

## The MEF Is Our Mission . . . The MAGTF Staff Training Program (MSTP)

by Col James F. Amos

*Fighting as a MEF doesn't just happen overnight. It takes patience, education, and the commitment of a great many senior Marines.*

The MAGTF (Marine air-ground task force) Staff Training Program (MSTP) received its "official sanctioning" in August of last year when the Commandant released ALMAR 238/93 and signed on personally as the program's sponsor. Like any program that plows new ground, the MSTP began with a vision. The visionary was BGen Paul K. Van Riper, President of the Marine Corps University; the year was 1989. Gen Van Riper wanted to take the talents of his instructor base out to the MAGTF staffs rather than keep it solely at Quantico. His key initiative zeroed in on the operating force's ability to do MAGTF staff planning, and his target audience was primarily the command elements (CEs) of the standing Marine expeditionary brigades (MEBs). As his small nucleus of instructors visited the various MAGTFs, Gen Van Riper became convinced that the Marine Corps needed a structured program to train staffs for future conflicts. Later, as the director of the Marine Corps Combat Development Command's (MCCDC's) Training and Education Division, Gen Van Riper continued to be the driving force behind the concept of training battle staffs.

During February 1989, a message was sent from the commanding general at MCCDC to the Fleet Marine Force (FMF) announcing the draft concept of a MAGTF CE (Battle Staff) Seminar. This seminar became known as the Battle Staff Training (BST) Program. The instructors for this program came from the structure of the Amphibious Instruction Division; this new organization was titled the MAGTF Integration Team (MIT). Initial configuration and vision were based largely on a similar program that the Army had started the previous

year at Fort Leavenworth.

Concept validation continued during 1990 as the skeleton cadre of instructors visited various MAGTF CEs and their major subordinate commands (MSCs). Predictably, manning and funding shortfalls precluded full program development right up front. With DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM, however, came the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF), or the "Super MEF," and the need to organize and train a large Marine battle staff.

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MIT instructors were deployed to help with the task both as members of mobile training teams and, in some cases, as full-time staff members joining the MEF or one of the major subordinate commands for the duration of the war.

Post-Gulf War analysis by the Marine Forces/I MEF commander, LtGen Walter E. Boomer, revalidated the need in our Corps for a formalized, sponsored training program that focuses on the MEF commander and his staff from a warfighting perspective. In his capacity as the commanding general of MCCDC and now as Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen Boomer has been the strongest advocate of the MIT's mission.

The autumn of 1991 saw the organization's name change to the MAGTF Instruction Team (MIT). The bare-bones organization that began as a vision slowly took on structure and form. A seminar-type curriculum was developed whose principal focus was the primacy of the MEF; "if we are going to fight as MEFs, then let's train as MEFs" was the

guidance from above. This evolution was occurring against the backdrop of significant Service introspection regarding roles and functions. The Navy and the Marine Corps breathed new life into the concept of a forward-deployed naval expeditionary force. A tailored battle group and MAGTF combination offers a unified commander in chief (CinC) or a joint force commander (JFC) a formidable, self-sustaining force that can be employed in any contingency. The MEF is the CinC's "9-1-1 force-in-readiness." As such, the MEF commander and his staff must know how to fight a MEF in a joint campaign, interact with a component headquarters, and if required, serve as the nucleus of a joint task force headquarters. Gen Carl E. Mundy, Jr. summed it all up in Green

Letter 3-92:

As our warfighting doctrine evolves to include the changes in force structure and impact of technology on an extended battlefield so must our knowledge. Towards this end, the MIT will . . . focus on MEF-level evolving concepts and doctrine to help establish the roles and functions of the MEF CE.

The MIT's responsibilities then became institutionalized in 1993 when Marine Corps Order 1500.53 was published, officially kicking off the MSTP. The MSTP is a MEF commander's program; its sole reason for existence is to support the MEF commander's efforts in training his staff. It is designed to focus on the pivotal role of the MEF commander and the diverse functional responsibilities of the MEF staff at the operational and tactical levels of war. And, because the MSTP team visits the FMF regularly, it also serves as a key link between the FMF and MCCDC in addressing and resolving doctrinal issues, training deficiencies, equipment acquisition planning,

and prospective force structure requirements—all key elements of the combat development process.

