Historical MEB Employment

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Photo credit line: 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines land at Da Nang, Vietnam on 8 March 1965 as part of 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade.

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Executive Summary

The Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) has experienced a resurgence of interest and prominence within the United States Marine Corps structure. Since its first articulation in 1962, the MEB has a performed a wide variety of roles and missions, and it has experienced many changes in its organization and prominence.

This report explores the historical employment of MEBs in order to better understand how the USMC has used MEBs, and why the USMC has used MEBs the way it has.

The historical record shows that the Marine Corps has used the MEB to perform nearly every possible mission (see table 4 and table 5). In addition, the size of the force has varied across a wide range: from a few hundred to as many as 25,000 Marines; although, the most common size for the MEB appears to be in the 4–8,000 range.

The historical record also shows that the Marine Corps has used the MEB in almost every possible way:

- Activated for an operation, then deactivated (Cuba, 1962: Cuban Missile Crisis)
- Maneuvered to participate in an operation while already active, but not originally activated for that particular mission (Cambodia, 1975: Operation Eagle Pull)
- As a lead-in for a larger force (Vietnam, 1965)
- As a transition for a departing force (Vietnam, 1971)
- As a planning element (Somalia, 1991: Operation Eastern Exit)
- As an oversight function, bringing a General Officer authority (various Pacific relief efforts).

Through its history, the Marine Corps has formed the MEB HQ in a variety of ways, which form a spectrum from dedicated forces to pickup forces. We describe four discrete points along this spectrum:

- **Standing HQ**. The MEB HQ staff has its own manpower (not dedicated to any other mission), with its own resources and training pipeline.
- **Embedded HQ**. Selected staff members at the MEF HQ also serve a role on the MEB HQ staff, but the MEB HQ does not exist as a permanent entity. These staff members spend their day-to-day lives at the MEF, but they are ready (manned, trained, and equipped) to fill the MEB staff role when needed.
- **Subordinate Resourcing**. Similar to the embedded HQ, the selected staff members come from subordinate units (the Division, Wing, and Logistics Group) instead of from the MEF HQ.
- **Pickup**. The MEB HQ has no pre-identified billets. The Marine Corps identifies the manpower to form the MEB HQ from the units at the time of an event.

Permanent MEB headquarters have been the exception, rather than the standard. This permanence has fluctuated, with flexibility and cost (manpower) as the primary driving factors. The Marine Corps returns to the MEB because of its *flexibility* and *relevance* in low- and mid-level crises, and moves away from the MEB due to *cost* constraints.

Present day discussions have highlighted the confusion both inside and outside of the Marine Corps on the topic of the MEB. A number of friction points, or ambiguities, cause confusion during discussions about the MEB. Many of these ambiguities involve conflicts over specific roles (for example, should the MEB be geared toward crisis response or major combat operations). The Marine Corps must resolve these friction points and ambiguities in order to move forward effectively with the MEB.

Define the MEB core identity. Many of the areas of confusion stem from lack of a solid definition of what a MEB is and what role it fulfills. A clear definition can clarify most of these ambiguities.

For example, the historical record suggests that the MEB has a command element with one or more MEUs, is usually sea-based and expeditionary, and can form the core of a JTF structure; the MEB is also formed for an operation whose size, complexity, or political sensitivity require a General Officer in command.

A MEB can be and do more than these things in order to give it flexibility, but the core identity of the MEB should start here. That core identity gives the Marine Corps the starting point it needs when engaging in discussions internal and external to the Corps. Beyond that core identity, the Marine Corps must identify the upper limit of the required capabilities. For example, will the MEB be capable of Joint Forcible Entry Operations? What are the expected timelines for the various missions?

These definitions will resolve most of the friction points. However, a conflict will likely continue to occur with the programmatic Baseline MEB, barring a cosmetic change in terminology (for example, a Marine Expeditionary Group).

Organize, resource, and train the MEB accordingly. The organization of the MEB may vary, depending on the specific aspects of the core identity. For example, the MEUs might be assigned to the MEB, which will build relationships between the staffs and alleviate one of the common complaints that MEBs violated the "train how you fight" principle.

Regardless, the historical record has shown that MEBs are susceptible during budget downturns, which includes the current fiscal environment; resourcing decisions must be able to weather these fiscal changes so that the MEB can meet its identified mission sets and other requirements.

Introduction

The United States Marine Corps (USMC) has well-defined air-ground task organizations at the small end, the Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), and at the large end, the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF). In between, however, the Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) lacks a precise definition, and since its first articulation in 1962, the MEB has had a cyclical significance as a USMC operational entity.

Purpose and Background

In this report, we look at the historical record to understand how the USMC has employed MEBs in the past. We consider the international political environment at the time, as well as other driving factors, in order to understand better why the USMC chose to operate with MEBs as it has.

Timeframe of Focus

The 1st MEB can trace its lineage to 1901, with the 1st Brigade operating in the Philippines [1], and the 4th and 5th MEBs can point to the 4th and 5th Brigades that operated in France during World War I [2][3]. However, the MEB name did not appear as the Marine Expeditionary Brigade until Marine Corps Order 3120.3 in 1962, which formally defined the MEU, MEB, and MEF Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF)[4]. As such, this report focuses on the employment of the MEB starting from the 1960s; however, we will also take a brief look before 1962 at a unit that one might call the spiritual predecessor to the MEB: the Provisional Marine Brigade.

Terminology

During the Vietnam War, the USMC expunged the term "Expeditionary" from its vocabulary and replaced it with "Amphibious." Thus, the Marine Expeditionary Brigade became the Marine Amphibious Brigade (MAB), with similar changes for MEU to MAU and for MEF to MAF. The change occurred because the Vietnamese had a negative

view of the word "expeditionary," likely arising from the previous presence of the French Far East Expeditionary Corps during the French Indochina War [5].[1] The USMC eventually changed the name back to "expeditionary" in 1988. This report will use the name of the unit at the time of the event, but in essence a MAB refers to a MEB.

The term "MEB" technically refers to all the units that constitute the entire organization: the Command Element (CE), the Ground Command Element (GCE), the Air Command Element (ACE), and the Logistics Command Element (LCE). However, in common usage the term "MEB" may also simply refer to the CE portion. In this report, we use "MEB" to refer to the entire organization, and "MEB CE" or "MEB HQ" to refer only to the Command Element.

The CE typically comprises the staff, along with a number of other support units (such as radio, communications, and intelligence detachments). Thus "MEB staff" will refer only to the staff portion of the Command Element.

Definition of a MEB

Most sources describe the MEB as being a MAGTF built around a reinforced infantry regiment (along with a composite Marine aircraft group, and a brigade service support group). The table below shows a summary of descriptors, including the approximate number of personnel; these attributes tend to be quite flexible in practice [6][7][8][9].

Table 1. Comparison of MEU, MEB, and MEF ground combat units and sizes

	Ground Combat Unit	Approximate size
MEU	Reinforced infantry battalion	2,000 to 2,2200
MEB	Reinforced infantry regiment	3,000 to 20,000
MEF	Marine division	30,000 to 60,000

Generally, the MEB has had a transient nature, often used to fill operational gaps or meet sudden requirements [10], an attitude that perhaps spawned from the original articulation of its capabilities in MCO 3120.3 in 1962:

1. *Corps Expéditionnaire Français en Extrême-Orient.*

> However, the majority of situations in which sustained combat is anticipated will eventually require a larger Marine air-ground task force. Accordingly, the MEB is normally organized to accomplish a limited mission. Upon accomplishment of the mission, a MEF or MEC (Corps) usually absorbs the MEB. [4]

Like all Marine units, the MEB is task-organized, which means that it can be configured in order to optimize its capabilities to the mission at hand.

> Three factors contribute to the sizing and composition of a MEB. First, a reinforced regiment is about one-third of a MarDiv and a composite aircraft group about one-third of a MAW. Second, the mission assigned prior to embarkation will determine what should be included and what should be left out or minimized. Third, the available shipping will dictate the size of the brigade that can be embarked. When there are opposing arguments as to the size, the available shipping always prevails. [7]

And like all Marine units, the MEB has the ability to self-sustain for a period of time. The table below summarizes an example of such endurance [11].

Table 2. Comparison of MEU, MEB, and MEF response times, endurance, and reach

	Strategic Response Time	Austere Endurance	Reach
MEU	1-5 days	15-30 days	165 NM
MEB	30 days	30-60 days	365 NM
MEF	60 days	60+ days	>365 NM

MEB Mission Spectrum

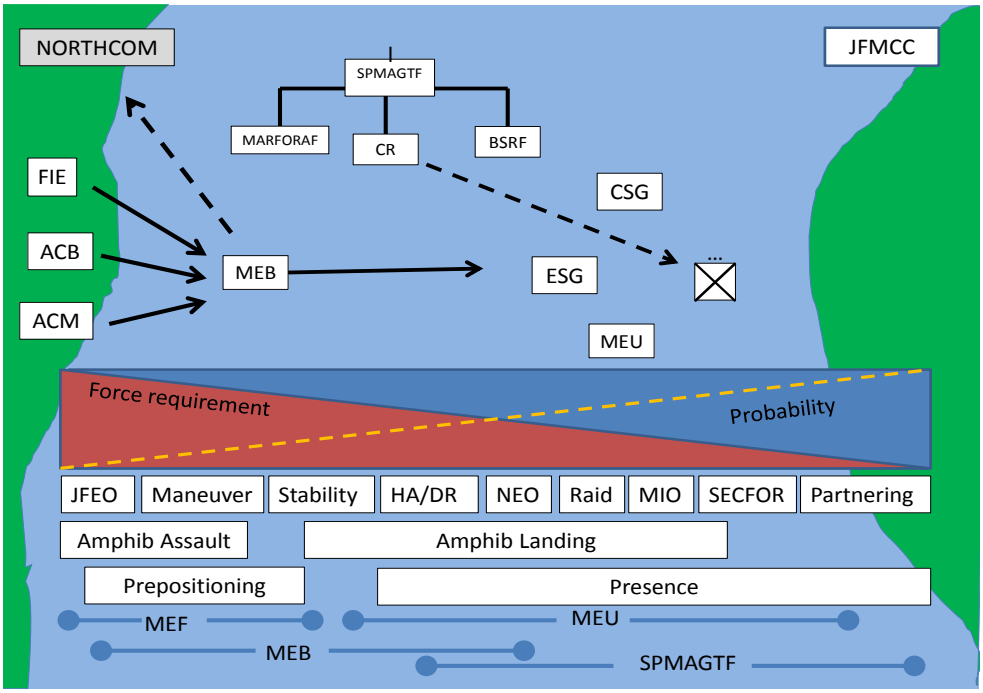
The MEB can perform independent operations, or it can serve as the vanguard of an arriving force; it can even serve as the remainder for a departing force. Being in the middle of the organizational structure, many sources describe the MEB as being capable across a wide range of operations—"from humanitarian assistance to forcible entry" in the operational and tactical areas of operations. Table 3 shows a comparison of how different sources have articulated the mission spectrum of the MEB [12][9][13].

Table 3. Comparison of viewpoints on MEB missions.

CNA 2010	McDivitt 1999	CNA 2004
Peacekeeping	Forcible entry	Nucleus of a JTF HQ
Peacebuilding	Combat operations	Marine component of a JTF
Peacemaking	Forward element of a MEF/JF	Tactical maneuver of CE
Peace enforcement	Combined arms	HA/DR
Conflict prevention	Benign entry	Show of force
Counter-insurgency	Rapid response	Freedom of nav/overflight
	Increase aviation	NEO
		Peace operations
		Strike/raid

Recently, the USMC has established a variety of MEB working groups, summits, and discussions, and figure 1 shows a graphic representation of the spectrum of operations that has appeared in some of these discussions on the MEB.

