourth core competency, **sea-based operations**. Sea-based operations provide for extraordinary strategic reach, and give the nation an enduring means to influence and shape the evolving international environment. In addition, sea-based operations provide units with a large measure of inherent force protection. A highly ready, combined arms MAGTF, operating from a mobile, *protected* sea base, provides the NCA with unimpeded and politically unencumbered access to potential trouble spots around the world.

The Marines are perhaps best known for their fifth core competency, **forcible entry -- from the sea**. Ultimately, a global superpower must possess an ability for unilateral action. A key requirement for unilateral action is the ability to project power ashore in a theater without forward bases, and in the face of armed opposition. In the past, forcible entry from the sea was defined by amphibious assaults, focused on establishing lodgments on the beach and then building up combat power for subsequent operations. It is now defined as an uninterrupted movement of forces from ships located far over the horizon directly against decisive objectives.

Although a force in readiness cannot afford to pause to call up its reserves in order to respond to an emerging crisis, MAGTF operations still demand a sixth core competency, **reserve integration**. Marine Reserves routinely practice carefully crafted reserve integration plans to augment or reinforce crisis response missions, and to add combat power for operations, especially at the high end of the conflict spectrum. For example, during Operation Desert Storm, 53% of the Selected Marine Corps Reserve end strength was activated, surpassing any other service reserve component activation by more than a factor of two. This degree of integration provides the Marine Corps with unprecedented mission depth, operational flexibility, and sustainability up and down the conflict spectrum. ■



Humanitarian Assistance

SEND IN THE MARINES

...the art of MAGTF Operations



Disaster Relief



Evacuation Operations



Smaller-Scale Contingencies



Major Theater War