Reflections on the Corps: Some Thoughts on Expeditionary Warfare

by Gen Carl E. Mundy, Jr.

Here the 30th Commandant of the Marine Corps provides a perspective on expeditionary warfare and discusses the major operational challenges it poses for the Navy-Marine Team.

Just over 40 years ago we were heavily engaged in Korea. The Korean campaign, the first of the "small wars" and "police actions" that defined the Cold War, is known to all Sailors and Marines. That's because, in many ways, Korea remains the prototypical naval expeditionary campaign. Korea provided moments of epic courage, but it also demonstrated, even more than the battles of World War II, the nature of integrated air-ground operations inherent in Marine expeditionary forces, and showed how they could work closely and effectively with Navy carrier task forces, while fighting alongside Army units in extended operations ashore. Korea was the defining moment for the modern Marine Corps. From Pusan, Inchon, and Chosin, the outlines of our current approach to operational level doctrine sprang.

The 1st Provisional Marine Brigade served as the Eighth Army's "Fire Brigade" during the defense of the Pusan Perimeter in August 1950. The Marine Brigade—an air-ground-logistics task force of the 5th Marines and Marine Aircraft Group 33 (MAG-33)—was the precursor of the today's Marine air-ground task forces (MAGTFs). Key to the success of the brigade in the Pusan Perimeter was the closely integrated, carefully tailored close air support that Marines on the ground received from their Marine aviator comrades, flying off Navy carriers.

It took tough infantry fighting and courageous round-the-clock aviation efforts—but when it was over, the North Korean threat to the perimeter was crushed. MAG–33 flew 1,511 sorties, 995 of them in close support of Marine and Army ground units. An Army regimental commander who fought on the flanks of the brigade had this to say of Marine aviation:

> The Marines . . . had squadrons of air in direct support. They used it like artillery . . . We just have to have air support like that or we might as well disband the Infantry and join the Marines.

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A half century later, it still can't be said better than that.

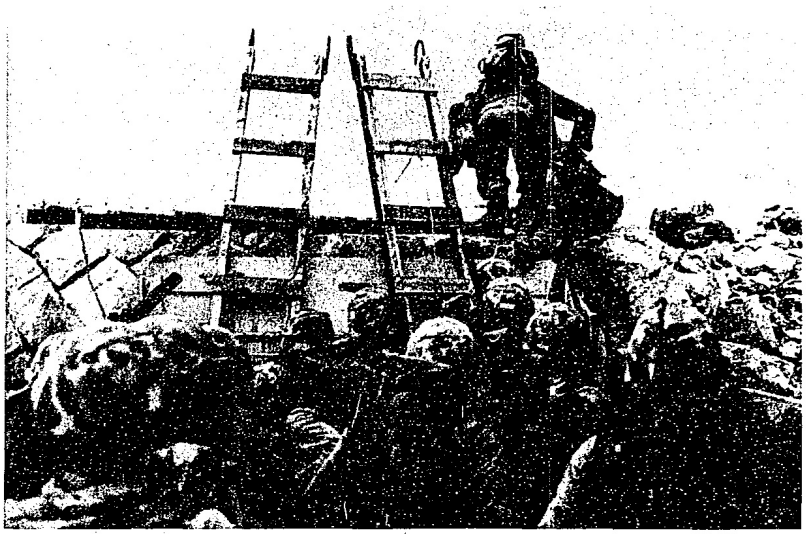
The Marines were pulled from the perimeter to land at Inchon in mid-September, in perhaps this century's classic operational maneuver from the sea. It was an operation that had immediate theater-wide strategic implications, freeing the Eighth Army to breakout from the perimeter, while catching large elements of the North Korean Army in a trap.

The Marines were soon extracted from Inchon, and transported by sea to the eastern side of the Peninsula, where they landed at Wonsan, beginning the Chosin Reservoir Campaign. By early 1951, in an epic campaign well known to all Marines, they had fought their way back to Wonsan for movement south.