Figure 1. Graphic representation of envisioned MEB battlespace. [14]



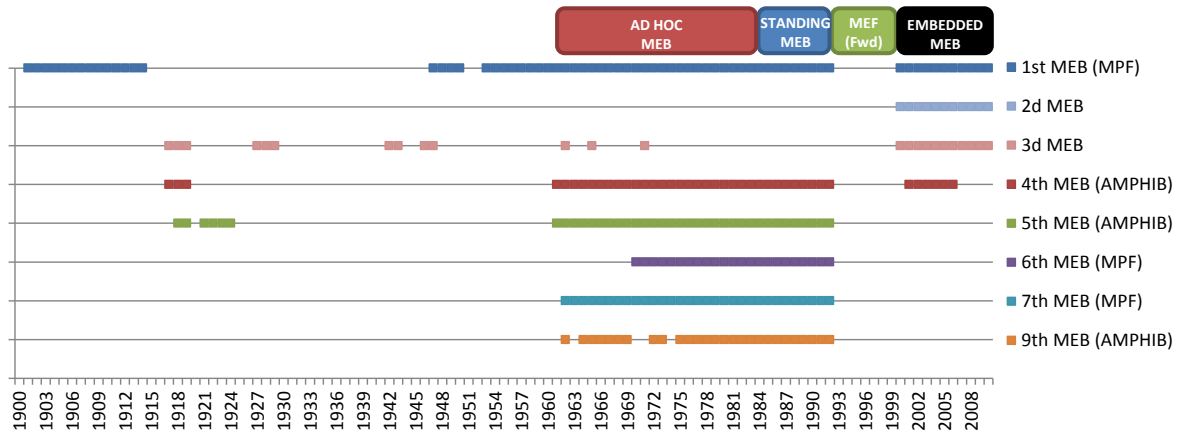
Historical Record

In this section, we delve into the historical record and examine in greater detail the times when the Marine Corps used a MEB or a MEB-sized force. First, we provide a broad overview of the history of MEBs, in which we divide the timeline into "eras" in order to discuss the changes in MEB organization. Then we summarize the operations that MEBs have conducted since 1962. After that, we discuss some of the motivations behind the changes in operations and organization that have occurred over the past 50 years.

Overview

The figure below shows a timeline of activity for MEBs in the USMC. The colored boxes at the top of the chart break the timeline into various "eras," which we describe next. This chart and presentation of the timeline are adapted from [10], and the segmentation of the timeline into eras is adapted from [13].

Figure 2. Timeline of MEB activity.



For reference, the MEBs have been home-based in the following locations:

- 1st MEB – Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii; now Camp Pendleton

- 2d MEB – Camp LeJeune
- 3d MEB – Okinawa, Japan
- 4th MEB – Quantico, Virginia; Little Creek, Virginia
- 5th MEB – Camp Pendleton
- 6th MEB – Camp LeJeune
- 7th MEB – Twentynine Palms, California
- 9th MEB – Okinawa, Japan

Ad hoc MEB (1962–1985)

During the Korean and Vietnam Wars, the USMC activated and deactivated MEBs as they were needed. Although figure 2 shows a solid line in this era for most of the MEBs, they stood up only as needed (many of them were activated every year); outside of war, they performed various exercises and operations in their areas of operation [10].

In addition, as West notes in his *Evolution of the Marine Expeditionary Brigade*, "Though it had existed since 1953, the 1st MEB in Hawaii was not really an operational Brigade. It rarely trained as a full Brigade and did not have any dedicated amphibious shipping" [10].

Standing MEB (1985–1992)

The MEB headquarters permanently stood up on the dates shown below; additionally, each MEB had a focus: amphibious operations (AMPHIB), or maritime prepositioning force (MPF), as denoted in figure 2. A later section further discusses these designations.

- 4th MEB: 1972
- 5th MEB: 1985
- 6th MEB: 1983
- 7th MEB: 1980
- 9th MEB: 1975

MEF (Fwd) (1992–2000)

During the early 1990s, the MEBs were deactivated, largely due to budget constraints and manpower reductions (the force was dropping to 159,000 Marines; see the section on "Motivations"). In their place, the USMC established the "forward MEF," or MEF (Fwd), which amounted to part of the MEF staff deploying to support operations.

Embedded MEBs (2000-present)

The MEF (Fwd) still continued to deploy during this period, particularly for operations in Afghanistan, where both I MEF and II MEF rotated responsibility for a forward element.

Outside of Afghanistan employment, the idea of the MEB as its own entity returned, and the USMC reestablished the MEB staff as an embedded force within the MEF staff. At present, each of the three MEF headquarters has a MEB staff embedded, where pre-identified staff members have dual responsibilities for both the MEF and the MEB.

At present, the 1st MEB CE intends to remain embedded within 1st MEF; however, the 3d MEB CE plans to attain stand-alone status in FY13; the 2d MEB CE also plans stand-alone status in FY15.

Side Note: 4th MEB (AT)

The 4th MEB (Anti-Terrorism) was activated in 2001 in response to the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, and was dedicated to the antiterrorism (AT) mission. This organization contained a number of other USMC units, such as the Marine Corps Security Force and the Marine Corps Security Guard Battalion. The 4th MEB (AT) was deactivated on 24 February 2006. The remaining 4th Battalion (AT) was transferred to 2d MarDiv, and then later deactivated on 13 July 2007 [15]. Due to its special nature, we will not further consider the activities of 4th MEB in this period (2001-2007), although we will discuss one example of their employment in Haiti in 2004.

Descriptions of MEB Employment

This section describes various instances of MEB employment in greater detail. Table 4 provides a summary of these instances. We

included all major operations that we discovered, but we only included a few examples of exercises. As such, this list is not exhaustive.

Table 4. An overview of operations involving the MEB.

Date	Operation	Location	MEB	Size	Operation Type
1962	Laotian Crisis	Thailand	3d	3,400	Show of force
1962	Cuban Missile Crisis	Cuba	4th(-)	25,000	Show of force
1962	Cuban Missile Crisis	Cuba	5th	6,200	Show of force
1965	Power Pack	Dominican Republic	4th	8,000	NEO
1964-5	Tonkin Crisis	Okinawa/Vietnam	9th	6,000	Show of force
1965	Vietnam War	Vietnam	9th	4,700	Airfield sec., COIN
1965	Vietnam War	Vietnam	3d	~4,100	Airfield sec., COIN
1965	Vietnam War	Vietnam	3d	~5000	(Chu Lai)
1966	(Amphibious)	Okinawa	9th	-	Amph Readiness
1971	Vietnam War	Vietnam	3d	14,700	Oversight
1972-3	Vietnam War	Vietnam	9th	~6,000	(Amphibious Ops)
1975	Eagle Pull	Cambodia	[11th]		NEO
1975	Frequent Wind	Vietnam	9th	~6,000	NEO
1980s	Bright Star	Egypt	6th	-	Exercise
1988	Just Cause	Panama	6th	-	Security/Combat
1990	Mud Pack	Philippines	9th	-	HA/DR
1990	Desert Shield	Saudi Arabia	1st	15,000	Combat
1990	Desert Shield	Saudi Arabia	7th	15,000	Combat
1990-1	DS/DS	Saudi Arabia	4th	8,400	Combat
1990-1	DS/DS	Saudi Arabia	5th	7,500	Combat
1991	Eastern Exit	Somalia	4th	(~60)	NEO
1991	Sea Angel	Bangladesh	5th	4,600	HA/DR
1992	(Unrest)	Somalia	1st	-	-
2000	Operation Stabilise	East Timor	3d	-	Logistics
2001	Enduring Freedom	Afghanistan	TF-58	~5,000	Combat
2003	Iraqi Freedom	Iraq	2d	-	Combat
2003	Shining Express	Liberia	2d	~400	(NEO)
2004	(Typhoons)	Philippines	3d	~600	HA/DR
2004	Pre Secure Tomorrow	Haiti	4th	50	Security
2006	Leyte Mudslide	Philippines	3d	-	HA/DR
2006	Java Earthquake	Indonesia	3d	~200	Medical
2007+	Operation Goodwill	Philippines	3d	-	HCA
2007	Sea Angel II	Bangladesh	3d	(small)	HA/DR
2008	Caring Response	Burma	3d	-	HA/DR

Table 4. An overview of operations involving the MEB.

Date	Operation	Location	MEB	Size	Operation Type
2009	Enduring Freedom	Afghanistan	MEB-A	-	Combat
2009	Typhoon Morakot	Taiwan	3d	-	HA/DR
2010	Typhoon Megi	Philippines	3d	-	HA/DR
2011	Tomodachi	Japan	3d	-	HA/DR
2012	Typhoon Bopha	Philippines	3d	-	HA/DR

Laos, 1962: Laotian Crisis

The North Vietnamese were backing a communist group, the Pathet Lao, in Laos. The Commander in Chief, Pacific (CinCPac) briefly activated Joint Task Force 116 in May of 1961 to address rising tensions; however, the conflict de-escalated. The following year, tensions quickly rose again, and CinCPac activated Joint Task Force 116 under the command of 1st Marine Air Wing (MAW) Commander, MGen Condon on 10 May 1962. When President Kennedy ordered US forces to Thailand a few days later, CinCPac put Army LTG Richardson in charge of JTF-116 for the defense of Thailand and as a show of force.

JTF-116 was to execute Plan 32-59, Phase II (Laos), which called for a MEB-sized force. BGen Simpson, who had been Assistant Division Commander of 3d MarDiv, arrived at Udorn, Thailand on 19 May with the staff of 3d MEB HQ; he carried the title of Naval Component Commander until JTF-116 was activated. Other USMC units arrived at Udorn and Nong Tai Kai, including VMA-332, an A-4C (Skyhawk) jet attack squadron; Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 3/9 (1,500 personnel)[2]; and HMM-261, an HUS-1 helicopter squadron that came from a nearby Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) through 7th Fleet. US Air Force and Army assets were also present in Thailand.

The units began to train shortly after arrival. The training operations had the benefit of exposing units to the rigors of the climate, allowing units to familiarize their command relationships, and demonstrating the US presence in the region.

2. The "x/y" shorthand will be used throughout this research memorandum to denote the Xth Battalion, Yth Marines.

As tensions eased toward the end of May, BGen Simpson redesignated the force as the 3d MEU, although reinforcements continued to arrive. At the height of the buildup, the Marine force totaled just over 3,400 personnel. By the end of June, major elements began to withdraw, such that only 1,000 personnel were left with 3d MEU by 6 July. Laos signed a Declaration on the Neutrality on 23 July 1962 [16].

Cuba, October–November 1962: Cuban Missile Crisis

The Marines prepared for operations during the Cuban Missile Crisis on two fronts. First, II MEF deployed a variety of units, comprising nearly 25,000 Marines. These units included "4th MEB(-)," which had been afloat and participating in PHIBRIGLEX-62 exercises. The headquarters "was deactivated and its personnel and equipment were absorbed into the headquarters of Landing Group West" [17]. The Commanding General of 2d MarDiv became the Commander for Landing Group West, and was embarked in USS *Mount McKinley*.

