

fantry battalion. The Army currently employs the M120 120mm mortar, so the equipment and ammunition are available. The cost of such acquisitions probably would not be prohibitive. Currently the maximum range of this system is over 7,000 meters with a 10,000-meter capability under development. Numerous types of ammunition are available or under development, including scatterable mines, antitank, flechette, and antipersonnel improved conventional munitions. Personnel requirements would remain the same. The weapons company mortarmen could cross-train on 81mm and 120mm systems. Depending on the situation the BLT/MEU commander could determine which system to employ. This is both a feasible and appropriate solution. Artillerymen used to have to maintain proficiency on two howitzer systems; certainly mortarmen could also meet the challenge.

The bottom line is that change is due. Certainly we are not operating in the smartest, most efficient manner by continuing to deploy artillery batteries with the MEU. Contrary to popular belief, the much touted "lightweight" howitzer of the future will not rectify the MEU artillery situation. This howitzer will be lighter than the M198, but still requires one helicopter to lift it, one prime mover to tow it, and does not provide any increased range/ammunition benefits. I would recommend that the liaison section (without FOs), continue to deploy with the MEU. The section is small (one officer, four to six Marines), and like naval gunfire it could attach to the headquarters and service company for the deployment. The section would participate during workups, and would continue to assist in the rapid planning process for the different missions. If required

during a contingency, the section could quickly provide interface with the supporting battery, in the case of the first or second alternative mentioned above, that deploys to catch up with the MEU. Habitual artillery/infantry relationships would remain in place during workups, the only change would be that the liaison section deploys, and the artillery battery doesn't.

Deploying artillery batteries with the MEU is unnecessary. We can't afford such unnecessary deployments at the expense of training for conventional artillery support to the Marine division. We need to "fight smart" and "operate smart" in today's world.

US  MC

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The MEU(SOC) Program: Are We Preparing Properly?

by Maj William F. Mullen III

This author believes we can improve the training currently being given to our forward deployed units and proposes some significant changes.

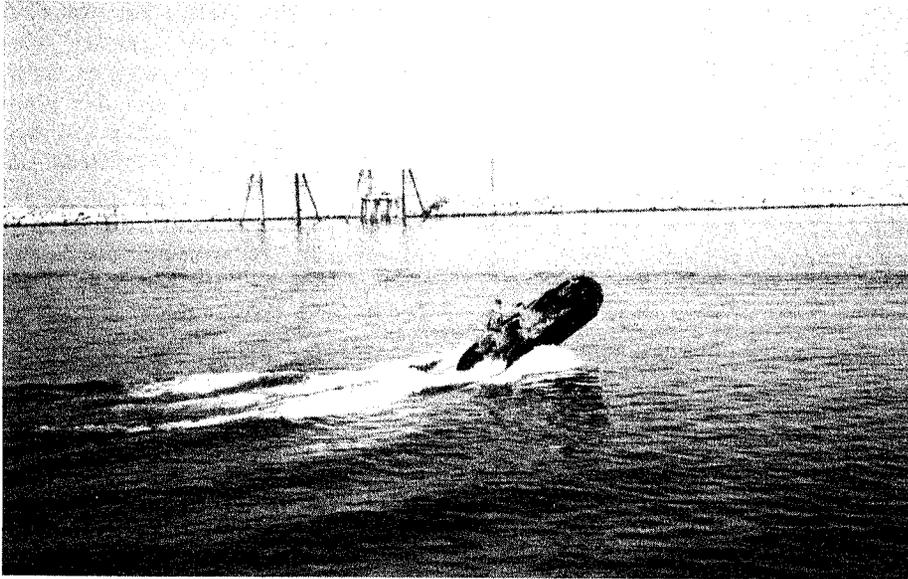
As the stern gate on the LSD opens up, the red lights of the well deck give way to the inky darkness of the open sea at night. Marines and sailors move combat rubber raiding craft (CRRC) out onto the now level stern gate four at a time, conduct last minute checks on their stowed gear, then load into them and prepare to launch. The raid force commander and well deck control officer agree that it is time to launch and the signal is given. The stern gate lowers into the water as the Marines push off with paddles both from the stern gate and the other nearby CRRCs. As they recede into the darkness and disappear within seconds, the twin 35-horsepower motors on each

CRRC can be heard starting. The stern gate comes back to level when all CRRC are clear and the process repeats itself until the entire raid force is launched. When the raid force is all accounted for, it travels 15 nautical miles from over the horizon to the hostile coastline, lands, conducts a clandestine destruction raid, withdraws from the beach, and returns to the ship.

