

**MPF**

# Maritime Prepositioning Force Equipment Readiness

by Capt Raymond M. Poinsette

*An effective MPF program requires the prepositioning of effective equipment. More could be done to maintain the condition of this equipment. Needed measures range from improving MPF deployment practices to erasing the 'rental car' mentality of FMF units.*

Many units and organizations within the Marine Corps and the Navy are not aware of the logistics functions and maintenance concepts used to repair equipment in the Marine Corps Maritime Prepositioning Force (MPF) Program. This lack of understanding is having an adverse effect on equipment readiness. In addition, the present policy concerning training for the regeneration phase of an MPF exercise is severely insufficient and needs to be improved. It is time for the Navy-Marine Team to change the ideals, thoughts, and policies of how MPF exercises are conducted and how the equipment is maintained in this vital Marine Corps and national program.

## The Purpose of MPF

The purpose of the MPF is to provide equipment for Marine air-ground task forces in the absence of forward basing. This is in support of the Department of Defense initiative to enhance the Nation's strategic mobility and rapid deployment concept. This is truly an important issue, since the MPF equipment is probably going to initially make up the bulk of Marine Corps assets ashore during a contingency or major conflict. It is imperative to the Marine Corps mission of being a force in readiness that the MPF equipment and supply readiness be maintained at the highest levels possible. The MPF program has been tested and proved effective during the Gulf War, Operation RESTORE HOPE in Somalia, and numerous U.S. humanitarian efforts around the world. However, with so many different

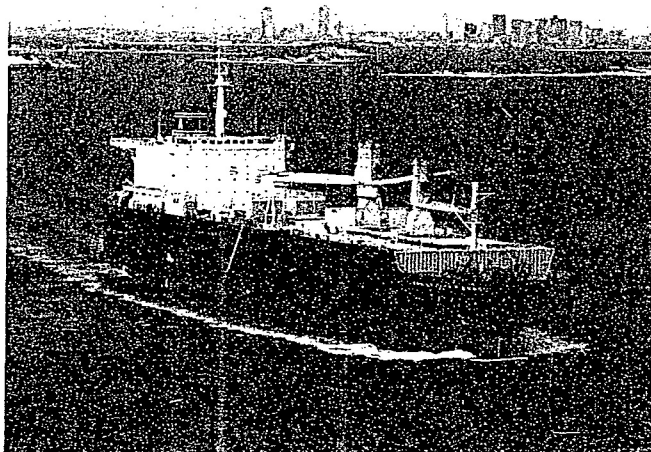
organizations now striving for MPF resources, to include the utilization of the MPF ships for transporting Marines to non-MPF exercises, the program's readiness is at risk.

## Prepositioned Equipment

There are over 26,000 major end-items of equipment prepositioned around the world aboard Maritime Prepositioned Ships (MPS). These items

make up the majority of the items used by the MPF. The rest of the equipment items used to support the MPF are considered fly-in echelon (FIE) assets and are brought into the operating area by aircraft. The FIE items are considerably less in quantities and sizes. The prepositioned equipment the Marine Corps has placed afloat around the world is almost one-third of the total amount of equipment in the Active Fleet Marine Forces and al-

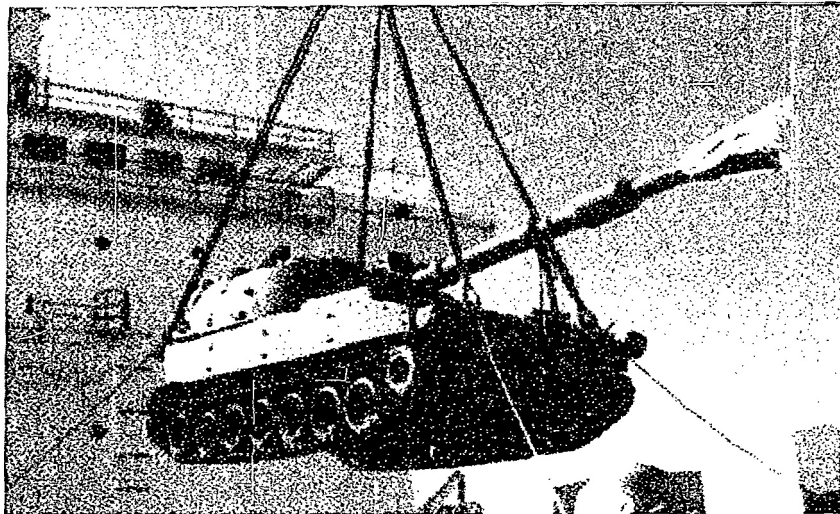
most one-half of the Marine Corps total Active combat power. Present plans are to increase the total number of prepositioned M1A1 combat tanks from 90 to 174. With this increase in tanks, the Marine Corps will have more tanks prepositioned than there are crews in the Active fleet to man them. During MPF exercises a portion of the assets are off-loaded from the ships and used for field training.



