

# AFOE: More Than Just Supplies

by LtCol Daniel M. Dykstra

*Gaining AFOE assets at the outset of a crisis is not a given. It must be carefully planned for with particular attention paid to other Service requirements and joint planning priorities.*

Amphibious assaults remain a viable option for future joint operations. However, few military planners in joint environments have an appreciation for the merchant shipping requirements to support the assault follow-on echelon (AFOE) of an amphibious assault force. It is not uncommon to have joint planners discuss the AFOE as if it were some new concept, even though it's been in Marine Corps doctrine for years. The result is that Marine expeditionary forces (MEFs) may unnecessarily compete for merchant shipping with the Army during the initial deployment stages or "surge" period of a crisis. By understanding and imparting the operational importance of the AFOE to the joint community, Marines can stave off a host of problems and ensure the ability of Marine amphibious forces to fully support a unified commander-in-chief (CinC). The purposes of this article are to describe the AFOE, provide a better understanding of AFOE characteristics and requirements, and review the inventory of assets that are currently available for AFOE sealift planning.

## The Nature of the Beast

An amphibious assault breaks down into three principal segments: (1) the assault echelon, (2) the AFOE, and (3) follow-up. This article, however, focuses on the AFOE, which relies on merchant vessel support provided by the Military Sealift Command (MSC). It is defined in *Joint Pub 1-02* as follows:

In amphibious operations, that echelon of the troops, vehicles, aircraft equipment, and supplies which, though not needed to initiate the assault, is required to support and sustain the assault. In order to accomplish its purpose, it is normally required in the objective area no later than five days after the initiation of the assault landing.

All too often, the AFOE is mistakenly attributed with carrying only the second half of an amphibious force's supply package. For example, a Ma-

rine expeditionary brigade's (MEB's) AFOE consists of 15 days of supply/ammunition; a MEF's AFOE consists of 45 days of supply/ammunition. However, as indicated in the joint definition, the AFOE is more than just supplies. In the joint vernacular, sustainment refers to sustaining supplies needed by deploying forces to support them from the time their accompanying supplies and forward-deployed pre-positioned war reserve materiel stocks run out until the continuous resupply pipeline opens. Sustaining supplies are normally delivered by airlift. A continuous resupply pipeline largely depends on sealift. The AFOE, which Marines sometimes refer to as "sustainment," falls within the joint definition "unit-related supplies and equipment," which includes: (1) the basic load, as in the assault echelon and (2) additional accompanying supplies and equipment, as in the AFOE. You can see that mislabeling the AFOE as "sustainment" can lead other Services into thinking of the AFOE as something its not—namely, supplies having no particular operational significance, as opposed to command element and combat service support equipment (including a hospital company) that round out a MEB's overall assault capability. Therefore, the first survival tip in strategic deployment is to keep your definitions straight.

## Speaking Joint

It is particularly important to use the proper jargon when dealing with the U.S. Transportation Command (USTRansCom), which is the unified command controlling all common-user strategic deployment assets. Common user refers to the strategic-list pool of ships and planes that support the Services on a priority basis in wartime as determined by the warfighting CinC. Army unit deployment methods, reinforced by the USTRansCom Army component called Military Traffic Management Command (MTMC),

predominate the thought processes of everyone in the joint planning and execution community and impact operations at the Military Sealift Command (MSC) as well. It is MTMC's job to coordinate lift requirements in the time-phased force and deployment data (TPFDD) with the transportation asset operators at MSC and the Air Mobility Command—formerly the Military Airlift Command. Consequently, Marine Corps AFOE lift requirements, which are comparatively smaller (but certainly no less important than the other Services) can be mistaken or overlooked altogether. Also important is the manner in which the use of supporting equipment is coordinated.

During Operation DESERT SHIELD there was confusion at MSC for a short time over why the Marine Corps needed to obtain containers when U.S. shipping lines were already being contracted to run regular resupply container shipments to the Gulf. This was not cleared up until it was explained that Marines would put unit-related supplies and equipment in the containers they were obtaining. Consequently, making sure you speak the common language is always the primary key to communication.