Great training, right? But how likely is it that we would ever receive permission to do something like that for real? How much time, effort, and money was spent preparing a Marine rifle company to be able to conduct a mission like that? Having gone

through the entire process and completed a Marine expeditionary unit (special operations capable), or MEU(SOC), deployment, my experience tells me it was too much.

The MEU(SOC) program is touted as the jewel in the crown for the Marine Corps. It is a responsive, flexible, potent weapon that unified commanders (CinCs) have at their disposal year round. Having participated in this program as a member of Battalion Landing Team 2/6, part of the 26th MEU(SOC), I would still agree that this is definitely true. It is the fastest way to deal with a potential trouble area. How many times in



Is CRRC training well suited to our most likely threats?

the past have we heard about a MEU pulling up off the coast of some troubled land and seen the calming effect that it has? How many other times have we seen Marines go ashore to protect American lives and interests? My questions about the program don't include whether we should be sending out MEUs—expeditionary units are the best asset this Nation has to deal with crises around the world. I am simply asking: Are we really training and preparing MEUs the best possible way before they go out? Has the time during the 6-month workup period been wisely and effectively spent? When MEUs deploy, do they have the best equipment available, tailored to the most likely threats and environments they may have to deal with? Based on what I experienced, I don't think so.

When you look at the way a MEU is trained during the workup, you would think that it is deploying to be a clandestine raiding force. In reality, who would ever allow us to send portions of a Marine rifle company in from over-the-horizon in CRRC in order to conduct a raid? Even if a raid were to be approved, what chance would that force have with the small coastal patrol craft that all of our most likely opponents seem to

have? Were we to conduct the raid with AAVs, what chance do they have of sneaking up on anybody? Helicopters are the most likely means of employment, but what about enemy air defense measures? No matter how we plan the mission, we still get back to the questions of whether we would ever be given permission to do it and whether such raids are the way the world's only superpower should employ force.

“ . . . the skills we spent all that time learning would never be used. What made this worse was that our conventional skills atrophied . . . ”

Don't misunderstand me, my Marines and I enjoyed our training as the CRRC raid and cliff assault company. For many of us it was exactly what we had come in the Marine Corps to do. It was great zooming in through the night on CRRC (when they worked properly) and conducting raids. The morale and confidence of the company skyrocketed as we completed this training, but after the special operations capable exercise (SOCEX), it was pretty much over. We were able to conduct some training while deployed, but it was difficult to schedule and even

more difficult to carry out. I'm not even going to go into the stowage and maintenance nightmares we encountered throughout the workup and deployment. Worse yet, using CRRC in exercises while deployed was like trying to make a square peg fit into a round hole. The majority of the exercises we participated in were conventional operations and trying to find a role for the CRRC company was a continuing headache for our operations officer.

Looking back on the workup from the post deployment vantage point, it appears misdirected—not really focused on what we would most likely be facing in our designated area of operations. There was a set schedule established by the II MEF Special Operations Training Group (SOTG) that we hurtled through up to our major exercises, the MEUEX and SOCEX, then we deployed. The only SOC skills we ever even considered using during the deployment were those associated with evacuation of noncombatants (NEOs) and tactical rescue of aircraft and personnel (TRAP) type operations, and even these were treated as sideshows until TRAP got a lot more attention as a result of the O'Grady rescue. It was

abundantly clear to us that the skills we spent all that time learning would never be used. What made this worse was that our conventional skills atrophied to an unacceptable point because we were

so focused on ensuring that we would be certified as SOC capable.

