

MARINE CORPS GAZETTE ARTICLE # 1, MAGTF LESSONS LEARNED

Marine air-ground task force (MAGTF) operations are inherently complex. While each element of a MAGTF provides unique capabilities to the MAGTF, each element has its own set of complexities. The MAGTF commander and his staff must understand the distinct yet complementary nature of each element to maximize their collective efforts to accomplish the mission. This is a challenging task at any echelon but especially so at the Marine expeditionary force (MEF) level. As our principal warfighting organization, the MEF is composed of 45,000 plus Marines and sailors who, in a single day of combat, will operate 5000 vehicles, fly 450 aircraft, expend 1,600 short tons of ordnance, consume 1.2 million gallons of fuel, and use 400,000 gallons of water. Focusing the MAGTF's combat power to deal with a wide range of missions across the spectrum of military operations requires an extraordinary degree of professional knowledge, judgment, and experience. To do this, commanders and staffs must have a thorough knowledge of the Marine Corps' philosophy of maneuver warfare; joint and service doctrine; operational and tactical fundamentals; and the tactics, techniques, and procedures associated with MAGTF operations.

Based on his experiences both as the MEF commander in Southwest Asia and later as the Commanding General, Marine Corps Combat Development Command (MCCDC), then LtGen Walter E. Boomer concluded that the Marine Corps had to do more to train Marine Corps force and MEF commanders and staffs to conduct MAGTF operations. He saw a need for a progressive education and training program to enhance the warfighting proficiency of MAGTFs and their major subordinate commands. In addition to assisting the senior commanders and their staffs with the complexities associated with "fighting the MEF," LtGen Boomer also noted the requirement to improve the links between the operating forces and MCCDC. LtGen Boomer knew that the Army had greatly improved their own warfighting proficiency through their Battle Command Training Program (BCTP). He also realized that the Marine Corps could not duplicate the funding and personnel resources the Army had committed to the BCTP. Therefore, in March 1992, he proposed that the Marine Corps University's MAGTF Instruction Team be augmented and reorganized into the MAGTF Staff Training Program (MSTP) under the sponsorship of the Commandant of the Marine Corps. As part of this reorganization, MSTP became the proponent for the MEF and MAGTF staff training for MCCDC.

Then LtGen Charles C. Krulak, LtGen Boomer's successor as CG, MCCDC, further refined the MSTP concept by adding MAGTF command experience to the program in the form of retired general officers acting as senior mentors. Currently, four retired lieutenant generals—E. C. Cheatham, G. R. Christmas, J. A. Brabham, and N. E. Ehlert—serve as senior mentors. Combined, they represent over 130 years of experience in all elements of the MAGTF and all echelons of command.

Then-Commandant, Gen Carl E. Mundy, Jr., concurred with the proposal and in Green Letter 3-92 described how he envisioned the program:

Although the MSTP will originate out of MCCDC, it is intended to be a FMF [Fleet Marine Force] asset that will afford each MEF Commander, his staff and participating MSCs [major subordinate commands] another means to hone and sustain critical warfighting skills. This is a MEF Commander's program and participation should not be construed as a formal evaluation process or a report card ... Each MEF Commander's team building and professional development goals will be an integral portion of the program.

Over the past eight years, MSTP has collected data from various MEF-level exercises which identify the following recurring challenges: the role of the commander; comonency and command relationships; deployment and sustainment of the force; understanding the integrated application of the warfighting functions; and applying operational and tactical fundamentals when planning and executing the MEF single battle. The recurring nature of these challenges can be attributed to high personnel turnover, lack of formal training of commanders and staffs to conduct MAGTF operations, and in some cases, the absence of doctrine to support MAGTF operations.