## MPF Exercises

MPF exercises are conducted to practice and plan for contingency operations. These training events are designed to test the readiness of the program and exercise the phases of an MPF operation: planning, marshaling, movement, and arrival and assembly. Regeneration, which is the restoration of the exercised items to their original ready condition and capabilities, has recently been established as an additional phase of an MPF operation. However, the regeneration phase usually takes a lower priority than the other phases during training exercises. This may be due to the fact that restoring and maintaining equipment to be backloaded

include tanks, trucks, amphibious vehicles, HMMWVs, light armored vehicles, and numerous other large high-volume engineering, motor transport, and ordnance items. Many of these vehicles are mobile-loaded with supplies and other equipment that would be used for sustained operations. The equipment is loaded aboard civilian owned and operated ships and divided into three MPS squadrons (MPSRon) of four or five ships each. These prepositioned assets



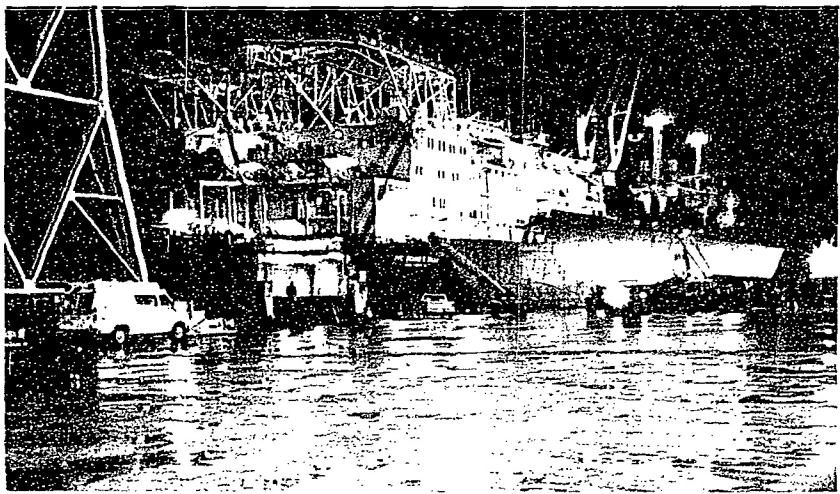
aboard a ship can be considered an administrative function and not of a tactical importance.

Marine units may also feel that the cost of conducting maintenance in the area of operations is too high. Units may incur a cost for having Marines and Navy personnel in foreign countries for additional periods of time and having to fly these people to their home units separate from the main body.

During MPF exercises, the "rental car" mentality may surface when operating forces use gear that they will turn over after the exercise. Once the MPF assets are backloaded aboard the ship many Marines may feel that it is not their equipment and other organizations will repair the damaged items. This mindset has a major effect on MPF readiness.

#### MPF Readiness

The equipment readiness of MPF assets typically decreases after an exercise or contingency operation. During an MPF exercise in September 1995, selected vehicles and equipment were offloaded from one MPF and used for field training. Upon backload the shipboard Marine Corps maintenance center (MCMC) reported 21 nonoperational or "deadlined" combat reportable items. These items are tracked by an automated readiness reporting system just as Fleet Marine Force (FMF) combat reportable equipment items are tracked. The noncombat reportable items are tracked by a manual system and usually are not reported in readiness calculations or percentages. Therefore, the total of unusable items was far greater than 21.



While the MPF equipment is deployed aboard ships, this equipment tracking process is accomplished by using the Marine Integrated Maintenance Management System (MIMMS). Shipboard maintenance crews transmit the MIMMS data to the Blount Island Command, where the information is fed into the automated system by contracted civilian personnel. The government employees at the Blount Island Command continually monitor and review the information to ensure that the maintenance processes on the deployed prepositioned equipment is conducted properly. The MIMMS information is available to the Marine expeditionary force maintenance management officers through their maintenance information offices. This information can be extremely important to logistics planners before an MPF equipment offload.

The operational or nonoperational status of prepositioned equipment is one factor of readiness. However, if an MPF ship has hundreds of prime movers of equipment and these items all average less than one-quarter of a tank of fuel, then readiness, and the arrival and assembly of the force, would be affected. Since JP-5 fuel is used in the majority of the MPF vehicles, the mixing of JP-5 and diesel fuels that FMF units use may also have an impact on the readiness of the equipment. This is one reason why the shipboard maintenance crews must be kept informed about the status of returned MPF equipment.

It is a natural occurrence for mechanical items to break when they are operated. However, the maintenance resources should continually be in place to correct these problems and equipment discrepancies. MPF readiness involves much more than the operational status of equipment items. MPF readiness is dependent on the status of supplies, mobile-loaded assets, fluid levels to include fuel, and the accountability of collateral equipment. Present practices recognize only equipment operational condition as a readiness factor. This can be misleading if the mobile-loaded or collateral items cannot be located. In addition, certain types of equipment modifications or configurations will affect how various items are used in relation to other assets.