Meanwhile, 5th MEB (at Twentynine Palms, California[3]) was activated on 23 October in order to serve as Landing Group East under II MEF. The units included Regimental Landing Team 1 (RLT-1), the 3/7, and the 1/7 in reserve. In total, 6,200 Marines and their equipment were ready to go in under 96 hours. The ships present included the USS *Bayfield*, the USS *Iwo Jima*, and the USS *Eldorado*. The *Eldorado* served as a command ship, but had limited berthing, thus many members of the 5th MEB CE had to berth on other ships (which clearly hampered coordination). This group became TG 53.2 and arrived at the Panama Canal on 5 November. The group temporarily dissolved in order to reorganize, and stood up as TG 44.9. The group arrived in Puerto Rico on 15 November and began various practice drills at Vieques. Eventually, tensions resolved with Cuba, and the 5th MEB got the official message to return to California on 29 November [17].

3. The Command Lineages state that 7th MEB was located in Twentynine Palms and 5th MEB at Camp Pendleton. However, before the establishment of permanent HQs, the tie of a MEB to a location may have been less explicit.

It is not clear in this example why one MEB CE (4th) was absorbed, while another (5th) was activated and stayed intact. It is possible that the presence of the 2d MarDiv General, serving as the Commander for Landing Group West, trumped the General in charge of the 4th MEB CE.

Dominican Republic, 1965: Operation Power Pack

In the early 1960s, the Dominican Republic underwent political and military turmoil that finally erupted in late April 1965 with the collapse of the government; various factions attempted to control the nation. The United States sent assets from all services in order to evacuate US citizens from the Dominican Republic and to attempt to restore order.

Before violence erupted, USMC forces had performed Exercise QUICK KICK VII off of Vieques, Puerto Rico in early April; Army and Air Force units participated in this exercise as well. These forces involved 6th MEU, building up to 4th MEB (during which the Colonel in charge of the MEU became the commander of the Regimental Landing Team). This exercise put everybody "on a first name basis" [18]. Some of the forces had a follow-on exercise (PLACE KICK) during 20–23 April, further strengthening the relationships.

The initial signs of trouble in the Dominican Republic came on 25 April. The 6th MEU was on scene, just out of sight of land by the morning of 26 April and prepared to conduct NEO; initial evacuations happened the nights of 26 and 27 April. By 28 April, a request came to get 1,200 Marines ashore to help restore peace. The 4th MEB HQ was activated on 29 April; units included BLTs 1/6, 3/6, 2/2, and later 1/2; ProvMAG-60, HMM-263, HMM-264, VMFA-323, VMF(AW)-451. The ships present included the USS *Boxer*, USS *Ruchamkin*, USS *Rankin*, USS *Raleigh*, USS *Fort Snellings*, USS *Wood County*. The peak of the buildup happened around 17 May, with approximately 15,000 Army, 8,000 Marines, and 1,000 Air Force personnel. Final withdrawal of Marine units began on 2 June.

During this event, the United States received some criticism for not waiting to work through the Organization of American States (OAS). However, the situation turned bad so quickly, that slower action may have resulted in the loss of many lives [18].

Vietnam, 1964–1965

In early August 1964, torpedo boats from North Vietnam attacked two US destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin. In the wake of the attack, the US Pacific Command activated the 9th MEB, under the command of the assistant division commander of 3rd MarDiv. The MEB consisted of the 9th Marines regimental HQ and three BLTs. These groups (about 6,000 Marines) embarked on Seventh Fleet amphibious shipping on 6 August, with a composite MAG and squadrons in support (but not embarked). The crisis from the Gulf of Tonkin attacks faded, and the MEB did not take part in any combat. The three BLTs split—one to Okinawa, one to the Philippines, and one remained afloat as part of the Special Landing Force. The Commander of 9th MEB returned to Okinawa, but "maintained a skeleton headquarters at Subic Bay on board… USS *Mount McKinley*" [19].

The 9th MEB stayed active, with two BLTs (1/9 and 3/9) on standby as tensions flared and violence erupted in Vietnam. Eventually, the conflict escalated to the point where, on 7 March 1965, Washington ordered the landing of 9th MEB and two of its BLTs at Da Nang. On 8 March, 3/9 landed by "administrative offload" from amphibious shipping. Meanwhile, 1/3 began to land by air, with some helicopters arriving by ship; their mission was to defend the Da Nang Airbase. The logistics support for the forces took until the end of March to solidify.

On 14 March, the 3d MEB HQ was activated in Okinawa, with RLT-3 (comprising BLT 3/4 and BLT 2/3, the latter of which was already in Thailand for Operation Jungle Drum III), VMA-311, and VMFA-542, as well as other units. BGen Carl took command of 3d MEB on 4 April, and the force began to land on 10 April at Da Nang, where 9th MEB had already landed. Initially the command relations were not clear, with each MEB vying for control of their units; eventually they decided that 9th MEB would gain control of units as they landed ashore.

Thus on 18 April, RLT-3 reorganized under the 9th MEB structure as the 3rd Marines, Reinforced. With the arrival of more forces, the brigade eventually had "a four-battalion regiment and a four-squadron Marine aircraft group, as well as artillery and engineer groups and a

logistic support group" [19]. Upon depositing the BLTs ashore, the 3d MEB CE returned to Okinawa for deactivation.

Again, the initial mission for the Marines was restricted to defense of the airbase, but by mid-April, the Johnson administration decided to lift the restriction to allow the Marines to conduct counterinsurgency operations.

By the end of April, the US authorized more troops for Vietnam, including an additional 5,000 Marines, the latter of which were destined for a new base at Chu Lai, 57 miles southeast of Da Nang. The 3d MEB was reactivated to oversee the landing of these Marines, which included RLT-4 HQ, BLT 1/4, BLT 2/4, 3d Reconnaissance Battalion, and a Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (for construction of an airfield). BGen Carl and his staff embarked the USS *Estes* in the Philippines to plan for the landing; eventually a third battalion (3/3) was added to the list.

The *Estes* arrived in the area on 3 May, and after some final planning, the Marines began movement ashore on 8 May. Although they had initially planned for an opposed landing, they eventually landed unopposed due to the preparations of South Vietnamese army units along with additional security from Marine units attached to 9th MEB to the north. The units completed movement ashore by 12 May.

> With the completion of the Chu Lai amphibious landing, seven of the nine infantry battalions of the 3d Marine Division, supported by most of the 12th Marines, the artillery regiment of the division, and a large portion of the 1st MAW were in South Vietnam. As a result, the 9th MEB was deactivated and replaced by a new Marine organization, the in [sic] Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF). [19]

On 5 May, approval came for the formation of a force-level headquarters. MGen Collins took the Naval Component Command and established the III MEF HQ and 3d MarDiv in Vietnam. The III MEF became III MAF on 7 May, from the recommendation of General Westmoreland, who noted that the Vietnamese had a distaste for the word 'expeditionary.'

Upon establishment of the MAF, the former 9th MEB commander returned to Okinawa to continue his role as an assistant division

commander; meanwhile, the former 3d MEB commander became the Deputy Commander of III MAF [19].

Okinawa, 1966

In the absence of the 3rd Marine Division in Okinawa, Japan, the 9th MAB was activated on 1 March 1966 to serve as the amphibious force in readiness for the region. Units included RLT-26 and its three infantry battalions; two BLTs to the 7th Fleet Special Landing Force (afloat in South China Sea); and MAG-15 (VMFA-122, VMGR-152).

9th MAB executed "over 82 major combat operations," including Operation Bold Mariner on 13 January 1969, which involved an amphibious assault at Batangan Peninsula, Vietnam (BLTs 2/26 and 3/26).

Due to the redeployment of forces from Vietnam to Okinawa, the 9th MAB was deactivated on 7 November 1969. The 3rd Marine Division resumed the readiness responsibilities of 9th MAB [20] [21].

Vietnam, 1971

In 1970, President Nixon approved the redeployment of 150,000 personnel from Vietnam. This withdrawal occurred in a number of segments, the sixth of which was to begin in February of 1971. For the Marines, this withdrawal involved Marines from III MAF, the 1st Marine Division, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing Headquarters, and the 5th Marines.

After major Marine units departed Vietnam, the remaining Marines in Quang Nam were to form the 3d MAB. The leadership expected the duration of 3d MAB "to be short and that the brigade would probably redeploy during late April, May, and June" [22].

Planning for the transition had begun as early as July of the previous year, with emphasis placed on keeping as much continuity as possible. (Officers continued to fill the same role on the MAB staff as they had on the MAF staff.) The plan for transition identified officers from the MAF, division, and wing who would transition to the MAB and who would start to work part-time on MAB issues from 10 March to 13 April. The MAF and wing would relocate key functions and personnel

to the 1st Marine Division Command Post on 3 April for the final transition, and 3d MAB HQ would then activate on 14 April.

MGen Armstrong was appointed to command 3d MAB; he had been the Commanding General of 1st MAW in Vietnam since June 1970. Originally, BGen Simmons had been designated to command 3d MAB; however, the leadership had concerns that a one-star general might have a disadvantage when dealing with the other services. Further, the leadership foresaw that the MAB would have to deal primarily with aviation redeployment issues, and thus Armstrong's aviation background better suited him for the task. With MGen Armstrong as Commander, BGen Simmons was thus assigned as Deputy Commander of 3d MAB.

The early stages of the redeployment began in mid-January 1971; ground combat and combat support units began to cease operations in mid-February. Some units (particularly air assets) stayed a bit longer than originally planned in order to continue active support. As units departed Vietnam, many left behind smaller groups (such as companies) for incorporation into the 3d MAB. By the beginning of April, the 1st Marines were the only active infantry unit left at III MAF.

In the event, 3d MAB was activated on 14 April, with assignment of all remaining Marine forces in Vietnam. It included around 14,700 Marines (and just over 800 Navy personnel) from the 1/1 and 1/11, and various battalions, batteries, and companies of larger units that had already left. The air assets consisted of MAG-11 (VMA-311, VMA (AW)-225, and a detachment of OV-10s) and MAG-16 (HMH-463, HMLs -167 and -367, and HMMs -262 and -263). The departing III MAF Commander, LtGen Robertson, returned to Okinawa to re-establish the force headquarters there.

In the days following the activation of the MAB, units began to leave Vietnam by ship and by plane, with the majority of units (around 12,000 personnel) gone by 30 April. The remaining units of 3d MAB ceased operations on 7 May and turned remaining functions over to the 196th Army Brigade; these units prepared for and executed their redeployment. The 3d MAB formally deactivated on 27 June [22].

Vietnam, 1972–1973

The 9th MAB was activated on 9 April 1972 for operations. The command deployed off of Vietnam aboard the USS *Blue Ridge,* with 238 personnel in the headquarters (58 officer, 180 enlisted) along with two officers and three enlisted from the Navy. The 9th MAB assumed the role of TG 79.1, with two MAUs (31st and 33d), as well as two BLTs (1/9, 2/9), for a total of around 6,000 Marines (the HQ started at around 240 personnel, but decreased to 50 by May) [23] [24].

The MAB participated in a number of amphibious operations, including the assault on Quang Tri City at the end of June. The 9th MAB was eventually deactivated on 9 February 1973. The staff became a "nucleus staff" and served as a forward command element for III MAF while aboard the USS *Paul Revere* [25].

Philippines, 1973–1974

Although not many details are available, it appears that the 9th MAB was involved in Operation Pagasa II in the Philippines during October 1973 and December 1974. These events were landing exercises in combination with the Philippine Marines [26].

Cambodia, 1975: Operation Eagle Pull

In April 1975, the Khmer Rouge closed in on the final stronghold of the Khmer Republic at Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The United States Embassy called for evacuation of US nationals as well as "at-risk" Cambodians.

The number of expected refugees fluctuated between 400 and 3,600. The upper range required some additional "worst-case scenario" planning and led to the requirement for two battalions to assist in the evacuation. As such, the III MAF commander activated the 11th MAB on 26 March and placed BGen Coffman (Assistant Division Commander of 3rd MarDiv) in charge. Coffman had commanded the 9th MAB the previous year.