## DESERT SHIELD AFOE

When Operation DESERT SHIELD commenced with the President's deployment order, MSC began matching shipping requirements expressed in the TPFDD with the shipping available. Initially, 2 maritime pre-positioning squadrons, 11 afloat pre-positioning ships, and 8 fast sealift ships deployed the first batch of response forces' unit equipment and supplies. The MSC-controlled peacetime fleet of cargo ships was insufficient to move the additional, unanticipated lift requirements and had to be augmented by commercial charter and Ready Reserve Force (RRF) shipping.

In the days and weeks that followed it became evident to everyone concerned that 4th MEB's plan for AFOE shipping was not panning out as desired. Essentially, in the crunch to deploy the bulk of requirements (U.S. Army assets), unique Marine AFOE shipping requirements competed for available common-user shipping. The details of this dilemma are the subject of several joint lessons learned studies and not addressed here. However, it is important to note that had all planners been more attuned to AFOE re-

## AFOE MEB Shipping Requirement (10 Dry Cargo)

### Force Beachhead

- 1 Seabee (Mobile Loaded Causeways)
- 2 Crane (T-ACs)
- 2 RO/ROs
- 1 Breakbulk (1 Tanker)

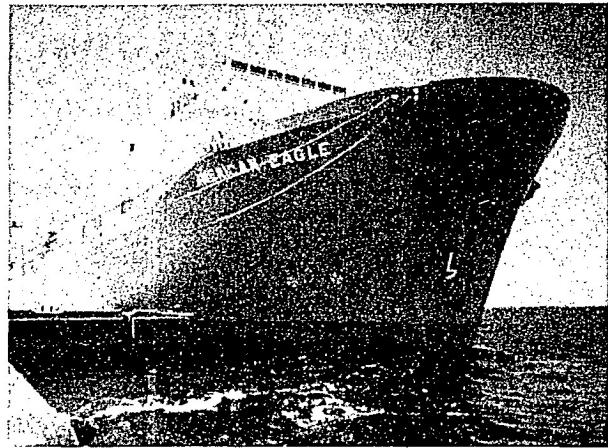
### Fixed-Wing Ace

- 1 RO/RO (1 T-AV8)
- 1 Breakbulk (1 Tanker)

### Fleet Hospital

- 1 Container/Breakbulk
- 1 Breakbulk

Figure 1



quirements ahead of time, more could have been done earlier in the shipping assignment process to prevent problems. As it turned out, 4th MEB received the desired shipping capacity to carry the AFOE, but not the desired shipping capability to support it in the unique environment of an amphibious assault—that is, dedicated, self-sustaining (in-stream offload capable) ships assigned for an indefinite period.

DESERT SHIELD experience taught another survival lesson in strategic deployment as well. Namely, you must be well aware of how your competition operates. The Army is not concerned with forcing its way ashore. All Army sealift requirements move directly from port of embarkation to port of debarkation. Marines, on the other hand, need merchant shipping support that can stay seaborne or loiter in or near the objective area for an indefinite period of time. For this reason, commercially chartered ships on limited time contracts or single-voyage charters may be suitable for the Army (and thus foremost in TransCom and MSC experience), but will not work for the Marines' AFOE. Marines must help their colleagues in other Services to understand that self-sustaining, preferably government-owned, RRF ships are the most suitable for Marine Corps AFOE support. 4th MEB was not committed to an amphibious assault upon arrival in the Southwest Asia (SWA) theater, and it was fortunate. The unsuitability of all but one of the five ships assigned to the AFOE requirement necessitated transloading ships' contents to two empty maritime pre-positioning ships in order to have the desired rapid in-stream offload capability. Had there not been available

ports/secure areas to support offload/onload, the MEB would not have had ready access to the balance of its accompanying supplies.

