

Lean and Mean

We can do more with less

by Maj Paul L. Stokes, USMC(Ret)

“**T**his Marine Expeditionary Brigade Staff will be Lean and Mean!” As he uttered those words, BGen Hardcharger, the new MEB CG, could see the disbelief in the eyes of his Marines—but he knew his bold statement had sparked their interest.

When he received orders to assume command of the MEB in late autumn of 2018, the first thing he did was review the MEB’s table of organization. His initial reaction was that a 200-plus Marine staff was far too large. After all, a German Panzer Division staff in 1940 was smaller than a current Marine infantry battalion staff,¹ and when he was a young sergeant attached to “The Gunfighters” of 9th MEB back in 1990, they could accomplish the mission with 95 Marines. Ergo, it was time to return to our roots and learn how to do things as effectively as possible, even if that meant “going back to the future.” So he dug into his footlocker, pulled-out several timeless, well-worn publications, and—along with his professional education and 28-plus years of leadership experience—developed the commander’s guidance to his newly formed MEB CE staff that he delivered to this Marines later that day.

BGen Hardcharger continued, “We will accomplish this task by going back to the basics. So Marines, I want all of you to take a look at the handout you were issued as you came through the front hatch and follow me!”

MCDP 1, Warfighting

“Marines, the fundamental reason for our existence is fighting and winning our Nation’s wars, and in order to accomplish that mission, we, as a staff, must understand the Corps’ philosophy of warfighting, to include an appreciation for the nature of war itself and its moral, mental, and physical characteristics and demands.”²

>Maj Stokes retired in August 2006 after 31 years of active duty service. A former Gunnery Sergeant and Chief Warrant Officer 3, he served in a variety of leadership and communications billets from the team to theater levels. He has served as the Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School’s Operations Officer, Deputy Operations Officer, and Future Operations/Plans Officer since January 2007.

Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) Command Element (Proposed) – 1 Feb 2019						
			BGen	MEB Commanding General		
			Col	MEB Chief of Staff		
			1stLt	Aide-De-Camp		
			SgtMaj	Sergeant Major		
Staff Sec	G-1	G-2	G-3	G-4	G-6	G-8
1 Maj 1 Sgt 1 Cpl	1 LtCol 1 Capt 1 GySgt 1 Sgt 1 LCpl	1 LtCol 1 MGySgt 1 Sgt Ops 2 Maj 1 Capt 1 MSgt 1 GySgt 2 SSgt	1 Col 1 LtCol 1 MGySgt COPS FOPS 1 LtCol 1 LtCol 1 Maj 1 Maj 1 MSgt 1 SSgt 1 Sgt 1 Sgt 2 Cpl 1 LCDR	1 LtCol 1 Maj 1 MGySgt Ops/Plans 3 Maj 1 Capt 1 GySgt 2 SSgt 2 Cpl	1 LtCol 1 MGySgt Ops/Plans 2 Maj 3 CWO3 1 MSgt 1 GySgt 2 SSgt	1 LtCol 1 SSgt
Special Staff						
SJA 1 Maj 1 Sgt		CI/HUMINT 1 Capt 1 GySgt	Air 1 LtCol 1 Capt	Info Ops 1 Maj	Engr/Med 1 Maj 2 CDR 1 HMC 1 HM1	KMI 1 GySgt
Info Manager 1 LtCol 1 MSgt		SIGINT/EW 2 GySgt	Fires 2 Maj 1 MSgt	LNO 2 Maj	IE/Cyber Ops 1 Capt 2 GySgt	NetOps 2 GySgt
Red Team 1 LtCol 2 Maj 1 GySgt		Systems 1 Maj 1 SSgt 1 Cpl	Tech Ops 1 Capt			
			ATFP/CBRN 1 Maj 1 GySgt			
					Summary 47 Marine Officers 43 Marine Enlisted 3 Navy Officers 2 Navy Enlisted 95 Total Personnel	

Ref: CE, 3d MEB, III MEF, Unit 35606, T/O dtd 19 Apr 2013, Modified by the Author on 1 Feb 2019

Figure 1. (Figure provided by author.)

I know that may sound like restating the obvious, but the fact is that the first step in becoming lean and mean is establishing a goal. For this MEB, warfighting is our reason for being and any activity that does not support that mission will be closely scrutinized.”