The nucleus of the 11th MAB staff came from 3rd MarDiv. On 2 April, the staff presented its operational plan for evacuation, which employed the 1/9, 3/9, and the 31st MAU (2/4 and HMH-462).

However, in the following days, the requirement for the number of evacuees dropped (particularly because some evacuees departed on outbound supply aircraft). As such, the III MAF Commander deactivated 11th MAB on 5 April.

The final evacuation occurred on 12 April and involved elements of 31st MAU, BLT 2/4, and CH-53s of HMH-462 launched from USS *Okinawa* (ARG Alpha), and HMH-463 helicopters as backup. In total, the Marines evacuated 287 people (the final estimate from the previous day had identified 590 people).

During the months leading up to the evacuation, US forces were adapting to a rapidly changing (and deteriorating) security environment. The brief existence of the 11th MAB provides one example of the ability of the forces to quickly activate an organization to take command of a particular operation [26].

Although the 9th MAB was in existence at this point (see next section), it is not clear whether the staff had any role in planning for Operation Eagle Pull.

Vietnam, 1975: Operation Frequent Wind

In April 1975, the North Vietnamese Army approached Saigon in the final move to bring an end to the Vietnam War. The 9th MAB would play the key role in the evacuation of refugees from Saigon.

The 9th MAB was activated on 26 March 1975 to participate in a landing exercise in the Philippines, MABLEx 2-75. This exercise served a second purpose, because it provided reason for the movement of units in the South China Sea. (The exercise had been in planning for 18 months prior, so it was a cover story of opportunity.) Originally the exercise had been scoped for a MAF, but because 9th MAB was on standby for evacuation of Phnom Penh, Cambodia (see previous section), the exercise was reduced to accommodate the MAB.

The personnel for the 9th MAB came from III MAF, 3d MarDiv, and 1st MAW:

> The Chief of Staff, 9th MAB and his core of officers were normally collocated with the commander of Task Force 76, the commander of amphibious forces in the Seventh Fleet, where they functioned as a headquarters with

> representatives from each operational area. For contingencies and exercises, the full brigade staff was activated by drawing previously designated officers from III MAF, 3d Marine Division, and 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, and integrating them into the original nucleus to form the tactical MAB headquarters. Ground combat, aviation combat, and service support forces were then attached to the brigade as mission or operational requirements dictated. [26]

On 7 April, III MAF activated the 33d MAU (BLT 1/9, LSU 1/9), to be part of ARG Bravo (USS *Hancock*, *Durham*, *Frederick*, and *Dubuque*); the MAB staff and 33d MAU embarked on the USS *Hancock,* and ARG Bravo departed Subic Bay on 9 April.

On 10 April, 9th MAB Commander requested HMH-463 (which was part of ARG Bravo) be reassigned to 31st MAU (which was with BLT 2/4 on ARG Alpha) for Operation Eagle Pull (see previous section). On 11 April, the *Hancock* met with the *Blue Ridge*, where the forward element of the MAB staff had been. The MAB staff finally consolidated and began planning for Operation Frequent Wind.

Meanwhile, on 6 April, BLT 3/9 in Atsugi, Japan, began to transit to Okinawa to meet shipping of Amphibious Squadron 5 that was just arriving from California. This BLT, along with HML-367, formed along with 35th MAU (which drew personnel from the 9th Marines HQ) to be on ARG Charlie.

Thus three MAUs had formed on various ships in the Western Pacific. It was noted that (with emphasis added):

> The inclusion of the 35th MAU created an unusual organization, a brigade with three MAUs. This organization reflected the **uncertainty prevalent** in WestPac at the time. No one could predict if or when an evacuation might be necessary, or even if the inbound ships of Amphibious Squadron 5 would arrive in time. Each MAU formed as amphibious ships became available.
>
> To meet both the Cambodian and South Vietnamese emergencies and still **maintain mobility**, the Pacific command ordered the formation of three MAUs, each assigned to a different amphibious ready group, under the 9th MAB. The brigade thereby possessed the ability to **control all these forces with a single headquarters**. [26]

On 12 April, 31st MAU performed Operation Eagle Pull and then reported to 9th MAB the next day. Meanwhile, the 35th MAU was due to arrive within ten days. At this time, 9th MAB began to send air and ground officers to Saigon for on-site planning reconnaissance.

This time period shows an example of a MAF and MAB active simultaneously, though it was noted that "by committing the 9th MAB to [Operation Frequent Wind], III MAF would have limited numbers available for any additional commitments" [26].

By mid-April, the North Vietnamese advance on Saigon stalled and the situation in South Vietnam appeared to stabilize. Task Force 76 requested permission to return to Subic Bay for repairs. Commander, 9th MAB used this opportunity to restructure his organization on 17 April: he combined the ground units into a regimental landing team and the squadrons into a provisional air group, and added a brigade logistic support group. Each of the MAU COs became a CO of a subordinate element. The resulting structure contained RLT-4 (BLT 1/9, BLT 2/4, BLT 3/9), Provisional MAG-39 (HMH-462, HMH-463, HMM-165 shipboard; and HML-367 with HQ in Subic), and the BLSG (LSUs 1/9, 2/4, 3/9).

The North Vietnamese soon renewed their offensive, which required the units at Subic to get underway on 18 April. In response, 9th MAB put a forward command element in Saigon (forward HQ established 21 April at Defense Attaché Office), including a liaison officer with the US Support Activities Group (USSAG) staff, which was in northern Thailand.

The control of assets had an element of complexity: While afloat, 9th MAB and units belonged to Seventh Fleet, but once ashore (past the coastline), they belonged to USSAG/Seventh Air Force. Thus,

> The brigade headquarters became in effect a conduit for melding the various plans of the dual chain of command. The 9th MAB staff…was required to examine every minute aspect of the operation, ensuring that the parallel planning cogs did in fact mesh. Where they did not, the brigade assisted in rectifying the differences. [26]

On 19 April, 9th MAB arrived off of South Vietnam, and on 20 April it promulgated its plan for Operation Frequent Wind. During these events, a security force was established to provide security aboard the

ships that would carry the refugees. This security force was initially performed by BLT 1/4, but was eventually done by a collection of Marines made up from various available units.

The North Vietnamese final assault on Saigon began around 28 April, and the official evacuation—Operation Frequent Wind—began on the morning of 29 April. The evacuation of refugees occurred primarily by helicopter; BLT 2/4 arrived in the first wave in order to provide additional security.

Over the next 20 hours, with 1,054 flight hours and 682 sorties, the task force would perform the largest helicopter evacuation in history, relocating just over 7,000 people to the amphibious ships (and Military Sealift Command ships) waiting offshore. The last helicopter left Saigon with the final group of a Marine security detachment a little before 0800 on 30 April. The Republic of Vietnam surrendered later that day.

9th MAB was deactivated on 18 May 1975 [26].

Exercise Bright Star, 1985

This combined exercise occurred from 15 July to 11 August, and involved around 2,300 Marines performing amphibious landings and live-fire exercises with Egyptian troops. We have not mentioned many exercises in this section, but we mention this exercise because the 6th MAB formed by compositing 6th MAU from the east coast with a MAF HQ from the west coast [27].

Panama, 1988: Operation Just Cause

In the wake of violent civil unrest, the United States sent Marines to Panama to protect American lives and property (much of which was related to the canal) in April 1988. The Panamanian Defense Force (PDF) under General Manuel Noriega was the primary enemy.

The Marines organized in a MAGTF structure (although they did not have an air element) with only a reinforced rifle company, BSSG-6; the Command Element came from "advanced elements" of 6th MEB. At times, this CE is described as three people; at others, it implies a more robust and typical staff. These forces fell in with other Marine forces already present in Panama (the Marine Corps Security Force):

Company Panama and a Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team (the latter of which had just arrived in March of 1988). In May 1989, a company from 2d Light Armored Infantry Battalion further reinforced these units.

Due to the open-ended commitment of these forces to Panama, the units rotated on a 90-day cycle. The CE also rotated on a similar cycle, but as individuals. However, the commander, executive officer, and sergeant major rotated on a 6-month cycle to promote better continuity; later, this longer cycle was extended to all major staff officers and the intelligence branch.

Initially, the PDF appeared to probe Marine intent and capabilities through light covert engagements at night. However, in early 1989, the efforts of the PDF shifted to harassment of the population in order to influence the upcoming local election; this effort failed, and Noriega was defeated in the 7 May election. Noriega annulled the election results and then sent a paramilitary battalion to attack the election victors. This action caused the United States to shift to a more aggressive stance: the 2d LAI company arrived in response, along with two Army infantry battalions.

Elements of the PDF attempted a coup on 3 October 1989, but failed. Noriega had to restructure the PDF, which resulted in a much weaker organization. Then, on 16 December, two events on American personnel (one of which resulted in the death of a Marine officer) witnessed the launch of Operation Just Cause on 20 December (a contingency plan that had been in development and rehearsal for some time), in which the Marine units attacked and seized various PDF installations and took control of the Bridge of the Americas. Noriega surrendered on 3 January 1990.

The mission then shifted to providing security for the local populace, as well as tracking down at-large PDF members. The need for the Marines gradually receded until their departure in spring 1990 [28].

Philippines, 1990: Operation Mud Pack

Very little information exists on this flood relief effort in the Philippines, other than the 9th MEB's involvement. It is possible that MEBs participated in many of these "small scale" events [29].

Persian Gulf, 1990

Under the leadership of Saddam Hussein, Iraq invaded Kuwait on 2 Aug 1990. In response, the United States began to mobilize troops to counter the invasion. The movement of Marine assets began on 6 August, as MPSRON3 departed from Guam (with gear for 1st MEB) and MPSRON2 departed from Diego Garcia (with gear for 7th MEB). On 10 August, CinCCent called for the airlift of the 1st and 7th MEBs; he also called for the seaborne presence of the 4th MEB.

In response, the 7th MEB began to depart from Twentynine Palms, California on 12 August with around 15,000 Marines. Units included RLT-7, with four BLTs; BSSG-7; and MAG-70 (fixed and rotary wing). The first elements arrived in Al Jubayl on 14 August under MGen Hopkins, and the first ships of MPSRON2 arrived the following day. By 20 August, the ground elements had secured their initial defensive positions and relieved the lighter 82nd Airborne Division troops. "Five days later, the brigade commander reported that his mechanized infantry battalions—supported by armor and the full complement of aviation, including fixed-wing close air support—was fully ready for combat across his sector" [30]. One historical document describes MGen Hopkins as "CG I MEF (Fwd)" at this point.

On 25 August, the first airflow of 1st MEB assets from Hawaii began, mostly 3d MarDiv units (two BLTs). The 1st MEB units *had no command element,* because the Marines already had enough command structure available in Saudi Arabia. On 26 August, MPSRON3 arrived Al Jubayl and linked up with 1st MEB units.

I MEF CE came from Camp Pendleton, California under the lead of LtGen Boomer, who arrived at Riyadh on 17 August. On 2 September, I MEF assumed control of all USMC assets in CENTCOM, formed from 1st and 7th MEBs. The CG 7th MEB became DCG I MEF; thus 7th MEB stood down.

Meanwhile for the seaborne assets, the first echelon from 4th MEB sailed from Morehead City on 17 August with around 8,000 Marines (RLT-2, MAG-40, and a BSSG) and under the leadership of MGen Jenkins. The ships sailed in three transit groups of about five ships each; the other two groups sailed on 20 and 22 August.