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Solutions to many of the problems associated with these challenges have surfaced in the MEF after-action reviews that follow MEF-level exercises. MSTP continues to incorporate these lessons, and the solutions developed by the operating forces into presentations and pamphlets to facilitate the exchange of tactics, techniques, and procedures throughout the various MEFs and their MSCs. The solutions developed in the field are brought back to Quantico and shared with the Doctrine Division and the MCU so that they can be codified and disseminated in a formal manner. The most recent example of this methodology was the publication of Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 5-1, *Marine Corps Planning Process*. The planning process within MCWP 5-1 had been in development and operational testing for several years and was predominantly influenced by input from the operating forces. Increasingly, representatives from Doctrine and MCU are participating in MEF exercises with MSTP to improve their ties to the operating forces. Because the exercise program provides the operating forces' commanders and staffs a forum to identify issues pertaining to MAGTF operations and a vehicle to propose solutions to the Combat Development Process, LtGen Boomer's vision of MSTP as a "vehicle which links the operating forces to MCCDC" is being achieved.

When Gen James L. Jones became the Commandant and issued his *Commandant's Planning Guidance*, he reinforced our Service ethos, not only with respect to the primacy of the commander, but also with regard to the Corps becoming a "learning organization":

Our training must provide a true learning environment, in which we recognize that Marines striving for excellence will make tactical mistakes from time to time. If we treat these mistakes as learning opportunities, the lessons will not be forgotten. Without question, the most important part of any exercise is the critique ... Skilled, confident commanders will allow, indeed encourage, free and spirited discussion among exercise participants ...

In order to bring the benefits of that "free and spirited discussion" to a wider audience, the *Marine Corps Gazette* has invited MSTP to publish a series of articles addressing MAGTF lessons learned. These articles are intended to generate further discussion among individual readers as well as the actual commands conducting MAGTF operations. To make this a truly shared experience, all Marines and organizations, particularly those involved with training and education, are welcome to provide their insight and experience concerning MAGTF operations.

While the accompanying figure lists specific articles, "MAGTF Lessons Learned" can be viewed within the framework of these three broad, overarching themes:

Role of the Commander. While the significance of the commander is well established within our Service ethos and doctrine, the actual "how tos" concerning commander's intent, critical information requirements, battlespace evaluation, and planning guidance will be more fully discussed.

Role of the Staff. The staff assists and advises the commander in exercising command and control. Numerous articles will focus on the staff's role and the issues surrounding their responsibilities in planning and execution. Specifically, staff integration during planning and execution, applying maneuver warfare concepts during course of action development, producing an operations order with sufficient detail that is clear and concise, managing information and battle rhythm, and assessing operations are issues that will be addressed.

Single Battle Concept. Operations and events in one part of the battlespace may have profound and often unintended effects on other areas and events. How are the various elements of the MAGTF employed to provide unity of effort to be decisive over the enemy in accordance with the commander's intent and planning guidance? The supporting concepts of decisive and shaping actions, main and supporting efforts, employment of the reserve and sustaining the force will be explored as the means of fighting the MAGTF's single battle.

Over the last eight years, MSTP has learned a tremendous amount from observing and working with the MAGTF commanders and staffs as they plan and execute various exercises and operations. This knowledge has been critical in developing, testing, and codifying doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures, that in turn have benefited other MAGTF commanders and staffs.

This series of articles will by no means answer all the questions and issues surrounding MAGTF operations. The intent of these articles is to raise the general awareness of all MAGTF Marines, generate discussion, propose solutions that are relevant, and eventually improve existing MAGTF operations doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures.

Future MAGTF Articles

- **Commander's Battlespace Area Evaluation/Commander's Intent**
- **Battlespace**
- **Commander's Critical Information Requirements**
- **Planning Guidance**
- **Operational Planning Team and Staff Interaction**
- **Intelligence Preparation of the Battlespace**
- **Single Battle**
- **Rear Area Operations**
- **Decisive/Shaping/Sustaining**
- **Main & Supporting Efforts and the use of the Reserve**
- **COA Development/War Game**
- **Fires**
- **Assessment**
- **Terminology/Symbology**
- **Orders Development**
- **Information Operations**
- **Logistics Support Planning**
- **Movement Control**
- **Information Management**
- **Battle Rhythm**
- **Componency**