MCWP 3-40.1, Marine Air-Ground Task Force Command and Control

“The key to a successful staff is establishing conditions wherein I, as a Commanding General, can create, foster, and maintain an atmosphere that recognizes

the facts that: people drive the command and control system; people gather information, make decisions, take action, communicate, and cooperate with one another to accomplish a common goal; and effective command and control starts with qualified people and a common philosophy.”³

My philosophy is simple, we are here to ‘take care of Marines and support operations’ in the most effective and innovative manner possible. This is why this staff will be capped at 95 personnel (See Figure 1).⁴ This will force us to work together by learning not only

our own jobs but those of our peers. I realize that may be a challenge, but that is why we have publications like *MCWP 3-40.1* to outline what we need to know in order to seek out, close with, and destroy the enemy!”

A Bias for Action: The 7th Panzer Division in France and Russia 1940-1941⁵

“What made the German Army successful was the fact that their commanders and staffs used a common doctrine that stressed initiative, critical thinking, and the willingness to make decisions at the lowest practical level. Furthermore, their staffs were lean and focused solely on mission accomplishment, requiring their principal staff officers to work just as hard as their Alphas. In other words, this MEB CE will foster its own ‘bias for action’ wherein our leaders will be encouraged to make decisions based on their own judgment vice waiting for ‘the word from the Old Man.’ This short manual will show us how to achieve this goal through leadership by example, professional study, and hard training.”

It was clear that his guidance was starting to have the intended effect as heads began to nod and the looks of foreboding and disbelief were starting to transform into ones of confidence. All he needed was the wide grins and the sparks of enthusiasm in their eyes.

9th MEB Operation Order (OPORD) 201-91⁶

“In order to meet my stated goals of an integrated staff, we will adopt the 9th MEB OPORD 201-91 format and update it to reflect how we operate in the 21st century. This OPORD covers all phases of MEB operations and provides a standard set of tactics, techniques, and procedures that can be modified via issuance of ‘green page inserts’ tailored to a particular operation or exercise.

Marines, I saw this OPORD in action throughout the Indo-Pacific, and it works. All that we have to do is embrace this template, create our own MEB OPORD 201-19, and reap the benefits.”

Expeditionary Force 21, MEB Concept of Operations⁷

“Marines, the OPLAN 201-91 will

help us to codify the ‘how’ while the *Expeditionary Force 21* dictates ‘why.’ I am proud to say that those pale action officers at CD&I⁸, who never see the light of day, did us right. As someone who does not like to reinvent the wheel, here are the core standards that we will train to:

- Be able to C2 forward deployed/rapidly deployable composited forces capable of operating in a joint, inter-agency, intergovernmental, multinational environment.⁹
- Be able to deploy an initial fly-in “jump headquarters” CE within 12 to 24 hours to command compositing forces and rapidly respond to any crisis or contingency.¹⁰
- Be expeditionary through all available means, to include amphibious shipping, organic, Inter-/intra-theater/strategic airlift/sealift, and the use of maritime/land prepositioned resources.¹¹
- Be able to leverage existing MEU combat logistics force and the Maritime Prepositioning Ship Squadron for up to 30 days of sustainment.¹²
- Develop habitual relationships with our Navy or Service component counterparts and be able to operate across multiple unified command boundaries.¹³
- Be prepared to form the nucleus of a joint task force (JTF) headquarters, or act as a functional component within a JTF or combined joint task force (CJTF).¹⁴”

CMC FRAGO 01/2016: Advance to Contact¹⁵ and The Marine Corps Operating Concept (MOC)¹⁶

“As General Neller, our 37th Commandant stated:

[It is] fundamental to our character as a Marine Corps is our role as the Nation’s force-in-readiness. We must continue to be ready for operations across the range of military operations. At the same time, we recognize the current and future fight may not be what we experienced in the past. It will encompass not just the domains of land, air and sea, but also space and the cyber domain. It will include information operations and operations across the electromagnetic spectrum. It will involve rapidly changing and evol-

*ving technologies and concepts, which will force us to be more agile, flexible and adaptable.*¹⁷

In other words, the time has come for this MEB staff take a hard look at what it needs as opposed to what it likes to have because we simply cannot afford to have a collection of specialists who focus on only thing at a time. We need leaders who thrive in dynamic environments, not pencil-pushing bureaucrats who only know how to make coffee and PowerPoint slides.”