The 13th MEU (SOC) departed from the Philippines with PHIBRON 5 and ARG Alpha, arriving at the Gulf of Oman on 7 September. By 11 September, the first transit group of 4th MEB arrived in the Gulf. All three transit groups had arrived by 17 September. The 4th MEB and 13th MEU stayed afloat, both falling under the Commanding General 4th MEB, who was also Commander, Landing Force (CLF). The seaborne units began to plan and execute landing rehearsals.

In November 1990, President Bush announced an increase of troops. So on 1 December, 5th MEB got underway from San Diego with around 7,500 Marines (RLT-5, MAG-50, BSSG-50) and 13 ships of PHIBGRU 3. This MEB had 11th MEU (SOC) "embedded" in it, with the idea that the MEU could be reconstituted to handle various missions. The Marines were due to arrive in theater around 15 January.

The 5th MEB was to serve as the MARCENT reserve and form a blocking position at the Saudi-Kuwaiti border. Fifteen ships were spread out in the Persian Gulf, which complicated preparations for landing (e.g., USS *Tripoli* was in the northern Gulf to support AMCM and had struck a mine on 18 February 1991); these ships were part of TG 156.2 (PHIBGRU 3) and included LHA-1 *Tarawa*, LPH-10 *Tripoli*, LPH-11 *New Orleans*, LPD-2 *Vancouver*, LPD-9 *Denver*, LPD-10 *Juneau*, LSD-36 *Anchorage*, LSD-39 *Mount Vernon*, LSD-42 *Germantown*, LST-1183 *Peoria*, LST-1184 *Frederick*, LST-1195 *Barbour County*, LKA-115 *Mobile*, M/V *Flickertail State*, and M/V *Cape Girardeau*. The 5th MEB personnel were in four elements: the Command Element (481), RLT-5 (4806), MAG-50 (1496), and BSSG-5 (617) [6][13].

Around this time, a plan was developed to send II MEF to the Gulf as a force (approximately another 30,000 Marines). In the end, however, only part of the II MEF forces departed (2d Division and 2d FSSG), which then fell under I MEF in theater. The movement of units began 9 December.

Thus, by 15 January, I MEF had "two divisions, a very large wing, and a substantial service support command. In addition there would be two Marine Expeditionary Brigades and a special-operations-capable Marine Expeditionary Unit afloat, offering a very powerful landing force for any contemplated amphibious operations." The total force

numbered around 84,000 Marines, with 66,000 ashore and 18,000 afloat [29].

Somalia, 1991: Operation Eastern Exit

Operation Eastern Exit involved a noncombatant evacuation (NEO) of the US Embassy in Mogadishu, Somalia. The US Ambassador requested assistance in evacuating the embassy on 1 January 1991 due to the increasing violence of the Somali civil war.

In the area preparing for Operation Desert Storm, the 4th MEB formed the core of a Special Purpose MAGTF (SPMAGTF) and began planning the evacuation. Although four ships, two escorts, and an oiler were available, NAVCENT approved a plan for two ships (USS *Guam* and USS *Trenton*) and a combination security detachment of USMC and SOF. A 60-man evacuation team launched at 0247 on 5 January via CH-53s. The first trip secured 61 of 281 evacuees, and the evacuation was completed via CH-46s by the early morning of 6 January [31].

Bangladesh, 1991: Operation Sea Angel

On 29 April 1991, a damaging cyclone struck near Bangladesh. CinCPac activated a Contingency Joint Task Force to coordinate the US humanitarian aid response to the disaster. The Commander of III MEF was appointed to lead the CJTF (a 2-star MGen who would soon be promoted to LtGen in July 1991), with reinforcements from the Deployable Joint Task Force Augmentation Cell from CinCPac, which brought the HQ to around 250 personnel.

The majority of the US forces that responded to the incident came from the 5th MEB, which was returning home from operations in the Persian Gulf. The 5th MEB included around 4,600 Marines, as well as roughly 3,000 Sailors from Amphibious Group 3. The forces also included some Army and Air Force units.

Operation Sea Angel lasted from 11 May to 13 June, during which the response forces remained mostly sea-based (no more than 500 personnel stayed ashore overnight). The 5th MEB units actively participated from 15 May to 29 May. However, it is not clear what role the MEB CE played in this event (whether they bolstered the CJTF staff,

or whether they stayed afloat with the units to provide local control) [32][33].

Somalia, 1992

In October 1992, during the lead-up to Operation Restore Hope, the 13th and 22d MEUs briefly (less than 2 months) formed the 1st MEB in order to provide support to UN and US forces. No further details are available [34].

East Timor, 2000: Operation Stabilise

In August 1999, the people of East Timor voted for independence from Indonesia. The resulting postelection violence by pro-Indonesia groups created nearly 250,000 refugees. On 15 September, the UN Security Council passed a resolution to create the International Force East Timor (INTERFET), with Australia in the lead.

The National Command Authority limited the number of personnel in East Timor to an overnight presence of 250. Thus an amphibious sea-based force had an advantage in this situation, able to send personnel ashore during the day and to recover them each night.

On 5 October, USS *Belleau Wood* and the 31st MEU arrived in support of the Australian Defense Force. The *Belleau Wood* had recently returned from a deployment and could not stay on station for the entire period, so the USS *Peleliu*—along with 11th MEU (SOC)—shifted early from the Arabian Gulf to relieve the *Belleau Wood* on 26 October. The *Peleliu* and the 11th MEU departed on 26 November. Finally, toward the end of January 2000, the INTERFET transitioned to the US Group East Timor, and USS *Juneau* and a SPMGTF (formed from elements of 31st MEU) arrived on 26 January.

US forces supported the Australian Defense Force, the latter of which had from 4,500 to 5,500 personnel. The USFORINTERFET Commander was the III MEF Deputy Commanding General, who also was the Commanding General of 3d MEB. Most of the staff came from III MEF. With 22 nations contributing to the effort, the INTERFET focus was on peacekeeping; US forces primarily provided transportation, logistics, and other support.

Not many sources exist that identify the nature and role of the 3d MEB in Operation Stabilise. The USMC Yearly Chronology for 2000 states that 3d MEB was reactivated in Okinawa on 1 January 2000 [35]. However, some sources describe 3d MEB activity before this date: for example, that the 3d MEB had conducted mission analysis in May–June 1999, and had developed scenarios by early September [36]. It is possible that 3d MEB was in the process of officially activating by 1 January 2000, and thus was able to perform some functions before that date [37].

Afghanistan, October 2001–February 2002: Task Force 58,

The 1st MEB CE was in Egypt in September–October 2001, participating in Exercise Bright Star. During this time, offensive military operations began in Afghanistan on 7 October 2001, and by the end of October, the need for a sustained ground presence had arisen.

At the end of Bright Star, on 27 October, CG 1st MEB, BGen Mattis, shifted to NSA Bahrain, along with his aide and two planners. By 30 October, a small Operational Planning Team (OPT) had formed to collect info and conduct initial mission analysis on possible amphibious operations. This OPT consisted of the two aforementioned planners along with a MARCENT Marine and a I MEF liaison officer. Within 48 hours, three Navy officers from NAVCENT N5, a Marine intelligence officer, and the OIC for the 15th MEU KC-130 detachment had joined the OPT. BGen Mattis held his initial commander's estimate on this day.

The staff went on to gain control of 15th MEU (SOC) and 26th MEU (SOC), and were able to penetrate far inland to Forward Operating Base Rhino in the Helmand desert (300 n.mi.), and then subsequently move north to occupy the international airport in Kandahar [30] [38].

Of key importance in this evolution (emphasis added):

> In the initial meetings with Vice Admiral Moore, the Admiral made it clear **his intent not to have a Marine Expeditionary Brigade staff in place.** Without a command ship, working spaces and communications would not be available to support a robust staff built along traditional lines. If the staff were to fall in on the ARG ships, space would be restricted. Although never formally stated, it was understood

> that the size of the staff would remain small. The limited infrastructure available at NSA Bahrain impacted the space available for working, billeting, and establishing a command post. The size of the staff also reflected General Mattis' desire for a small planning-focused staff with staff officers **making rapid decisions on their own authority,** not working on route sheets. The initial concept was for the staff to operate as an N-5 planning staff, however as the operation progressed the need for an N-3 operations section was realized. [38]

The execution of this task force highlighted several key issues:

- A MEB does not need a typical MEB staff (200+ personnel) to operate effectively
- In the case of Task Force 58, it takes a strong leader along with a hand-picked staff
- Staff was "making rapid decisions on their own authority, not working on route sheets"
- "Making rapid decisions on their own authority" requires a great familiarity and trust between the commander and his or her staff
- "Working on route sheets" is what happens with typical standing (and bloated) staffs, and can slow the ability of the staff to act

Iraq, 2003: Operation Iraqi Freedom

In preparation for Operation Iraqi Freedom, 2d MEB formed on 6 January 2003. The MEB departed North Carolina with Amphibious Task Force East (ATF-E) on 16 January. While en route, the group was renamed Task Force Tarawa and would fall under I MEF. On 17 February, the task force disembarked at Kuwaiti Naval Base and then moved by air to positions in north Kuwait; 2d MEB aircraft were assigned to 3d MAW. By 9 March, all units were combat ready. President Bush announced the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom on 20 March, and RCT-2 led the charge to Baghdad (this time includes such events as the Battle of Nasiriyah); the city was cleared of major resistance forces by the middle of April. On 18 May, the task force returned to the ATF-E ships, and the Marines had returned to the United States by late June [39].

Liberia, 2003: Operation Shining Express

In June 2003, the USS *Kearsarge* was returning to the United States after participating in Operation Iraqi Freedom (as part of ATF-E). During this time, violence began to increase in Liberia such that the US Ambassador to Liberia requested assistance in case an evacuation was warranted.

The *Kearsarge* remained on station near Liberia from around 13 June. After about a week, a cease-fire was brokered, which removed the immediate need for an evacuation. The *Kearsarge* departed and returned home to Norfolk on 30 June.

Before this diversion to Liberia, the *Kearsarge* had been called upon to support summits in Egypt and Jordan that President Bush would be attending. Reports on this assistance described 2d MEB assets on *Kearsarge* that were on standby as required; these same assets (on the order of 400 Marine personnel) likely were on call for Operation Shining Express. Though not stated in any sources consulted, the 2d MEB staff likely provided planning oversight for this effort.

Later, the *Iwo Jima* ARG (along with 26th MEU) was repositioned near Liberia for reinforcement in case violence erupted again, but the departure of the *Kearsarge* signaled the end of the passing involvement for 2d MEB [40][41][42].

Philippines, 2004: JTF-535

In late 2004, a series of tropical storms had killed nearly 1,000 residents of the Philippines and displaced around 170,000 more. In early December, the government of the Philippines requested assistance, and the United States responded by sending units mostly from 3d MEB. The Commander of 3d MEB served as the Commander for JTF-535; the assets included the USS *Fort McHenry*, with two CH-53 and six CH-46 Marine helicopters, along with three Air Force HH-60G helicopters. Within a week the response teams had provided food, water, and other supplies via helicopter. The response involved more than 600 Marines, Sailors, Airmen, and Soldiers with Joint Task Force-535" [43] [44].

Haiti, 2004: Before Operation Secure Tomorrow

During the political unrest in Haiti in early 2004, the US State Department began to issue travel advisories and eventually ordered the departure of US citizens from the country. On 23 February, a 50-personnel team of Marines from the Fleet Anti-Terrorism Security Team (from the "4th MEB") departed to provide additional security to the US Embassy in Haiti.