#### The MPF Maintenance Concept

Prepositioned equipment is continuously maintained by civilian personnel hired by a MCMC. The shipboard MCMC maintenance personnel live aboard the MPF ships year round, unlike

the ship's operating crew and Navy personnel, who rotate schedules or are with the MPF program for a 1-year period. As new people rotate onto the MPF ships, new ideas arise about sailing these vessels to different ports as long as they are in their operating region. The constant movement of the MPF ships can have an effect on the readiness of the ground equipment.

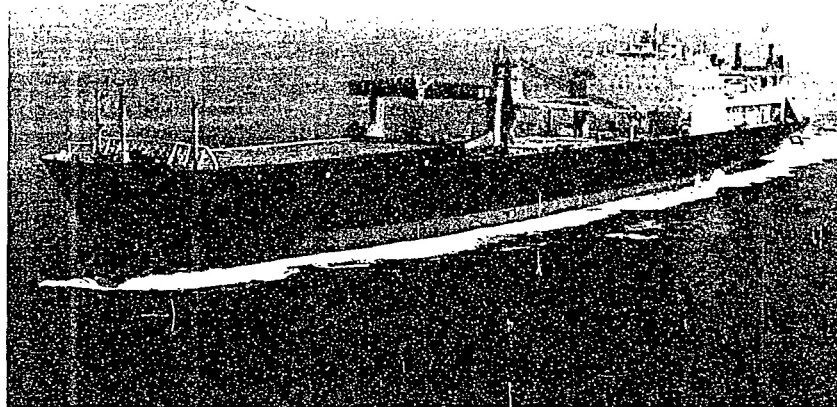
The shipboard MCMC has the tools and test equipment to perform limited maintenance on the prepositioned items. The MCMC is usually limited by space aboard ship, not by any maintenance authorization restrictions. In most cases the MCMC is authorized to perform as much maintenance as can be physically conducted. There are no means to evacuate prepositioned equipment to a higher echelon maintenance facility while the ships are deployed. During an MPF ship's deployment, vehicles and equipment that require corrective maintenance are either repaired by the shipboard MCMC, or repaired when offloaded for an exercise or contingency operation. If the maintenance must be delayed until the equipment is offloaded, the operating forces will lose time during the arrival and assembly phase while the assets are repaired. The shipboard MCMC, like any other maintenance unit, requires a supply link to receive repair and modification kits. Modification kits would be necessary especially if an item was nonoperational due to the modification not being applied. The supply resources are usually sent to a designated receiving point (RP) in the MPS squadron's operating area. The receiving points are:

<u>Squadron</u>	<u>RP</u>
MPS-1	Rota, Spain
MPS-2	Diego Garcia
MPS-3	Guam

To meet the requirement of high equipment readiness, the shipboard MCMC must be able to continually receive the supply resources to repair damaged items. In addition, the MCMC must be informed through the use of accurate documentation about the condition of the equipment during the regeneration phase of an exercise or contingency operation. These considerations and other procedures can be used to ensure MPF readiness remains at the expected high levels.

#### **Improving Readiness**

The present policy for the regeneration of MPF equipment and supplies is mainly focused on the need to return



these assets to their original capability after an operation. This concept and policy needs to be expanded to include exercises. It is true that not all of the various resources are used in an MPF exercise but the regeneration process still needs to be accomplished on the assets that are used.

Once an MPF field exercise is completed the operating forces must emphasize the maintenance and maintenance management functions for the MPF equipment. This emphasis must include the documentation of maintenance actions, the accountability of mobile-loaded supplies, collateral equipment, and fluid levels. The Marine Corps should establish as policy that the operating forces in an MPF exercise will conduct a minimum of one-half day of maintenance for each full day of field training. This maintenance period should be separate work days from the backload operation—the standdown should be devoted purely to maintenance.

Another means to improve equipment readiness would be to ensure that the shipboard MCMC can continually receive the supply resources needed to maintain the prepositioned assets. When MPS are used to transport people and make port calls throughout their operating regions the supply link is broken. The shipboard maintenance crews usually have to wait until the ships return to their receiving points before they can obtain the needed supply support. The idea of forwarding repair parts to the ships location has been reviewed in the past. But since MPS schedules change so frequently and on such short notice, the supply resources end up "chasing" the vessels from port to port.

A final step to improve readiness would be to rid the Marine Corps of the "rental car" mentality. Marines must understand that the prepositioned items are the assets that they will use in battle. This can be done by either establishing new Marine Corps orders that specifically address the maintenance and supply issues that pertain to prepositioning or adding this message to existing Marine Corps orders. If there were sections in these logistics orders that discussed the peculiarities of prepositioning equipment, the operators might better understand the logistics restraints of the program. The MCMC accounts for and maintains the items within the physical limitations of each ship. However, it is the Marine FMF units that will download the equipment and use it.

The primary purpose of the MPS is to preposition equipment. There are various Marine Corps policies that can be changed to place a higher emphasis on MPF assets. It is also time for Marine Corps units to embrace the MPF program and recognize that these prepositioned items are the resources they will use while operating on the "cutting edge" as the Nation's force in readiness.

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