As he continued, BGen Hardcharger started to hear the good-natured “here, here’s,” “it’s about time we cut the fat,” and “I’ll follow this man anywhere,” from his “Young Lions,” and he realized that he was winning over the staff. But this was nothing new; after all, the Corps has been doing more with less for over 243 years, so why stop now?

“Marines in order to accomplish these tasks, I have directed Col Route Step, the MEB G-3, in coordination with LtCol Mike Mercury, the CO of the Communication Battalion, and Col Straight Scoop of the MEF Information Group to implement a training program and that will ensure, within 90 days, the Marines of the EB CE will be able to:

- *Deploy within 12 hours via:*¹⁸
 - One C-12 (key principals, radio data team).
 - Two MV-22Bs (battle staff, two radio data teams).
 - Two KC-130Js (one for the staff, one for the MEB CE communication detachment and information environment coordination cell).^{19 20}
- Exercise C2 of Amphibious Operations aboard:²¹
 - Blue Ridge Class amphibious command ships.
 - All L-Class amphibious assault ships (LHD, LPD, and LSD)
 - A combination of L-Class and/or Military Sealift Command ships
 - High speed vessels
- *Conduct MEB Compositing Operations to include:* the integration of MEUs, SPMAGTFs, allied amphibious forces, or the air contingency MAGTF in a Marine forces or a JTF/CJTF.²²

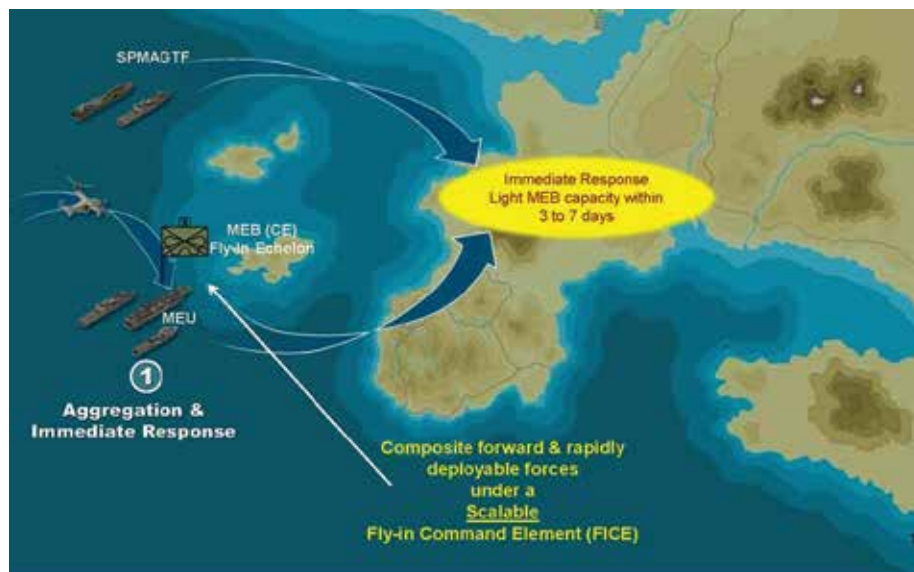


Figure 2. D-Day: MEB CE receives a no-notice alert order, deploys and seizes a port/airfield complex in Country X in preparation for follow-on forces. (Expeditionary Force 21 MEB CONOPS dtd 11 July 2014). (Figure provided by author.)

Conduct mobile/static ground operations to include:²³

- Alert contingency MAGTF (ACM) CE
- Field command group/jump command post
- Alpha/bravo command group
- Under canvas or in a permanent structure”

By this time, the MEB Staff was chiming-in with a rolling barrage of encouraging comments; he knew it was

time to close the deal.

“Marines, you have the mission, the bar has been set high, but I know that we can accomplish the task at hand. Will be it hard? Yes. Will you get frustrated and angry along the way? Yes. But will it be worth it in the end? You’re darned right it will be! So are you with me?”

In unison, 94 voices stood and cheered, “Aye Aye Sir!”