On 29 February, President Bush ordered the Marines into Haiti as part of an international stabilization force—the Multinational Interim Force (MIF)—which had around 3,300 personnel from several countries. This MIF provided security forces until early June, when a larger follow-on force arrived to relieve the MIF. The Marine portion of this MIF included the 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, and MAGTF-8, with around 1,900 Marines. Although very little information is available, this force did not appear to have any association with a MEB [45][46].

Philippines, 2006: Leyte Mudslide

On 17 February 2006, a large landslide occurred in southern Leyte, Philippines. As part of an international aid response, the US Navy sent the Forward Deployed ARG (USS *Essex*, USS *Harpers Ferry*, and elements of 3d MEB) from Subic Bay. The forces had been prepared to participate in Exercise Balikatan (20 February to 5 March), an annual bilateral exercise with US and Philippine forces [47].

Indonesia, 2006

On 27 May 2006, a 6.2 magnitude earthquake struck south-central Java, with an estimated 5,700 dead, 38,000 seriously injured, and more than 250,000 homeless. The Indonesian government requested *only* medical assistance from the United States; all other capabilities (including logistical airlift) were declined.

The 3d MEB deployed a surgical-medical capability to Indonesia in direct support to the US Ambassador to Indonesia. The Health Services Company had 56 personnel, and the Support Company had 104 Marines (along with seven USAF personnel).

A Disaster Response Assessment Team (DRAT) of eight personnel formed the nucleus of 3d MEB's HQ element, which arrived in theater on 29 May via a C-130. Patient care began the next day at an Expeditionary Treatment Facility (ETF), with the surgical capability fully operational by 31 May.

The response teams also established Mobile Medical Teams that ventured out into the area to find casualties, particularly in remote areas. These teams actively treated patients through 9 June.

In total, the medical teams treated more than 4,600 patients and performed 60 surgeries. The teams stopped their activities on 12 June and completed their retrograde by 15 June [48].

Philippines, 2007: Operation Goodwill

Operation Goodwill is a recurring series of humanitarian civic assistance activities "created in 2003 by U.S. Marines and Sailors and their families in Okinawa to show appreciation to the people of the Philippines for welcoming them during annual bilateral exercises" [49].

In late 2006 and early 2007, Operation Goodwill took the form of a three-part operation, with assets from the USS *Comstock* (LSD-45) and 3d MEB. It is unclear to what extent the 3d MEB staff and assets were involved, although photographs and other media citations indicate that the Commanding General of 3d MEB was present and involved.

Phase I occurred 13–19 December 2006 and involved the distribution of food, medical supplies, clothes, and toys in Palawan and northern Luzon. Phase II took place 20–22 January 2007 and involved the distribution of similar donations to other areas. Phase III occurred during a week in March 2007 and involved school repair, medical care, and delivery of relief supplies.

As a recurring activity, the involvement of 3d MEB in Operation Goodwill is not limited to 2007 [50][51][52].

Bangladesh, 2007: Operation Sea Angel II

On 15 November 2007, Cyclone Sidr struck southern Bangladesh, killing an estimated 4,000 people and displacing more than three million. During the resulting disaster relief efforts, the Commanding

General of 3d MEB and his staff worked at the US Embassy in Dhaka as the on-scene commander to help coordinate US relief efforts; CTF-76 oversaw efforts afloat.

On 23 November, USS *Kearsarge* arrived (having steamed from Somalia) with PHIBRON-8 and the 22d MEU. These units delivered relief supplies via helicopter and LCAC, and they also provided two medical teams. On 3 December, this group turned efforts over to USS *Tarawa*, PHIBRON-1, and 11th MEU. The operation continued through 9 December [53][54][55].

Burma, 2008: Operation Caring Response

Cyclone Nargis struck southwest Burma on 2 May 2008, and the death toll was estimated at 78,000 to 128,000, with at least 2.4 million people affected. US military forces, including the 3d MEB CE, the 31st MEU, and the USS *Essex*, were nearby in Thailand for the Cobra Gold exercise.

During 2–3 May, the *Essex* offloaded select 31st MEU assets to continue with Cobra Gold Thailand. The MEB had around 3,500 personnel for Cobra Gold, but shifted roughly 2,500 to focus on Operation Caring Response.

The Burmese government kept strict control over the extent of US efforts. Relief flights from other countries started as early at 7 May, but the Burmese government did not approve US limited relief efforts until 12 May. It allowed only fixed-wing delivery of aid; the force was able to use only 7xC-130 variants, and could not use the 22 helicopters it had. All overtures for greater assistance were denied.

COMMARFORPAC was designated as the CJTF for Operation Caring Response (CJTF-CR). The 3d MEB was the MARFOR, one of six major subordinate commands under CJTF-CR. "The mission of 3d MEB, as the supported Marine Service Component within CJTF-CR, was to conduct HA/DR operations in order to reduce further loss of life and mitigate suffering of affected populations" [56]. The Commanding General of 3d MEB assumed command of the JTF on 11 June; he departed 22 June. Department of Defense assets were on the scene for approximately 42 days.

The MEB was able to simultaneously conduct planning for Cobra Gold while also planning and executing relief efforts for Operation Caring Response. This dual use continued until Cobra Gold ended on 21 May.

In the end, however, "The [Commanding General 3d MEB] played no substantive part in acquiring supplies, determining requirements, sourcing those requirements, building the delivery plan, apportioning aircraft, submitting diplomatic clearances, building pallets, validating the loads, etc." The 3d MEB was eventually required to provide a "Cargo Verifying Officer," who then reported directly to the JTF G-3. The JTF proper had plenty of roles, but COMMARFORPAC filled this role throughout most of the operation [56].

Afghanistan, 2009: Operation Enduring Freedom

The 2d MEB became known as MEB-Afghanistan when it took over the battlespace in Afghanistan's Helmand Province on 29 May 2009 (from SPMAGTF-Afghanistan). The MEB was also known as "Task Force Leatherneck." The composition of forces varied with time, starting with one RCT and eventually building to two RCTs of approximately 10,000 personnel.

The MEB focused on counterinsurgency operations and participated in various operations such as Operation Strike of the Sword and Operation Moshtarak. On 12 April 2010, MEB-Afghanistan transferred authority to I MEF (Fwd) [57][58][59].

Various Pacific Relief Efforts, 2009–present

Recently, the 3d MEB has provided command and control oversight of disaster relief efforts. The level of oversight and the number of specific 3d MEB personnel (or assets) has varied, with much of the benefit appearing to come from the presence and authority of a General Officer; the available assets have typically involved one MEU (the 31st MEU) and a varying number of amphibious ships. Examples of these efforts include:

- Taiwan, August 2009 (Typhoon Morakot)
- Philippines, October 2010 (Typhoon Megi)
- Japan, March 2011 (Operation Tomodachi)

- Philippines, December 2012 (Typhoon Bopha).

1st Provisional Marine Brigade

The previous section described MEB-related activities after the Marine Corps Order formally defined the MEU, MEB, and MEF in 1962. Before 1962, however, one USMC unit shared various qualities of a MEB: the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade (PMB). In this section, we further discuss the PMB, the unit that one might call the spiritual predecessor of the MEB.[4]

The 1st PMB participated in five events from 1912 to 1950, and table 5 provides a summary of these events. As the term *provisional* suggests, the USMC used the 1st PMB as a temporary capability, and it often rapidly assembled the 1st PMB to meet sudden requirements [60].

Table 5. 1st Provisional Marine Brigade activations.

Date	Location	Size	Operation Type	Notes
1912	Cuba	1,200	Occupational; protection of US property	Formed from two provisional regiments that joined in Cuba
1941	Iceland	~4,100	Fortification	Transitioned from UK forces; transitioned to US Army forces
1944	Guam	~10,000	Amphibious assault	Formed from 4th and 22nd Marine Regiments
1947	(Guam)	(small)	Contingency	("Paper unit;" planning function)
1950	Korea	~4,700	Combat	Formed from 5th Marine Regiment; advance force for 1st MarDiv

Cuba, 1912

In the wake of a violent rebellion in Cuba, the United States sent two provisional regiments to Cuba to control rail traffic and protect US property. One regiment originated from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and the other from Key West, Florida; once in Cuba in early June, the regiments combined to form the 1st PMB under the leadership of one of the regiment colonels. The Cuban government squelched the

4. Other PMBs existed at times, but the historical record is most clear and complete for the 1st PMB. As a provisional unit, the 1st PMB does *not* share a direct lineage with the 1st MEB.

rebellion by late July, at which point the 1st PMB deactivated and its elements returned to the United States [61].

Iceland, 1941

The UK invaded neutral Iceland in May 1940 in order to secure the nation from German attack. Iceland preferred the presence of US troops (the United States was still neutral at that point in World War II) and signed a defense agreement to station US troops on the island.

The USMC rapidly assembled troops in Charleston, South Carolina. Most of the approximately 4,100 Marines came from 2d MarDiv, which was training in San Diego, California.

The Marines landed in Iceland on 7 July and relieved the UK 49th Infantry Division of some areas of Iceland. The 1st PMB activated 14 July 1941 under the command of BGen Marston. Shortly after, US Army forces arrived in August 1941. The US troops built infrastructure and acted as an emergency force in case of German invasion.

After the 7 December attack on Pearl Harbor, the Marine units began to depart in preparation for combat in the Pacific theater. The 1st PMB deactivated by end of March 1942, with most of the elements reassigned to 2d MarDiv [62].

Guam, 1944

The 1st PMB was activated in April 1944 at Guadalcanal under BGen Shepherd, with nearly 10,000 Marines from the 4th and 22d Marine Regiments. In July the brigade moved to the Marshall Islands to prepare for an amphibious assault on Guam. The 1st PMB fell under III Amphibious Corps, a total force size of around 67,000 Marines.

The invasion of Guam lasted from 21 July to 10 August; the 1st PMB assaulted the southern beaches of the island. After the invasion, the 1st PMB continued with “clean-up” operations for about one month. On 9 September, 1st PMB deactivated, and its elements moved to Guadalcanal as part of the 6th MarDiv [61][63][64].

Guam, 1947

After World War II, the 1st PMB existed briefly (1 June to 1 October 1947) as a contingency force in the Pacific theater of operations. The brigade came from "enlarging" the 1st Battalion, 11th Marines [63].

Korea, 1950

At the onset of the Korean War, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered the USMC to prepare a 15,000 Marine division for duty in Korea. While rebuilding that division, the USMC rapidly assembled the 1st PMB, using around 4,700 Marines of the 5th Marine Regiment and supported by MAG-33. The 1st PMB activated in California on 7 July 1950 under BGen Craig.

The 1st PMB landed at Pusan, South Korea on 3 August, where it fell under LTG Walker's Eighth United States Army and performed a variety of combat operations.

After a month of activity, LTG Walker wanted to retain the 1st PMB to hold the Pusan perimeter, but General MacArthur disagreed. The 1st PMB moved to Japan and deactivated on 13 September 1950; its elements merged with the 1st Marine Division [65].

Motivations

The section explores the reasons behind operational and organizational use of the MEBs, as well as their shifting prominence.

Ad hoc HQs

From 1962 until the mid-1980s, the USMC used MEBs on a case-by-case basis, activating them as needed, and then promptly deactivating them. In many instances, the MEB HQs were active for a month on average (such as 3d MEB's initial foray into the Vietnam War). Even before 1962, the USMC used the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade in a very similar fashion.

Standing HQs

The MEBs started to establish permanent headquarters in the late 1970s and early 1980s. LtGen Robert F. Milligan described the reason for the change as arising from the inability to get enough heavy

forces to the Middle East within a short timeframe, which led to the idea of maritime prepositioning ships (MPS). The MPS, in turn, "drove the Marine Corps to create permanent MEB headquarters" [10].

