

A Message from the Commanding General, 2d MEB

Such as brigades hand down forever
by BGen Anthony M. Henderson

The future of the MEB is as important to our Corps as the dynamic roles Marine brigades have played throughout history in the projection of national power. Since its first use in 1913, the task-organized brigade structure has served as a highly versatile formation to meet the needs of crisis response and combat operations ashore. Just as our Corps and warfighting doctrine have evolved over the years, our conception of what constitutes a brigade has likewise evolved. Originally conceived as our largest infantry formations, eventually they were diversified into combined-arms organizations. Naming conventions also varied, with descriptive terms applied to meet perceived needs. Perhaps the most memorable example is the “Marine Brigade” in action alongside Army infantry brigades during World War I and its distinguished service as part of the American Expeditionary Force. The “provisional” brigade used early on during the Korean conflict left open the possibility we would create a larger formation. In later applications, “amphibious,” “expeditionary,” and “anti-terrorism” revealed expectations for employment. Standing brigades have largely been a historical anomaly, although standing brigade CEs have enjoyed a greater shelf-life. In recent decades, we have established a more standardized MEB as a mid-sized MAGTF for employment across the range of military operations. Whether conducting humanitarian assistance operations, expeditionary deployments to

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manage contingencies, crises, or war, MEBs have answered the call over the past twenty years.

Given the evolutionary history of brigades within the Marine Corps, it bears asking the question, “Is the current MEB construct a viable capability for the Marine Corps in the future?” That is the question I have posed to the members of the 2d MEB staff.

Over the past three years, there has been much discussion and effort sur-

rounding the 38th Commandant’s *Planning Guidance* and *Force Design 2030*, and those activities will continue for years to come. It is important to clarify that, while the 38th Commandant’s *Planning Guidance* stated we will no longer use a “2.0 MEB requirement” as the basis for determining amphibious ship requirements, the Commandant did not discontinue MEBs as a force option. The articles published herein examine and discuss the MEB as a cur-



BGen Anthony Henderson, Commanding General of 2d MEB, discusses expeditionary warfare with Italian Navy Vice Admiral Aurelio De Carolis, Commander-in-Chief of the Italian Naval Fleet, while aboard the Italian Aircraft Carrier Giuseppe Garibaldi during Exercise Cold Response 2022. (Photo by SSgt Shawn Coover.)

rent and future capability. Before those discussions, let us place the MEB in the backdrop of our warfighting organizational approach—the air-ground task force.

MAGTF

The term “MAGTF” is well known by Marines. The challenge is that sometimes that knowledge and understanding go only to the extent of the acronym or major elements of the formation. The forming, integration, deployment, and employment of disparate parts to create a whole that is more powerful than the sum of its parts requires both art and science. As one of my mentors used to say, “1+2 equals 4 or more.” This construct expands the commander’s ability, to increase reach, sustain tempo, accept and pursue risk, gain advantage, and seize opportunity far beyond the basic military calculation of time, space, and force of other military designs. Properly understood and led, the power of the full integration and application of the air, ground, logistics, and CE that make up the MAGTF provides a warfighting force the ability to out-cycle and outpace an opponent. The Marine Corps long ago adopted the MAGTF organization to maximize the application of combined arms and maneuver. This warfighting organizational approach manifests in three primary organizations: the MEU, the MEB, and the MEF. Each provides a different scale MAGTF reflecting the command and control (C2) span from colonel, to brigadier general, to lieutenant general. Each has different attributes. The MEU, combined with amphibious shipping, provides the operational mobility to respond to regional crises and contingencies. The MEF is designed to fight major contingencies and wars in a joint campaign across the littorals and, if necessary, sustained operations ashore. The MEB provides the capacity to organize, deploy, and employ in a contingency at a greater scale than a MEU while also providing the basis for expansion into a MEF. An MEB must have the ability to conduct this from afloat or ashore in a littoral operation as part of a maritime campaign.¹ That is why the MEB CEs have been the headquarters

“When it became apparent the United States would enter World War I the Allied fleets had already obtained sea control. Assistant Commandant Brigadier General John A. Lejeune recognized the only chance for combat was service with the AEF. Lejeune explained, ‘there was no available naval mission, therefore, for an advanced base or expeditionary force. At that time, our officers and men were clamoring for service. Their adventurous spirit would brook no delay. Their thoughts were constantly turned toward France.’ The Marine Brigade was formed and its service has since stood as inestimable value to the Marine Corps, endearing the Corps to the American people for generations to come.”

of choice for amphibious planning for several decades.

Elements of MEB Campaign Plan

“2d MEB seeks to be ready to command and control expeditionary littoral combat forces conducting combined arms across all domains.” The future requires that an MEB must be able to execute this command, control, coordination, and collaboration, as an in-

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tegrated naval headquarters in a joint, NATO, and coalition environment.² This provides the MEF, fleet, and combatant commanders with capabilities throughout the competition continuum. The subsequent articles provide the experience of the 2d MEB in training, operating, and experimenting with our naval concepts and future force design. This future is closer upon us than we may have originally assessed.

The Marine Corps can envision Marine expeditionary brigades with

the ability to employ as integrated naval warfighting headquarters, whether forward or CONUS based, with competencies in the C2 of expeditionary littoral forces afloat and ashore. Of equal, if not greater, importance is the competency to organize, form, deploy and employ a Marine air-ground task force across seaward and landward.

Core Capability

The MEB remains a core part of Marine Corps capabilities and warfighting identity. Recently, the Commandant stated the MEB construct “is less about the institution pushing it and more about the combatant commands seeing a value in it because we can tailor it.” Fleet commanders recognize this, but to be a relevant future naval capability, we must continue to advance the future MEB construct and employment. Thus, we may hand these brigades down forever.

Notes

1. Gen David H. Berger, *38th Commandant’s Planning Guidance*, (Washington, DC: July 2019).
2. Reference NATO pub.

