

REFLECTIONS ON THE CORPS

Naval Expeditionary Forces: Stepping Lightly

by Gen Carl E. Mundy, Jr.

Sea-based forces provide something other Services can't—staying power without the political ill will often associated with more visible land-based commitments.

For over 50 years the Naval Services have pioneered and perfected the techniques and doctrine associated with amphibious warfare. Inherent in maneuvering from the sea is the maritime or sea-based sustainment of the forces ashore. The capability to project and sustain naval power is at the heart of America's global reach and influence. Maritime strategic mobility and seabasing, developed for amphibious operations and perfected in the crucible of World War II, are today perhaps this Nation's most versatile military capabilities.

The Cold War is over and the United States now commands the seas, but peace and stability are not at hand. Old World tensions and animosities threaten to engulf a number of countries in civil war. As well, natural disasters in the form of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and severe weather have visited untold destruction and suffering on civilian populations around the world.

Most of these afflicted peoples live and work within the reach of naval forces—within the world's littorals. In these regions, naval forces can come to fight or they can come to help; but regardless of why they come, they move freely on the oceans and are sustained *from the sea* across the full range of their capabilities. These naval forces represent a two-Service package with the "inherent jointness" needed to operate in all the elements—air, land, and sea—and provide the Nation with a credible, sustainable, and responsive capability. But with that responsiveness comes dependence on the other Services for the wherewithal

to operate over time and distance.

Marines operate with an inherent austerity born of necessity. Marine Corps units come light and are thus easier to support, but they boast a robustness that makes a difference in the critical, opening moments of a crisis. Virtually every aspect of the Marine air-ground expeditionary task force is tailored to function in an austere environment. From the individual rifleman, to the pilot, to the commander, austerity is a way of life among Marines, part of their ethos, their heritage. Marines have always understood "lightness," for there has never been enough lift. The Marine Corps consciously chose muscle because fat has never been an option.

When Marines go ashore, they start from zero. Pioneering logistics troops, in the form of task-organized detachments, build sustainability ashore to support operations across the entire spectrum of combat with the entire range of logistics. Combat logistics is second nature to Marine logisticians who not only build forward logistics bases from nothing, but defend them as well. There are no "rear area" Marines among Marine engineers and logisticians. Every Marine is a rifleman; every Marine goes in harm's way. All this translates to an innate responsiveness and relative ease of movement. Marine units, austere, tailored for action, ready to fight, and forward-deployed in likely hot spots reduce strategic mobility requirements and impact little on a host nation in trouble.

The value of these capabilities is obvious to U.S. National Command

Authorities and the joint warfighting commanders-in-chief (CinCs). They have found that the flexibility inherent in the sea-based sustainment of naval forces make them ideal choices for operations short of war—operations such as humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, peacekeeping, evacuation of noncombatants, and others.

Relief operations usually occur when a beleaguered nation is least capable of caring for its people. Already overburdened, and perhaps devastated by natural disaster or war, a host nation infrastructure can ill-afford the requirement to absorb the subsistence of the relief force as well. In this instance, naval forces in general and Marine Corps units in particular “step lightly” on the existing infrastructure, not only freeing it for national priorities but also augmenting it with command, control, and communications and tactical mobility assets integral to naval expeditionary forces.

Nowhere was this capability more

... Coming to help

National disasters and war continue to afflict millions. In the last couple of years, DESERT STORM notwithstanding, naval forces have been on scene as part of joint task forces time and again assisting those in distress.