In effect, this new MPS concept had suddenly created many new types of support requirements, operational considerations, and other unimagined challenges. The USMC recognized that dedicated staffs would have to focus on this new complex problem in order to solve the many new operational and logistical problems.

Each geographic area had two MABs (1 and 9 in the Pacific, 5 and 7 on the West Coast, and 4 and 6 on the East Coast), one planning and training for MPS operations, and one planning and training for amphibious operations (as shown in figure 2).

In addition to the MPS concept, the ad hoc nature of the MEBs did not quite mesh with the "train in peace how you will fight in war" mentality, because it brought together combat organizations that had not trained together. Some of the historical accounts noted how units exercised once joined, or that they had already recently completed an exercise in advance of an operation. As the DC/S for Plans Policy and Operations noted in 1983, "To create an ad hoc MAGTF HQ at any level, if combat is imminent, is sloppy at best and disastrous at worst. After long study and analysis, it was determined that the new permanent MAGTF HQ provides the best combination for stability and flexibility" [10].

In the mid-1980s, a composite MAGTF concept began to appear as well, which harkened back to the idea put forth in the MCO 3120.3 that the MAB would accomplish a limited mission and then likely be absorbed by a larger, follow-on force. This compositing idea, however, started with a permanent MAB HQ and then inserted a MAF "nucleus"—essentially an incomplete staff with a "MAB-shaped hole" that the MAB HQ could fit into, thus forming a complete MAF HQ staff:

> The MAF headquarters was intended to be a nucleus staff that would absorb, as needed, a full MAB command element to form an operational MAF.
>
> The driving factor in standing up MEB headquarters was the recognition that a MEF would be required to conduct sustained combat operations, but our amphibious and MPF

> lift capability dictated that the initial units would deploy as MEBs. The MEF would be reconstituted in the theater. MEBs would not only deploy, but must be prepared to engage in combat operations until the remainder of the MEF arrived. [10]

As an example of the numbers of personnel envisioned, MAU HQ had 13/24 personnel (officer/enlisted), the MAB HQ had 51/117, and the MAF (nucleus) HQ had 59/127. With a total end-strength of 198,000 Marines, the USMC was going to have three MAFs, six MABs, and four MAUs with permanent MAGTF headquarters. Presumably, the training process would familiarize the MAB HQ with the MAF (nucleus) HQ in order to reduce problems with ad hoc compositing.

MEB Disestablishment

However, just a few years later (in 1992), the MEB HQs were all disestablished. Many different sources appear to agree that *manpower* issues drove the decision. In 1991, the Marine Corps was driving toward a force structure of 159,000 Marines (nearly 40,000 less than previously envisioned). In 2001, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General James L. Jones, reflected on the reasons the MEBs were deactivated:

> For reasons that had nothing to do with warfighting but a lot to do with manpower, we stood down our standing MEB headquarters [HQs], and subsumed those HQs into the larger Marine Expeditionary Forces [MEFs]. The brigade, in my opinion, is the most flexible of all our forces, and certainly the most realistically usable. By reformatting the discussion and putting the brigade back in as the centerpiece, the deployed MEU(SOC) becomes the leading edge of the brigade, and the MEB becomes the follow-on force, as opposed to going directly from MEU to MEF (Forward), which nobody [in the joint community] understood. [66]

And as MGen Gene A. Deegan noted,

> We could not afford the structure to man MEB and MEF HQs. Thus, we had to compromise. You could either have a standing MEB focused on rapidly using the deployment means available, and trained, exercised and ready to conduct MAGTF operations, or you could invent these HQs in a time of crisis. [10]

He went on to describe concerns over *force structure vulnerability,* in which some feared that a brigade-structured Marine Corps would be more vulnerable to "vertical cuts" (read: elimination of entire brigades):

> The concept of permanent MAB and MAF headquarters was fought 'tooth and nail.' Many were paranoid about the implications for the MEF, Div, and Wing. If we can fight in a MEB/Reg/Group configuration, maybe someone will decide we don't need three Divisions and Wings. Another group [in the Corps] just didn't like the Corps' investment in so many HQs – a valid concern. [10]

A few sources note a similar concern over force structure, referring to the problem as "sacred cows" (i.e., the sanctity of the Division and Wing organizations) [67]. In addition:

> Second, with regard to Title X, the Marine Corps needs to account for US Code 5063, which states that the USMC shall be organized in no less than 3 Divisions, 3 Aircraft Wings, and such other land combat, aviation, and other services as may be organic. Doesn't the elimination of Divisions, Wings, and FSSGs violate the law? Would not the elimination of Divisions and Wings risk a revision of Title X that could cause 'downsizing' or, ultimately, the elimination of the Marine Corps? Further, some say, we should not reorganize because the law "is the law." Title X, USC 5063 was established by US Congress in 1947. It formalized the Marine Corps' role and position within our armed forces. However, if the rational move is to reorganize the Marine Corps, the law can and should be changed to reflect this reorganization. Whatever force structure is necessary to fulfill national military strategy ought to be codified in the appropriate legislation. "It will merely force DoD planners and Congress to count Marines "in terms of MEFs—our principal warfighting MAGTF" and not divisions and wings. [68]

Another shift in thinking occurred with the MAGTF Master Plan in 1989, which started to focus on the *lower end of the conflict spectrum,* appearing to favor the MEB. But the Marine Corps looked to the MEF to provide utility for "general war" [69]. All of these things resulted in the 1992 MAGTF Master Plan, which focused on the MEF over the MEB, and used the MEF (Fwd) as the lead to the MEF echelon.

However, some noted that the elimination of the MEB HQs did not eliminate the need:

> Eliminating the standing MEB command elements seems to have generated the most unrest of all the force structure changes. I don't believe it was intended to put them in mothballs by embedding them in MEF command elements... The need for a MEB has not gone away simply because command elements have been eliminated. There will still have to be MEB staffs capable of executing maritime prepositioning force and Norway air-landed deployment options. We have to recognize that one of our MAGTFs is being re-engineered, not eliminated—and we have to recognize that the job is not complete. [70]

But the MEF had arisen as the focus, as the Commandant of the Marine Corps' Planning Guidance from 1995 stated:

> Marine Corps operational forces will continue to be organized as Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (MAGTFs), with the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) as the principal warfighting organization. Necessary combat power will be provided to the committed MEF through global sourcing by the Total Force: one force consisting of Marine Forces, both active and reserve. [71]

Present

In the past decade of land war, the Corps' familiarity with amphibious operations has been waning:

> Further, practical amphibious knowledge and experience is no longer resident above the MEU level anywhere in the Corps training establishment. Expertise once resident in standing MEB HQs is no longer located there since these organizations were dissolved. Few Marine Corps officers below the O-5 level have first-hand experience with amphibious operations. Even at the MEU level, many of those with practical amphibious experience are nearing retirement age. [72]

And the question about the proper place for the MEB continues to arise:

> It is time for a bold move. Should we organize in MEBs, and eliminate divisions and wings? – a quote from USMC General Officer Symposium (GOS) Roundtable, January 2003.

Given the current structure of the Marine Corps, the answer that came back to this question was "no." However, with combat operations in Afghanistan winding down, the expectation for future conflicts is shifting once again to the lower end of the spectrum. This shift favors the MEB, and as previously discussed, the Marine Corps is re-organizing MEB HQs to support this shift.

Historical Summary

The historical record shows that the Marine Corps has used the MEB to perform nearly every possible mission. In addition, the size of the force has varied across a wide range: from a few hundred to as many as 25,000 Marines; although, the most common size for the MEB appears to be in the 4–8,000 range.

The historical record also shows that the Marine Corps has used the MEB in almost every possible way:

- Activated for an operation, then deactivated (Cuba, 1962: Cuban Missile Crisis)
- Maneuvered to participate in an operation while already active, but not originally activated for that particular mission (Cambodia, 1975: Operation Eagle Pull)
- As a lead-in for a larger force (Vietnam, 1965)
- As a transition for a departing force (Vietnam, 1971)
- As a planning element (Somalia, 1991: Operation Eastern Exit)
- As an oversight function, bringing a General Officer authority (various Pacific relief efforts).

The latter role, the oversight function of a General Officer, can factor into any of the other roles—it also appears to be one of the primary roles for the activity of 3d MEB in recent years.

Through its history, the Marine Corps has formed the MEB HQ in a variety of ways, which form a spectrum from dedicated forces to pickup forces. We describe four discrete points along this spectrum:

- **Standing HQ**. The MEB HQ staff has its own manpower (not dedicated to any other mission), with its own resources and training pipeline.
- **Embedded HQ**. Selected staff members at the MEF HQ also serve a role on the MEB HQ staff, but the MEB HQ does not exist as a permanent entity. These staff members spend their day-to-day lives at the MEF, but they are ready (manned, trained, and equipped) to fill the MEB staff role when needed.
- **Subordinate Resourcing**. Similar to the embedded HQ, the selected staff members come from subordinate units (the Division, Wing, and Logistics Group) instead of from the MEF HQ.
- **Pickup**. The MEB HQ has no pre-identified billets. The Marine Corps identifies the manpower to form the MEB HQ from the units at the time of an event.

The Marine Corps has often mixed and matched as needed. For example, during the departure of Marine forces in Vietnam in 1971, the Marine Corps appointed a two-star general from 1st MAW to lead 3d MAB, which ensured a higher level of oversight, and provided a Commanding Officer with air experience for the mission at-hand.

The historical record also shows that permanent MEB headquarters have been the exception, rather than the standard. This permanence has fluctuated, with flexibility and cost (manpower) as the primary driving factors. The Marine Corps returns to the MEB because of its flexibility in low- and mid-level crises, and moves away from the MEB due to cost constraints.

- **Flexibility**. As an argument for relevance, MEBs were seen as suited for the lower end of the conflict spectrum, with MEFs retaining the utility in "general war" [69]. MEBs were able to form rapidly to address a crisis response and then vanish when no longer needed.
- **Cost**. An always-active crisis response force comes with a high cost, mostly in manpower (and sometimes articulated as the number of HQs). During budget downturns, the permanent structures were eliminated in favor of the "as needed" model.

Present Day

In current discussions about the MEB, the topic often comes across as "MEBulous;" for example, two people speaking about the MEB may actually be referring to two very different things with the same word. This section explores some of these differences and the reasons behind them.

Ambiguities on Purpose

Friction Points

In a recent memo [74], Mike Moskowitz described a number of friction points that have arisen during present day discussions about MEBs. These friction points highlight areas where different groups tend to think in opposite directions (or mutually exclusive ends) on the purpose or direction of MEBs. He identified the following areas:

1. **Operational relevance versus programmatics**. This paper has not yet mentioned the "Baseline MEB," which exists solely as a programmatic entity. For example, table 6 shows the 2015 Baseline MEB from 2008, which consisted of about 15,000 personnel embarked on 17 amphibious ships.

Table 6. 2015 Baseline MEB (from 2008).