The Marine Corps has invested considerable structure and money in “fleshing out” the MSTP. Personnel assigned to the team represent a mini-MAGTF’s worth of talent, experience, and military occupational specialties. The addition of LtGen Ernest C. Cheatham, USMC (Ret) to the team set the cornerstone in place. As a former MEF commander, he serves officially as the team’s “senior observer,” providing the sense of direction, wisdom, and experience of one who has “been there” before. The efforts of the entire team are focused on developing ways to organize and fight the MEF from a commander versus staff perspective.

Currently, the MSTP is a four-phase initiative, tailored specifically to meet the needs of each individual MEF commander and his staff. Phase One is the initial meeting where the MEF commander articulates his objectives for the follow-on phases. Time lines are agreed to, and the resulting schedule is inserted into the MEF’s training, exercise, and employment plan. Phase Two is a 5-day seminar/workshop designed to build the MEF team into a warfighting staff. This phase includes both the MEF and MSC staffs. *Top-down planning* and the *single battle* concept are introduced through seminar-type classes and reinforced throughout the week. The idea of coordinating the entire staff’s efforts laterally and vertically from a *battlefield-activities* perspective is introduced as well. Workshops present the opportunity for team building as the commander and his staff focus on working through portions of

the deliberate and crisis-action planning cycles. Complementary to Phase Two is the selection of several “hot issues,” which are then discussed with the MEF commander and his major subordinate commanders as sidebar seminars.

Completion of Phase Two leaves the staff ready to “exercise” their knowledge in a forthcoming command post exercise (CPX). Phase Three is a 5-day command post exercise (CPX), involving the staffs

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of the MEF and major subordinate units. Ideally, the MSTP team will tailor the scenario and play of the problem to a MEF’s geographic area of responsibility. The CPX will be driven by a staff of professional controllers, augmented by the Marine Corps Tactical Warfare Simulation System. Future plans call for the opposition force, controllers, and modeling and simulation personnel to all be provided from within the MSTP team. The CPX is designed to give the MEF commander and his staff a “realistic” perspective of what it’s like to fight a MEF. A thorough after-action review is conducted at the end of the CPX, focusing on the learning objectives as formatted by the MEF commander during Phase One. The goal of the MSTP is to provide the MEF commander a “turn-key” operation/CPX.

The final iteration is Phase Four. The MSTP team will put together and mail to the MEF staff a sustainment package tailored to areas that need attention, as

evidenced during the previous Phase Three CPX.

Ideally, each MEF will begin a new cycle of phases every 18 months. This should accommodate changes of command and the annual turnover of staff personnel. The MSTP schedule for the remainder of 1993 and for 1994 is ambitious. The first-ever Phase Three administered by the team will be conducted at II MEF during March and April in preparation for II MEF commander’s assignment as the commander joint task force (CJTF) for AGILE PROVIDER-94. The MSTP team will provide a nucleus higher headquarters staff in support of this joint exercise and II MEF.

MajGen Van Riper’s vision has been realized in part. The MSTP’s goal is to

be fully operational by 1996. When completely stood up, the team will consist of some 40 active duty personnel from all Services, 80 Select Marine Corps Reservists (SMCR), and 40 civilian contractors all, of whom are needed to professionally support the four-phase program. The team’s main body has just recently completed a move into the “old library” at Quantico’s Little Hall and is under the leadership of Col James A. Fulks, former commander of both the 4th and 5th Marines. The Modeling and Simulation portion of the team remains located at Breckenridge Hall and Building 3074. Should you have any questions regarding the program, scheduling, or related matters, the team can be reached at DSN 278-2818/2906, or (703) 640-2818/2906.



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#### Quote to Ponder

### On Command

It is good fun commanding a division anywhere. It is one of the four best commands in the service—platoon, battalion, a division, and the army. A platoon, because it is your first command, because you are young, and because, if you are any good, you know the men in it better than their mothers do and love them as much. A battalion, because it is a unit with a life of its own; whether it is good or bad depends on you alone; you have at last real command. A division, because it is the smallest formation that is a complete orchestra of war and the largest in which every man can know you. An army, because the creation of its spirit and its leadership in battle give you the greatest unit of emotional and intellectual experience that can befall man.

—Field Marshall Viscount Slim  
*Defeat Into Victory*