This recital of Marine operations in the "maneuver period" of the Korean War is important, for it yields lessons that remain fundamental today. First, in these operations, all the concepts of operational maneuver from the sea are clearly displayed. The mobility differential, strategic agility, and flexibility inherent to expeditionary forces were all a part of operations in Korea. Second, Marines fought as an integrated air-ground team during this period, with such great effect that they were the object of Army envy. For these reasons, Korea remains the defining moment for the modern-day Marine Corps. It was the birth of our strategic concept. Its lessons still have applicability; they are the tradition, the foundation, on which we build.

Let's look, then, at expeditionary warfare for today and tomorrow, at capabilities for the present and the future. There are some broad observations that are useful as starting points:

- First, the strategy of fighting two near-simultaneous major regional contingencies will stretch naval forces to the maximum. Many of



Marines "go over the top" at Inchon. The Korean War was a defining moment for the modern Marine Corps.

the operations we will be contemplating will be, like Korea in 1950, operations executed in economy-of-force theaters. Because of the very real demands in other theaters, Europe in particular, the United States never generated overwhelming combat power in Korea. We could have, but the specter of the central front—the battle we could not afford to lose—shaped, really limited, our efforts. In economy-of-force theaters, environments where there is a rough parity of forces quantitatively, the *qualitative* differences provide the edge. These are things like leadership, organization, command and control, training, and doctrine. This is as true today as it was in 1950.

• "Forward . . . From the Sea" is a natural, logical continuation of the qualitative leap forward in naval thinking that our first white paper initiated. It's the kind of evolution that can help us maintain our edge. "Forward . . . From the Sea" is a good fit for austere resource and fiscal environments. In the future, not only will we often be forced to operate in an economy-of-force theater, we will also be operating in a political environment that will require commanders to understand that we may have an "economy of national will." The American people simply are not going to tolerate high casualties in military operations they don't view as critical to our national security. Look at Somalia or the concern over our entry into Haiti. Many of our future operations are going to be against objectives that, while important in a regional balance-of-power view of the world, may not be critical in Peoria. And CNN will instantaneously report every action—every act of violence—every crashed helicopter—every minor raid gone astray.

• Another observation is that, operationally, the unexpected and unlikely will dominate future battlefields. In the summer of 1950, nobody expected the North Koreans to attack in the first place. In July 1950, who would have thought that within 60 days a major amphibious operation would be undertaken that would dramatically shift the balance of power in the theater? There were other shocks: the surprise of Chinese entry into the war, a surprise to everyone except MajGen Oliver P. Smith and the 1st Marine Division. The unexpected *must* be expected! In planning for the future, we know we're going to be wrong. The trick is to not be too wrong. We must be adaptable enough so that tomorrow's Marine Corps and tomorrow's Navy will be able to do things we can't dream of today.

• A final observation is that, just as it has been in the past, any operation in the future will be joint. But it is fundamentally important that we come to understand jointness. Most of those who talk about "jointness" philosophically don't understand it. Jointness isn't a little bit of everything, everywhere; nor is it a substitution of "look alikes" for the real thing. Instead, jointness is the right mix of capabilities that are interoperable, commanded by a generalist, and supported by specialists. Jointness is a generalist's game.

Keeping these observations in mind, I want to consider three operational challenges the Navy-Marine Corps team faces in translating concepts into doctrine, hardware, and platforms. Then I will turn to another one that cuts across all these areas.

Command, Control, and Surveillance

The first is Command, Control, and Surveillance. It is first, because it's the key capability, the framework within which all other capabilities will be expressed. A scenario may be a useful way to express some of the challenges associated with it. We will typically be operating initially from a seabase, a MAGTF aboard amphibious shipping and perhaps a carrier battle group—the two merged to form a naval expeditionary force (NEF). Within the littoral target area, one of the principal early tasks of the command and control system will be to process the overwhelming amount of information that will be pouring in from surveillance systems.