Command Element (769)	GCE (5585)	ACE (5660)	LCE (2470)
MEB staff (205)	3 infantry bn	3 JSF sqd	CLR Fwd (-) x 7
Det intel bn (93)	2 tank co	1 EA-6B sqd	CLR x 5 (-)
Det force recon bn (56)	2 LAR co	1 HMLA sqd	CLR x (-) / CLB (-)
Det ANGLICO (65)	2 AA co	1.25 CH-53 sqd	Eng/dental det
Det comm bn (249)	3 arty btry	4 VMM sqd	
Det radio bn (101)	1 EFSS btry	1 KC-130 sqd	
	1 HIMARS btry		
	2 combat eng co		

Again, this Baseline MEB exists for programmatic purposes, and it serves as the basis for calculations that determine the amount of amphibious lift required. One of the areas of

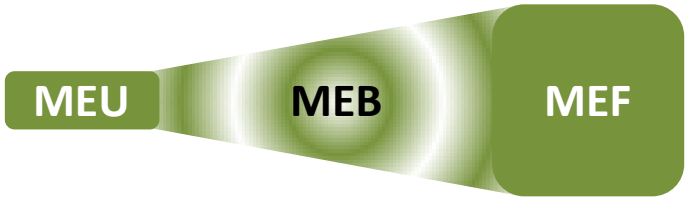
divergence happens when service leaders with an operational focus (vice programmatic) argue for a smaller, faster crisis response force—a force much less than 14,484 personnel. Because both groups use the term "MEB," the programmatic side worries that such discussions could weaken the arguments for the amphibious lift requirement.

2. **Crisis response versus major combat operations**. This friction point deals more with how the MEB should train. A classic argument centers on whether training for higher-end missions (major combat operations) also prepares units for lower-end missions. It is not clear whether the same force can do both simultaneously, and can do so in an expeditionary fashion.

3. **Amphibious versus fly-in**. Groups tend to agree that high-end operations need amphibious lift or prepositioned ships in order to arrive at the destination more quickly, but that a fly-in capability would be needed for the low-end crisis response missions (mostly for speed of response). The historical record has shown that the MEB has operated in both realms.

4. **Inter-service uniqueness versus intra-service uniqueness**. A basic desire exists to describe the MEB's uniqueness, which draws partly from the desire to describe its utility, but also to rationalize its need to exist. These comparisons tend to happen inter-service (particularly with the Army, in comparisons of amphibious or expeditionary response), but the comparisons also happen intra-service (comparisons of the MEB with the MEU or MEF). In the latter case, there is a feeling that the MEB cannot simply be a MEU(+) or a MEF(-)[75]. However, if the MEU-MEB-MEF is by definition a continuum, it is not clear that the MEB can truly bring anything unique to the fray; it may simply be the *combination* of things it brings that can be considered unique.

Figure 3. The solid anchor points of MEU and MEF, with the MEB in the middle.



To this list we add some additional friction points that we mentioned in the previous section on the historical motivations behind changes in the prominence of the MEB:

5. **Flexibility versus predictability**. Predictability and flexibility tend to have an inverse relationship; one comes at the price of the other. In the ad hoc era, the USMC activated the MEB to meet a variety of missions when a need arose, thus emphasizing flexibility. This approach minimized predictability, because it tended to bring together available units that did not necessarily train together. The transient nature of the MEB also required merging command structures and billets during operations, and the smoothness of these transitions often depended upon the personalities of those involved.

   Flexibility can be advantageous, if scoped appropriately:

   > The MEB and amphibious groups—indeed the entire numbered fleet—can be transformed to accomplish a very wide range of missions by changing the composition of the MEB and adjusting the form of internal organization... The elements are combined to adjust not only the fighting capacity, but also the command and control arrangements to best accomplish assigned missions and tasks. [7]

   And as Commandant Jones noted in 2001,

   > The brigade, in my opinion, is the **most flexible** of all our forces, and certainly the most realistically usable. By reformatting the discussion and putting the brigade back in as the centerpiece, the deployed MEU(SOC) becomes the leading edge of the brigade, and the MEB becomes the follow-on force, as opposed to going directly from MEU to MEF (Forward), which nobody [in the joint community] understood. [66]

   The era of standing MEB HQs eliminated many of the ad hoc problems but ushered in a new suite of problems. The standing HQs required more manpower and resources, and more assets had to be set aside in order to be ready when needed.

   Present-day discussions sometimes mix the two ideas by combining the predictability of standing MEBs with the flexibility of a varying composition. However, this mixing has led to confusion

and ambiguity. For example, in defining a MEB, MGen Melvin Spiese was quoted as saying, "If someone were to ask us what a MEB is, part of our answer [would be]: 'What do you want it to be?' It can be anything that it needs to be" [73]. If the term "MEF (Fwd)" confused the Joint community [66], then "What do you want it to be?" will completely befuddle it.

6. **Tradition versus change**. The Marine Corps has become familiar and comfortable with US Code 5063, first enacted in 1947, which states that:

> The Marine Corps, within the Department of the Navy, shall be so organized as to include not less than three combat divisions and three air wings, and such other land combat, aviation, and other services as may be organic therein. [76]

MEB discussions often cover the possibility of changing Marine Corps structure to align better with the MEB construct. As previously mentioned, the greatest concern against such a realignment (aside from having to change the law), is that a brigade-structure might be more vulnerable to vertical cuts [10][68].

Conflation of MEB with "middleweight"

Commandant of the Marine Corps Amos described a vision for the Marine Corps as a "middleweight" force: "We are light enough to get there quickly, but heavy enough to carry the day upon arrival" [77]. Put another way, "Middleweight situates the Marines between the light, transient SOF, and the ponderous, deliberate forces of the US Army" [30]. As such, the force would be able to engage and respond quickly, often from the sea, and it would be geared for crisis response. The Commandant also saw the force as able to "change its division" (heavy or light) by changing its weight and its training regime.

The wider community, however, has confused "middleweight" with the MEB, presumably because the MEB is in the "middle" of the MEU and the MEF. For example, a recent article on the reinvigoration of the MEBs stated that, "The aim is to develop the MEB as a 'middleweight' option between the Corps' smaller Marine expeditionary units and its larger MEFs" [73]. Further, each of the Wikipedia pages for 1st, 2d, and 3d MEBs describes the MEB in similar "middleweight" terms. For example,

> 1st Marine Expeditionary Brigade is a unit in the I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) and is the "middleweight" crisis response force of choice in the European and Southern Command Areas of Operation. [78]

The “middleweight” term has also been misapplied as being the reason for “rightsizing” (or reducing) the total number of Marines [79]. Similar to the problem of the term “MEB” meaning different things to different people, the different uses of “middleweight” tend to cause confusion about the role of Marine forces.

MEB in Name or Numbers

The introduction to this paper discussed how the term “MEB” can be ambiguous in whether it refers to the MEB CE, or the entire brigade.

This flexibility of the MEB in size and composition means that sometimes an organization may have the name of a MEB, but not the usual 4,000 to 20,000 Marine size. Or an organization may have the size of a MEB, but it may not have the name of a MEB. Some instances of these issues are in the historical record (for example, 3d MEB (CE) and a medical team participated in relief efforts in Indonesia in 2006); we find that in these cases, a MEB is needed for an operation when its size, complexity, or political sensitivity requires a general officer in command.

Other Challenges

Compositing

Because of the constraints on manpower and the desire to reduce the number of standing headquarters, the “composite” idea tends to arise frequently. By this term, we mean that two smaller groups can come together to form a larger group. For example, MEU + MEU = MEB. While such a combination makes theoretical sense, many operational barriers exist in reality; the primary problem is what to do with the resulting superfluous command elements. Examples exist for success and failure:

> Even though the 7th and 1st MEB rapidly deployed to the Gulf region as planned and advertised, their identity as independent MAGTFs was not conducive to the subsequent compositing into the MEF in this instance... traditional division/wing structure, personalities, and politics all played

> roles in the friction that existed during the absorption and transition to I MEF command. [10]
>
> While MEBs were usually absorbed into a MEF for ground combat, MEBs that remained sea-based were more likely to maintain their stand-alone MAGTF status, like 9th MEB in Vietnam and 4th and 5th MEBs in Desert Storm. [13]

For additional examples of successful compositing, see the descriptions for the operations in the Dominican Republic, or the activity of 9th MEB in Vietnam in 1975.

Moving Forward with the MEB

At present in the USMC, the three MEFs are the major standing operational organizations (even if not deployed), and the MEUs form the smallest regularly deployed unit (although smaller units do deploy). It should not be a surprise that the MEB in the middle has less definition or purpose, as it tends to be the part that is "left over." The historical record shows that the MEB has often been a flexible and short-lived organization of opportunity, made up of units available at the time of need.

Recent discussions have highlighted the confusion both inside and outside of the Marine Corps on the topic of the MEB. The Marine Corps must resolve these friction points and ambiguities in order to move forward effectively with the MEB.

Define the MEB core identity. The previous section described areas that cause confusion about the identity of the MEB, and many of these areas stem from lack of a solid definition of what a MEB is and what role it fulfills. A clear definition can clarify most of these ambiguities.

For example, the historical record suggests that the MEB has a command element with one or more MEUs, is usually sea-based and expeditionary, and can form the core of a JTF structure; the MEB is also formed for an operation whose size, complexity, or political sensitivity require a General Officer in command.

A MEB can be and do more than these things in order to give it flexibility, but the core identity of the MEB should start here. That core identity gives the Marine Corps the starting point it needs when

engaging in discussions internal and external to the Corps. Beyond that core identity, the Marine Corps must identify the upper limit of the required capabilities. For example, will the MEB be capable of Joint Forcible Entry Operations? What are the expected timelines for the various missions?

These definitions will resolve most of the friction points. However, a conflict will likely continue to occur with the programmatic Baseline MEB, barring a cosmetic change in terminology (for example, a Marine Expeditionary Group).

Organize, resource, and train the MEB accordingly. The organization of the MEB may vary, depending on the specific aspects of the core identity. For example, the MEUs might be assigned to the MEB, which will build relationships between the staffs and alleviate one of the common complaints that MEBs violated the "train how you fight" principle.

Regardless, the historical record has shown that MEBs are susceptible during budget downturns, which includes the current fiscal environment; resourcing decisions must be able to weather these fiscal changes so that the MEB can meet its identified mission sets and other requirements.

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Glossary

ACE	Air Combat Element
AMCM	Air Mine Countermeasures
ARG	Amphibious Ready Group
AT	Anti-terrorism
BLT	Battalion Landing Team
BSSG	Brigade Service Support Group
CE	Command Element
CG	Commanding General
CMC	Commandant of the Marine Corpse
CO	Commanding Officer
COIN	Counter-insurgency (operations)
DCG	Deputy Commanding General
DRAT	Disaster Response Assessment Team
DS/DS	Desert Storm/Desert Shield
ESG	Expeditionary Strike Group
ETF	Expeditionary Treatment Facility
FAST	Fleet Anti-terrorism Security Team
FSSG	Force Service Support Group
GCE	Ground Combat Element
HA/DR	Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief
HCA	Humanitarian Civic Assistance
HQ	Headquarters
INTERFET	International Force East Timor
JTF	Joint Task Force
LAI	Light Armored Infantry (Battalion)
LCE	Logistics Combat Element
MAB	Marine Amphibious Brigade
MAF	Marine Amphibious Force
MAG	Marine Air Group
MAGTF	Marine Air-Ground Task Force
MAU	Marine Amphibious Unit
MAW	Marine Air Wing
MCO	Marine Corps Order

MEB	Marine Expeditionary Brigade
MEF	Marine Expeditionary Force
MEU	Marine Expeditionary Unit
MIF	Multinational Interim Force
MPF	Maritime Prepositioning Force
MPSRON	Maritime Prepositioning Ship Squadron
NEO	Non-combatant evacuation operations
OMFTS	Operational Maneuver from the Sea
OPT	Operational Planning Team
PDF	Panamanian Defense Force
PMB	Provisional Marine Brigade
RLT	Regimental Landing Team
SOC	Special Operations Capable
SOF	Special Operations Force
SPMAGTF	Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force
TF	Task Force
TG	Task Group
US	United States
USMC	United States Marine Corps
USSAG	United States Support Activities Group

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