

REFLECTIONS ON THE CORPS

Dial 9-1-1 for Marines: One Call Gets it All

by Gen Carl E. Mundy, Jr.

Forward deployed Marine forces are ready, at a moment's notice, to meet the Nation's emergency calls.

Pusan Perimeter, Korea, August 1950: The Marine Brigade had newly arrived from the States. MacArthur had wanted to hold it back for future amphibious operations, but the situation along the Nakdong had been too critical; the Marines were needed for a fire brigade.

*—From This Kind of War
by T. R. Fehrenbach*

Throughout its history, this Nation has been faced with overseas crises that have been preceded by little, if any, warning. With minimal time available to prepare a response, it has fallen to those forces that were immediately ready, if not already on-scene, to answer the Nation's call for action—its 9-1-1 call. In the vast majority of cases, it has been naval expeditionary forces that have responded with the capabilities appropriate to the crisis.

The 9-1-1 call can mean many different things. For a citizen in distress, it may mean police, fire, and rescue. For a starving child, it may mean food, water, and medical care. To the United Nations, it may mean a country-wide show of force to create an environment in which humanitarian assistance can be effectively rendered and civil order reestablished. To the United States, it may be an in-extremis rescue of diplomats from an embassy in a country whose civil order is rapidly deteriorating.

Given the fiscal environment and accompanying reduction of military forces, future U.S. military responses will necessarily include all Services—a joint response. Ships and Marines, however, are often first on the scene of a crisis. Because it is forward deployed on the "edge of the empire" as this Nation's initial response force, the Naval Service is an inherently "joint," air-ground, combined arms force with the

capability to respond across the spectrum of conflict. Tactical aviation, ground combat units, water purification systems, medical support, humanitarian assistance . . . one call gets it all.

Of the Nation's forward-deployed forces, Marine units, like the police car patrolling a neighborhood, provide a deterrent force that can loiter indefinitely in an area, and thereby prevent conflicts and respond to emergencies as they arise. This was dramatically demonstrated during the evacuation of noncombatants from Somalia in January 1991. Without forward-deployed naval expeditionary forces, the U.S. Embassy would have been overrun by warring factions in a civil war with a probable substantial loss of American lives. Further, when the Marines rescued State Department officials in Mogadishu, diplomats from the former Soviet Union and several other nations were among them.

Forward-deployed Marine forces are like the neighborhood firefighting engine company that responds to a call for assistance in containing and bringing a blaze under control. They can respond rapidly to contain emerging crises and suppress these "brush fires" before they grow into raging infernos that require a multiple-alarm firefighting response. In July 1958, two battalion landing teams landed in Beirut with less than 24 hours notice. For the next 3 months, Marines, together with Army units deployed from Germany, established a secure and stable environment in which diplomats were able to assist various Lebanese factions in peacefully resolving their differences. By their response, Marines were instrumental in protecting American lives and interests and in helping to prevent Lebanon from being engulfed

in the growing violence of inter-Arab politics.

Forward-deployed Marine forces are like the paramedics of a local rescue squad who respond to an emergency; they stabilize an injured person until such time as a doctor can render full medical care. They provide the immediate assistance required to stabilize a crisis or disaster, provide the immediate "first-aid" required, and enable the introduction of follow-on forces necessary for long-term effect in a major contingency operation. During Operation RESTORE HOPE, a forward-deployed naval expeditionary force was the first unit to arrive in Somalia. Marines served as the core of the joint expeditionary task force, seizing the port and airfield of Mogadishu, thereby enabling the introduction of follow-on Marine and Army forces as well as the resumption of desperately needed humanitarian assistance by civilian relief agencies.

When dialing 9-1-1, a caller in distress has several expectations—that there will be a quick response, that the response will be appropriate and sufficient to meet the crisis, and that those responding will be well-trained and experienced and possess the necessary equipment. Similarly, when the Nation faces a crisis, it expects much of the same from its armed forces: that they possess the versatility to respond wherever, whenever, and however they are required; that they are responsive on short notice; that they are expeditionary and able to operate in an austere environment without access to outside support; and that they are credible for the task at hand.