It will be vital to identify centers of gravity rapidly and determine the critical vulnerabilities that will be our pathways to them. We won't always have the luxury of a passive foe, and there's no natural law that says that every high-tech war must be fought in the desert with unlimited

visibility and good weather. How will we attack these centers of gravity? With what systems? The integration of not only joint but often multinational manned attack aircraft, cruise missiles—air, land, and sea launched—naval gunfire, and shorter ranged land systems will require a command and control system that is redundant and simple, yet capable of achieving synchronized lethal and nonlethal fires at the decisive place and time. It will need to be capable of rapid identification and servicing of high-value and high-payoff targets across the depth of the battlefield, from sea to inshore to the deep battle, perhaps hundreds of miles in the enemy's rear.

Of course, all of our conflicts will not be this sophisticated. Many potential foes will present decidedly low-tech target arrays that will be relatively invulnerable to cruise missiles and strike warfare.

Just as important, how will we protect our own force from the readily available, cheap weapons systems being shopped around in the Third World? Increasingly, tactical decisions about reactions to these weapons will have to be made in real time and the volume and sophistication of imagery and other technical analyses will never give us a complete picture of "the other side of the hill." Our command, control, and surveillance architecture and philosophy must be capable of functioning in this environment afloat, during the transition of command across the beach, and then from command posts inland.

We also need to look closely at who will command these NEFs and Joint Task Forces, operating ashore and at sea in the littorals. Command in littoral warfare calls for generalists—officers who have a broad and varied background, not specialists tied to unique warfare specialties or platforms.

In this era when the line between the land and sea is blurring, there may be times when it is more appropriate for the commander of the operation to be ashore, and that commander may need to be a Marine or a soldier instead of a sailor, depending on the circumstances. Alternatively, there may be situations when the commander afloat may need to be a Marine. Peace enforcement operations like Somalia are a good case in point, as are any operations in which there are no serious naval threats to the NEF, and where the focus of all efforts is clearly on events ashore. Haiti, of course, is another example.

The bottom line is clear. If NEFs are to be effective, we must get at ease with a shift in our antiquated doctrine and realize that after the transport movement to contact phase is completed, commander, amphibious task force may need to shift from blue to green for the conduct of the operation.

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What does all this mean? I think we must continue to test and revalidate some of our basic concepts of naval expeditionary warfare command and control, from the amphibious objective area to the PERMA (plan, embark, rehearse, move, assault) acronym that generations of Marines and gator Sailors have memorized. Our deploying forces now leave home not knowing exactly what they may be called upon to do. We have to adapt, usually very rapidly, to unforeseen and complex circumstances. So now we have to change our thinking—from PERMA to EMPRA. Now we embark, move, plan, rehearse, and assault. Often, because of time constraints, the rehearsal phase may not be possible, either, while multievent planning for other contingencies continues. This is what "Forward . . . From the Sea" is all about.

Battlespace Dominance

A second challenge is Battlespace Dominance. We achieve battlespace dominance by detecting, targeting, and destroying enemy forces that present a threat to our maneuver ashore or afloat and also by degrading the enemy's ability to conduct his own operations. In the littoral this will be accomplished through the use of carrier-based and other aviation, surface warfare assets, space support, submarines, and the MAGTF itself, through its aviation combat element and ground-based indirect fire systems. Needless to say, we will often have to lean heavily on joint assets, depending on the environment and nature of the threat. And fair questions to ask are, How often will we be required to dominate battlespace in a classic "war at sea" environment? What tradeoff does that require in operations? What tradeoff in training?

Complicating our task will be the fact that we're going to be operating from far out at sea to well inland at the same time, facing diverse threats. Inshore, we face a growing diesel submarine threat and significant sensor problems as we attempt to adapt platforms like the Aegis antiair warfare system and the nuclear submarine to shallow-water, close-horizon operating environments.

Many of our potential opponents believe that they only have to get lucky once against a carrier or a big-deck amphibious ship to raise the stakes high enough to either break apart a coalition or place great pressure at home on American decision-makers. The close-in environment, complicated as it is by a short-range air warfare picture and perhaps by civilian air traffic as well as mine warfare and shallow-water submarine threats, is going to be a tough place to operate.