So where does this leave us? First, we need to look at the MEU force structure. Why even have a company designated as a CRRC raid company? Is this a viable option for anything but very small unit special operations (i.e., reconnaissance insertion/extraction)? CRRC are slow and vulnerable when compared to coastal patrol craft. Helicopters with infrared sights would be a nightmare for a CRRC force. Enemy troops and vehicles can easily block choke points on inland waterways. Once

ashore, a foot mobile force has an extremely difficult time keeping up with the other two companies when one is in tracks and the other is moving via helicopter. A much more ideal structure would be to have two companies in tracks and the third in helicopters. The pincer arms of two mechanized companies coming ashore is a force to be reckoned with especially when the helo company is thrown in as a blocking force. We conducted an operation using this force structure during an exercise in November 1994 and enjoyed a great deal of success. This option, which would require an additional amphibious assault platoon, would probably cause problems with space and operations tempo, but these can be worked out. We overcame similar problems when we opted to bring along an MIAI platoon on our deployment.

What about the training of a MEU(SOC)? How could we modify it to better suit reality? The planning for the workup schedule should be conducted well in advance and should involve members of all four staffs—all the MEU components—as well as the SOTG and any other agency involved. It should be based on a detailed analysis of the area of operations and most likely threats therein. The entire spectrum of conflict should be examined and once the most likely employment scenarios have been identified, the schedule should then be tailored to ensuring that the MEU is prepared for those scenarios. If the MEU will be going out during the winter, or anticipates operating in mountainous terrain, a trip to the Mountain Warfare Training Center should be included in the schedule. The MEU may only be able to get up there in the summer, but the staff at Bridgeport could still conduct a modified cold weather package in order to expose the force to this type of environment. If desert operations are anticipated, the entire MEU should participate in a combined arms exercise at Twentynine Palms or a rota-

tion to the Army's National Training Center. These things may be a scheduling nightmare, but it seems to me that this is some of the best training available to an infantry battalion today and the force that is deploying at the "tip of the spear" doesn't even receive it during a typical workup.

Of course, not all scenarios can be anticipated and there are many skills that will always be needed regardless of the area of operation or employment options, so a skeleton training schedule should always be included. This training could be as follows:

- Month 1: Concentrated training focusing on individual, team, squad, and platoon conventional operation skills across the spectrum. Build up a sense of unity

“We are distracted by the ‘high speed’ and ‘sexy’ aspects of special operations, and pay only lip service to the more mundane . . .”

among Marines who usually have come together just prior to lock-on. A more intensive combat conditioning program can be implemented and rapid planning training for the four MEU staffs could begin.

- Month 2: Integration training among the units of the MEU focusing on company level training and interoperability among the different assets the MEU possesses. This training should be focused on conventional operations as a type of review before moving on to the more complicated special operations-type training.

- Month 3: Special operations training should begin with an exposure to raids and a bigger focus on the more likely employment scenarios such as NEO and TRAP reinforcing operations. The MEU should begin to work from the ships they will be deploying with during this phase.

- Month 4: Scenario training for the entire MEU as a workup to the SOCEX and joint task force exercise. This should be conducted

both ashore and on the ships, with the companies only going out to the ships when they will actually be employed in a scenario. (We spent a lot of time aboard ship waiting for a mission during the workup when we could have been ashore conducting much more valuable training.)

- Month 5: Advance force operations and the SOCEX with the emphasis on the employment scenarios identified in the prelock-on planning that was conducted by the MEU staffs and SOTG. The SOCEX should then be followed by a 2-week exercise that emphasizes bringing the entire MEU ashore and operating for an extended period.

- Month 6: Maintenance, inspections, and maximum leave before embarkation and departure.

The MEU(SOC) truly is an extremely flexible tool for a CinC. It is a useful, easily controlled force that can get most any

job done in a professional manner. I'm convinced that it really is something we need to be doing; but the way we currently prepare for these types of deployments is misdirected. We are distracted by the "high speed" and "sexy" aspects of special operations, and pay only lip service to the more mundane fundamentals that ultimately decide the outcome. The irony of it is that those same mundane operations are the most likely ways that we will be employed. We are spending too much time and effort training for operations we will never be allowed to conduct. We owe it to the sailors and Marines who will be first in the door in an emergency to give them the best possible preparation for the challenges they will actually face.

US  MC

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