When the decision was made to deploy an offensive capability to SWA, the lessons learned deploying 4th MEB were applied in earnest to support 5th MEB. With no small amount of effort on the part of several key Marine logisticians and embarkation officers, as well as the personal interest of the commander of MSC, 5th MEB was assigned three ships for its AFOE. Two of the ships were from the RRF, which were ideal AFOE ships; the third, a commercial charter, was sufficient, but not considered the best available since it was a foreign flag ship, which is subject to certain restrictions prohibiting it from transporting certain types of ammunition. Also, there was concern that foreign masters and crews might be less willing than U.S. counterparts to enter certain hostile areas; although it was MSC's experience in DESERT SHIELD/STORM that foreign flag ships were no less dependable than U.S. commercial charters.

### Lessons Learned

Despite the eventual success in providing adequate ships for both MEBs, it's important to point out that the AFOE in each case was smaller than normal. The MEBs did not deploy with their normal naval support elements, and 5th MEB deployed with only a small amount of ammunition. Most of its ammunition was shipped to SWA as part of the MEF's 60-day accompanying supply balance via point-to-point commercial shipping.

Subsequent to the experience in

SWA, Headquarters Marine Corps' Strategic Mobility and Transportation Section (Code LPO-3) reevaluated AFOE shipping requirements and determined that a 10-ship per MEB mix based on a midlevel threat scenario was needed to support surge AFOE requirements (see Figure 1). The section also determined certain lessons learned that applied to AFOE ship assignments. I have included what I believe to be the top three lessons learned, as well as a fourth that I have taken the liberty to add:

- First, RRF and MSC controlled shipping (long-term MSC charters) should dominate AFOE ship-mix assignments. Included should be roll-on/roll-offs (RO/ROS), a container, a breakbulk, and a seabee (for causeways).
- Second, auxiliary crane ships (T-ACs) should always be in an AFOE ship mix. The ships would carry cargo into theater, discharge their own loads, then use their cranes to offload other non-self-sustaining ships. The crane ships are the first links in a logistics over-the-shore (LOTS) operation that may eventually serve the entire joint force (JLOTS).
- Third, suitable RRF ships should be earmarked "AFOE capable" and identified as such in Annex J (Mobility) of the sealift tables in the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan.
- Finally, Marine planners must be visible and vocal within the joint planning and execution community to ensure they get what they need to successfully obtain necessary shipping. Once AFOE lift requirements are in the TPFDD, close supervision is needed at the operational command level to ensure that all requirements are met. The deploying MEB is too

## MSC Controlled Fleet as of Aug 92

Ship Name (Dry Cargo)	Type	Capacity (in thou.)	Year Built
<i>American Condor</i>	RO/RO	198 sq ft	1981
<i>American Eagle</i>	RO/RO	198 sq ft	1981
<i>American Falcon</i>	RO/RO	198 sq ft	1981
<i>Cleveland</i>	BBULK	1,018 sq ft	1969
<i>Fred G</i>	BBULK	790 cu ft	1960
<i>SS Galveston Bay</i>	BBULK	749 cu ft	1966
<i>Green Ridge</i>	BBULK	676 cu ft	1979
<i>Green Wave</i>	BBULK	676 cu ft	1980
<i>James Lykes</i>	COMBO	790 cu ft	1960*
<i>Louise Lykes</i>	BBULK	750 cu ft	1965
<i>Constellation</i>	BBULK	1,145 cu ft	1978
<i>Mercury</i>	RO/RO	145 sq ft	1977
<i>SS Rover</i>	COMBO	1,194 cu ft	1969**
<i>Strong Texan</i>	RO/RO	21 cu ft	1976
<i>Tampa Bay</i>	BBULK	750 cu ft	1966
<i>Algol (FSS)</i>	RO/RO	189 sq ft	1972
<i>Altair (FSS)</i>	RO/RO	189 sq ft	1973
<i>Antares (FSS)</i>	RO/RO	189 sq ft	1972
<i>Bellatrix (FSS)</i>	RO/RO	189 sq ft	1972
<i>Capella (FSS)</i>	RO/RO	189 sq ft	1971
<i>Denebola (FSS)</i>	RO/RO	189 sq ft	1973
<i>Pollux (FSS)</i>	RO/RO	189 sq ft	1973
<i>Regulus (FSS)</i>	RO/RO	189 sq ft	1972