The new emerging weapons technologies feature things like sensor-fused weapons that promise greater

effectiveness on targets and greater survivability for out manned aircraft. But while these new weapons promise much, their utility in places less inviting than the desert remains to be proven, and certainly they will be less capable against foes who do not fight in armor-heavy formations with Soviet-style tactics.

We may not be able to use certain weapons, however effective, if their political cost outweighs their tactical gain. There may come a time and place when weapons of 90-percent accuracy just will not be good enough. That is not a pleasant thought, but it is one we can't ignore as we look at new systems, and the application of existing technologies.

Power Projection

The third challenge is Power Projection. I know there are many forms of this, but how we get our Marines from the sea to shore is obviously of particular interest to me. Our change of terminology from "ship-to-shore movement" to "ship-to-shore maneuver" is a key conceptual change.

Thinking like this reflects the need to envision moving from sea to objectives inland with great rapidity, while retaining the combat power necessary to win. NEFs must be able to reach inland rapidly, finding the gaps in coast defenses where possible, but if necessary by breaching beach defenses. Regardless, we must be able to go ashore by both air and sea, and any NEF configuration that cannot give us this dual option has serious flaws. Once ashore, elements of the MAGTF will need the mobility to maneuver against equally capable foes.

This is truly the heart of the matter: The NEF must be able to project credible, sustainable combat power directly against a center of gravity, without becoming entangled in prepared defenses. If it is necessary to go in through prepared defenses, we have to be able to perform the myriad tasks that will be necessary to allow this. Our improving, but still gravely deficient, mine warfare capability comes to mind immediately. There are other areas we need to look at also: integrating future systems such as the advanced assault amphibious vehicle (AAAV), the tilt-rotor MV–22 aircraft, and our existing air cushion (LCACs) into maneuver.

How we sustain these rapidly moving, geographically disparate elements is of fundamental importance. Assuming that the amphibious task force will remain 25 miles offshore, with at least part of the MAGTF's ground elements some 40 miles inland, it is possible to get a grasp of the magnitude of the logistics problem. The essence of sea-based logistics is that the logistics flow must come from ships scattered across the sea echelon area over an extended period of time. We have tried seabasing across short distances, but we've never really worked the concept at true over-the-horizon distances, and with a large force.

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New technologies like the LCAC give us greater flexibility and speed for force sustainment, and the innovative use of maritime prepositioning ships, integrated into our NEFs, may offer advantages that have not yet been fully explored. For example, the core problem remains the rapid, responsive transportation of bulk supplies and equipment from ships to organizations ashore. Using part of a maritime prepositioning force squadron to expand NEF operations offers possibilities.

Deception

A final area we need to continue to look at closely is deception operations for expeditionary forces. Deception cuts across all areas, and in this era of "information dominance," it may be one of the greatest combat multipliers we have. Vince Lombardi once said that all offensive football is based on speed, power, and deception. With our inherent mobility advantage while at sea, we can translate mobility into operational advantage ashore through imaginative maneuver and the development and use of the appropriate systems for fixing the enemy and blinding him when necessary. Such operations must be considered in all phases of our planning and thinking: conceptual, doctrinal, and in the hardware and platforms that will execute them.

The American people expect us to win quickly and cheaply; they expect us to get it right the first time and every time. That is an unintended legacy of DESERT STORM—but one we will have to learn to live with. It is not an unreasonable demand. We must also bear in mind that whatever solutions we devise today will eventually have to function in ways and in environments and against foes that will be very different from our nice, neat, tidy planning scenarios.

So our weapons, platforms, and doctrine must be flexible enough to accommodate and adapt to unforeseen changes in the face of the enemy. In future wars, the first battle may also be the last one, because our Nation may not allow us the luxury of time as we adapt to a new opponent. We may not have the luxury of maneuver room and time to recast our platforms, weapons, and doctrine as we fall back to a second Pusan perimeter. We're expected to get it right with minimum casualties and material cost. Our Marines and our Nation deserve no less.

USMC

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