Marines are uniquely qualified to respond to emergency 9-1-1 calls, whether in Liberia, Southwest Asia, Bangladesh, the Philippines, or Somalia, because they are on-scene, ready, and capable. From 1985-1991, Marines participated in 61 percent of all U.S. military crisis responses, and in 71 percent of all crises involving U.S. naval forces. These responses ranged across the entire spectrum, from combat operations to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. In the last 2 years alone, the Corps has assisted in the rescue of more than 20,000 diplomats and citizens, aided over 4 million refugees, and sent 90,000 Marines into combat.

Marines are able to respond to all these crises because, as a Corps, their role in the Nation's defense requires that they be forward deployed, expedi-

tionary, and seabased. Further, they are expected to maintain a capability to "kick open the door" to enable, if necessary, the introduction of heavier follow-on forces or to "put the door back on its hinges" by providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Representative of this capability are Marine expeditionary units (MEUs)—Marine air-ground task forces consisting of about 2,000 Marines and Sailors embarked in 4-5 amphibious ships, which are routinely forward deployed 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year. The Corps has over four decades experience deploying MEUs. Its mission capabilities, today, are finely tuned to respond to a broad range of requirements, from humanitarian intervention to limited objective combat operations ashore.

Due to their complete, self-contained sustainment and the "diplomatic immunity" bestowed on them by their naval character, Marine expeditionary forces can loiter indefinitely in an area and are unconstrained by such limitations as overflight and landing rights. If required, however, they can respond rapidly to crisis taskings. This strategic and operational flexibility, which a forward deployed Marine force provides, is well known to national decisionmakers and theater warfighting commanders, and has been demonstrated on numerous occasions in the past. During the 1990 crisis in Liberia, for example, an amphibious ready group arrived on 2 June, but was not called on to evacuate citizens and diplomats until 5 August. Indeed, amphibious forces remained on station for 7 months, until 9 January 1991. At the other end of the decision-time spectrum, the Somalia evacuation in 1991 was demonstrative of the ability of forward deployed naval expeditionary forces to react to a crisis that demanded immediate response. On 2 January 1991, Marine expeditionary forces committed to Operation DESERT SHIELD in the North Arabian Sea were ordered to evacuate the U.S. Embassy in Mogadishu as American diplomats were faced with an in extremis situation. On the night of 4-5 January, embarked helicopters flew 466 miles, with 2 aerial refuelings from Marine KC-130s en route, and evacuated 281 people. The point is that, with this capability, there was no need to stage and deploy forces from out of theater. Forward deployed Marine expeditionary forces were on-scene, responsive, and capable of handling situations

that developed over months, but went to full crisis within hours.

Due to the demands of expeditionary warfare, virtually every element of a Marine air-ground task force is tailored for operation in an austere environment. Further, the flexibility inherent in the sea-based sustainment of naval forces makes them ideally suited for operations short of war. In particular, the ability to operate in an expeditionary environment, to "step lightly," where the existing infrastructure is limited or does not exist, where there is a necessity to avoid placing a strain on it, or where access to it is constrained by diplomatic concerns, is of increasing importance. As recently demonstrated in Somalia during Operation RESTORE HOPE, Marine expeditionary forces were successfully deployed to an area in which the infrastructure had been ravaged by years of neglect and civil war.

The international environment has experienced fundamental change during the past four decades. While the nature of the threats is less certain than in years gone by, what is certain is that the United States will have to face them at a time and place that is increasingly difficult to predict. What is required from the Nation's Armed Forces, now more than ever, is a force of certain capability with which to respond to this uncertainty. B.H. Liddell Hart, writing the foreword for Robert Heinl's book *Soldiers of the Sea*, may have put it best when he said:

To meet emergencies . . . it is essential to have a marine force. An amphibious force of modern type, operating from the sea and equipped with helicopters, is free from dependence on airfields, beaches, ports, and land bases, with all their logistical and political complications. . . . A self-contained and sea-based amphibious force, of which the United States Marine Corps is the prototype, is the best kind of fire-extinguisher because of its flexibility, reliability, logistic simplicity, and relative economy.

For over 217 years, the U.S. Marine Corps has been this Nation's force-in-readiness, its 9-1-1 force. It brings with it the tradition, experience, organization, training, doctrine, and equipment to meet the caller's expectations; and provides the Nation with the "fire insurance" to meet the unexpected crises that will inevitably flare-up in the future.

U.S. Marines—America's 9-1-1 force—one call gets it all.