- Liberia—2,400 civilians evacuated.
- Somalia, January 1991—260 Americans and other noncombatants evacuated in a high speed relief operation conducted over 2,000 miles.
- Iraq—500,000 Kurdish refugees assisted.
- Bangladesh—1.7 million people assisted following devastating floods.
- Philippines—provided support to and evacuated over 17,000 after the eruption of Mount Pinatubo.
- Cuba—housed and provided assistance and security for over 11,000 Haitian refugees.
- Chuuk Islands—in Micronesia, provided over 622,000 gallons of water and medical services to the drought-stricken state.
- Guam—after Typhoon Omar, provided disaster supplies, water, and engineer equipment.
- Florida—in the wake of Hurricane Andrew, constructed two relief camps that housed more than 2,000.
- Hawaii—as part of Joint Task Force Garden Isle, distributed purified water and food and contributed to the cleanup of parts of Kauai.
- Somali, December 1992—during Operation RESTORE HOPE, Marines and sailors were part of the initial expeditionary joint task force that landed to begin humanitarian and security assistance.

graphically demonstrated than when, in December 1992, Marines landed in Somalia as the lead element of a joint expeditionary task force. This is a nation with a population and infrastructure devastated by war and famine. With no government, primitive airfield and port facilities, crumbling road systems, and inadequate sanitation, Somalia was incapable of caring for its people. The United Nations called on the United States and its allies to render assistance, and the Nation turned to its Marines . . . again.

Operating from a sea base of amphibious shipping, Marines quickly secured the port and airfield facilities in the Somali capital of Mogadishu to permit the introduction of follow-on joint and combined forces. Marine maritime prepositioning ships moved rapidly to the port to off-load trucks, water purification units, generators, engineer equipment, and the myriad items required in humanitarian assistance and relief. As this article goes to

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press, the joint task force in Somalia has relieved the suffering of hundreds of thousands of Somali.

With Somalia only the most recent example, in the past two years, naval forces, as the center pieces of joint task force operations, have been the lead elements in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts in Liberia, Somalia (in 1991), Kurdistan, Bangladesh, the Chuuk Islands, Guam, and Guantanamo Bay. Some four million people have been aided during these joint operations that were, without exception, based on the responsiveness of the Navy and Marine Corps.

The warfighting CinCs understand better than anyone else the inherent utility of naval forces. Over and above a reduced impact on a host nation's infrastructure, there is an attractiveness to maritime forces that goes beyond seabasing. There is a price associated with the movement of forces into or within a theater, and that price is paid in terms of precious mobility assets.

... Stepping lightly

Naval forces, similar to those that arrived off Bangladesh after the disastrous typhoon of May 1991, provide significant capability.

- Can provide on scene medical care. The Wasp-class LHD carries with it a 600-bed hospital complete with 6 operating rooms, an isolation ward, a 20-bed intensive care unit, complete dental facilities, and a pharmacy—equivalent to the hospital capacity of Annapolis, MD.
- Can feed and provide fresh water for an entire city like Bowling Green, KY.
- Can provide enough electricity to run disaster relief and evacuation centers, hospitals, and schools—virtually a small city.
- Carry enough jet fuel to run the Boeing 747 cargo fleet of Federal Express.

All of this support can be delivered by a variety of means—by air, land, and sea.

The mobility of naval forces is integral to its organization. That is, Navy and Marine Corps units “step lightly” on a CinC's mobility requirements. With naval expeditionary forces steaming toward a crisis area, Military Sealift Command shipping, fast sealift, strategic and in-theater airlift, aerial refuelers, and Civil Reserve Air Fleet (CRAF) activations remain largely available for the CinC to allocate to follow-on deploying units. As these forces close on the objective area, naval expeditionary forces, maneuvering from the sea, contribute to and enable the introduction of unique Army and Air Force capabilities. As the United States closes 628 overseas bases, a 38 percent reduction of the 1990 overseas basing structure, the strategic mobility of the Navy and Marine Corps looms more relevant than ever to the United States. The time is soon approaching when naval forces may be the only credible response of the Nation for a fast-breaking crisis.

The strategic environment the United States will face in the future demands forces that possess the capability to respond to a wide range of needs and crises. As with President Theodore Roosevelt's policy of “walking softly and carrying a big stick,” these forces must be structured to exploit the policy subtleties of power projection from the sea. Navy and Marine Corps forces—austere, sea-based, and mobile—afford national and theater decisionmakers with options that no other force can provide.

They step lightly where it counts and hit hard where it hurts.

USMC