\*Primarily BBULK, configured for containers

\*\*Combination RO/RO/Container ship

(Source: MSC P504)

Figure 2

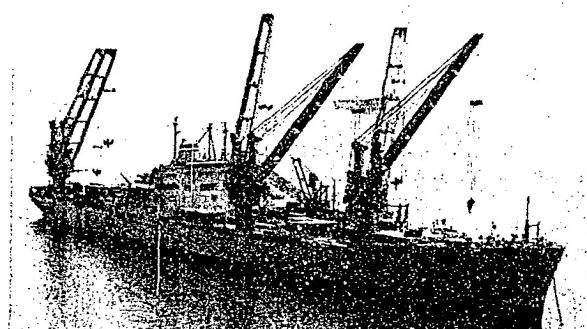
## Ready Reserve Force

### As of Aug 92

Ship Type	Quantity	Ship Type	Quantity
Crane	9	Troopship	2
RO/RO	17*	Product Tanker	13
Breakbulk	49	Lash	4
Seabee	3	Total	
		97	

\*The Mobility Requirements Study has recommended 19 RO/ROs be added to the RRF and all RO/ROs be put in 4-day readiness status (ROS 4). Currently all RRF ships are in 5, 10 and 20 day readiness blocks.

Figure 3



The SS Keystone State (T-ACS 1) is a superb example of an RRF crane ship that will be included in every AFOE mix. A T-ACS will benefit the AFOE offload, as well as be the "point man" for follow-up joint logistics.

busy getting out of town to spend a lot of time chasing after the problem.

### Future AFOE Planning

There are several publications available that aid AFOE planning. The *Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan* provides guidance to the Cincs during development of the operational plan. *Joint Pub 4-01.2* describes tactics, techniques, and procedures for sealift support; it also includes chapters on assets availability and employment. *OH 7-8 (TACMEMO PZ 005700-1-88)* provides doctrinal information to the Navy and Marine Corps.

Figure 2 is the current inventory of the MSC controlled fleet by name. Figure 3 is a summary of the RRF ships that are maintained by the Maritime Administration. I have listed those assets that can be expected to support the AFOE. Included is a listing of the fast sealift ships that are primarily intended for Army use. However, it is possible for them to be employed elsewhere given the Cinc's priorities. Of particular note is the

quantity of RO/ROs currently available. An operation that calls for a high volume of wheeled and heavy tracked vehicles (read Army) will place a heavy demand on high capacity RO/ROs. Consequently, the Marine Corps has ensured that its AFOE lift footprint is reflected in the congressionally mandated Mobility Requirements Study (MRS). The purpose of the MRS is to determine the strategic-lift requirements for future years and the number and type of strategic lift assets to be procured and maintained by the U.S. Government. There are now Department of Defense-sponsored initiatives underway to increase the U.S. flag RO/RO lift capability, and the Marine Corps must make certain its AFOE requirements are considered.

The unique characteristic of amphibious deployments—that is, planning and utilizing sealift for the AFOE—is not well understood by the joint planning and execution community. Consequently, the success of a Marine Corps amphibious operation can be jeopardized

in the course of execution planning during a crisis.

As the title of this article implies, the AFOE is more than just supplies. Marines must fully comprehend the AFOE concept and educate the joint community on this important aspect of amphibious warfare. It is equally important that Marines gain an appreciation for the way the Army employs strategic sealift so that AFOE-capable ships are not unnecessarily usurped at the onset of a crisis.

Experience gained from the recent Gulf War has shown, as in the case of the two MEBs cited, that obtaining AFOE shipping does not always work according to plans and Marine planners must, at every opportunity, seek to influence the action. An appreciation for the assets available and the methods by which they can be applied is the key to maximizing this all-important force.



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