Figure 3. D+10: MEB reinforced by ACM and MPF shipping, expands AOA and begins sustained combat and humanitarian operations. (Expeditionary Force 21 MEB CONOPS dtd 11 July 2014). (Figure provided by author.)

Southeast Asia, Spring 2019

D-Day. In a replay of The Laotian Crisis of 1962²⁴, the MEB received a no-notice alert order to deploy to an expeditionary strike group (ESG) off the coast of Country X: an emerging democracy that was under threat from a nationwide rebel ground offensive. As a result of the CG’s 90-day training package, “The Lean and Mean” MEB CE executed this mission flawlessly and within twelve hours, the MEB battle staff had deployed via a pair of MV-22Bs, landed on the ESG’s LHD, formed a composite MEB²⁵, and began preparations to seize a port and airfield complex with a MEU and SPMAGTF as its maneuver elements. Concurrently, the supporting MEF staff and combatant command was preparing the ACM and follow-on forces for what promised to be the largest amphibious operation in Southeast Asia since FREQUENT WIND in 1975.²⁶ (See Figure 2.)

D+10. After several company-level firefights and one battalion-level air assault, the MEB was successful in seizing the port and airfield complex and established C2 of all of its forces both afloat and ashore. Once this was completed, the ACM was flown-in, increasing the MEB’s GCE to a full regiment which enabled him to expand the amphibious objective area by over 100 percent, including multiple communications, economic, and population centers. As the situation unfolded, it became clear that—in addition to his combat mission—he also faced a potential humanitarian crisis as hundreds of refugees flocked into the amphibious objective area. This required assets from MP-SRON 3 located at Guam. He subsequently submitted the requests and within 72 hours the USNS 1stLt Jack Lummus (T-AK 3011) arrived and the MEB’s CLR²⁷ began to off-load critical supplies and equipment as the MEB transitioned from a light to a medium MEB. (See Figure 3.)

D+25. After extensive negotiations by the United Nations Security Council, the United States was given a mandate to form a multi-national CJTF in support of the flagging Country X government. In a video teleconference with the combatant commander and MEF

commanders, BGen Hardcharger was given the order to establish a CJTF CE and be prepared to accept units from several nations and non-governmental organizations. Fortunately, the MEB staff was ready for this contingency; they reached for their MEB OPORD 201-19 and adapted to the change in mission without missing a beat. Concurrently, the MEB executed several ground and air mobile operations ashore and after an eight-week campaign, decisively defeated the rebels, strengthened the Country X administration, and ushered in a stable, safe environment for their citizens. (See Figure 4.)

D+60. The MEB had successfully accomplished its mission and transferred its CJTF mission to a U.S. Army commander. As he lifted-off from the LHD that had served as his afloat-headquarters for the past 60 days, BGen Hardcharger reflected on that day, just six short months ago, when he told his staff that they would become lean and mean; he was proud to say that they exceeded his expectations.

Epilogue

The story of the MEB is nothing new. In fact, it has been repeated countless times since July 1975, when Gen Louis H. Wilson, the 26th Commandant of the Marine Corps, approved the MAGTF Concept which established six standing, regionally-aligned MABs.²⁸ As our Corps enters the second decade of the 21st Century, it is incumbent upon us, as leaders, to follow BGen Hardcharger's example, learn from those who came before us, and re-establish the MEB as the premier "Fighting MAGTF," capable of successfully conducting operations across the spectrum of conflict because, in combat, there is no substitute for victory.

Notes

1. Dr. Russel H. S. Stolff, *A Bias For Action: The German 7th Panzer Division in France & Russia 1940-1941*, (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Perspectives on Warfighting the Command and Staff College Foundation, 1991). In 1989, a U.S. Marine infantry battalion staff had thirteen officers (one lieutenant colonel, two majors, five captains and five lieutenants); whereas the 7th Panzer Division Staff of 1940-1941 only



Figure 4. D+25: MEB composites with joint/allied units, becomes a CJTF, and prepares to transition C2 to a U.S. Army Commander. (Expeditionary Force 21 MEB CONOPS dtd 11 July 2014). (Figure provided by author.)

had eight Officers (one brigadier general, three majors, and four captains).

2. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCDP 1, Warfighting*, (Washington, DC: June 1997).

3. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCWP 3-40.1, Marine Air-Ground Task Force Command and Control w/Change 1*, (Washington, DC: September 2005).

4. Command Element, 3D Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB), III Marine Expeditionary Force, Unit 35606, Table of Organization dated 19 April 2013.

5. *A Bias for Action*.

6. Command Element, 9th MEB, *9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade Operation Order (OPORD) 201-91*, (Okinawa, JPN: July 1990).

7. Headquarters Marine Corps, *Expeditionary Force 21, Marine Expeditionary Brigade Concept of Operations (CONOPS)*, (Washington, DC: July 2014).

8. Combat Development and Integration.

9. *Expeditionary Force 21*.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Headquarters Marine Corps, *CMC FRAGO 01/2016: Advance to Contact*, (Washington, DC: January 2016).

16. Headquarters Marine Corps, *The Marine Corps Operating Concept How an Expeditionary Force Operates in the 21st Century*, (Washington, DC: September 2016).

17. Ibid.

18. Multitude examples of these type of operations can be found in the Infantry Officer Course, The Basic School MCB Quantico, and Exercises Talon Reach II and Talon Reach III After-Action Reports (AAR) dated 24-25 March 2014 and 29 July 2014; CD&I/Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory, "MCB Quantico Troop Commander Airborne C2 Requirements," (brief, Quantico, VA, April 2014); Headquarters Marine Corps, "Marine Aviation Digital Interoperability Update," (Washington, DC: April 2014); and CO Special Purpose MAGTF-Crisis Response 100 Day AAR for the period of January 2014 to May 2014, dated 12 May 2014.

19. Deputy Commandant, CD&I, and Commanding General, MCCDC, *MAGTF Cyberspace and Electronic Warfare Coordination Cell (CEWCC) Concept*, (Quantico, VA: May 2014).

20. Marine Corps Combat Development Command, *Marine Air Ground Task Force Information Environment Operations Concept of Employment*, (Quantico VA: July 2017).

21. The Fleet Forces Command (FFC), *Bold Alligator 12 (BA-12) AAR*, (May 2012); 2d MEB, *BA-12 AAR*, (April 2013); 2d MEB, *BA-12 Seabasing AAR*, (May 2012); III Marine Expeditionary Force *Exercise 2014 (MEFEX-14)*, the Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned (MCCLL) *Exercise Ssang Yong 2014 (SY-14) AAR (Draft)*, (July 2014); and the CG, 3d MEB *EXERCISE SSANG YONG 2014 AAR*, (May 2014). All provide excellent synopsis of the challenges a MEB CE faces when operating from multiple amphibious platforms.

22. *Expeditionary Force 21*.

23. *9th MEB OPORD 201-91*.

24. Capt Robert H. Whitlow, *The Laotian Crisis, 1962: U.S. Marines in Vietnam; The Advisory & Combat Assistance Era 1954-1964*, (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1977). In 1962, 3d MEB deployed to Udorn, Thailand, as part of Joint Task Force 116, and was in-

strumental in ensuring the territorial integrity of Thailand, during intense fighting between Communist Pathet Lao Guerrillas and the Royal Laotian Army in the Plain of Jars, just outside of Vientiane, Kingdom of Laos. The 3d MEB's presence helped the parties involved to come to a peaceful solution and proved the timeless value of maintaining a forward deployed Marine presence in the Western Pacific.

25. *Expeditionary Force 21*.

26. The *Marine Corps Gazette* published a series of article on FREQUENT WIND including, BGen Richard E. Carey and Maj D.A. Quinlan, "FREQUENT WIND: Organization and Assembly," (Quantico, VA: February 1976); BGen Richard E. Carey and Maj D.A. Quinlan, "FREQUENT WIND Part Two: Planning," (Quantico, VA: March 1976); and BGen Richard E. Carey and Maj D.A. Quinlan, "FREQUENT WIND Conclusion: Execution," (Quantico, VA: April 1976).

27. Combat logistic regiment.

28. David A. Broyles, *Historical MEB Employment*, (Washington, DC: Center of Naval Analysis, August 2013). In 1975, Gen Louis H. Wilson initiated the process to establish six standing Marine Amphibious Brigade (MABs): 1st MAB, Kaneohe Bay HI; 2d MAB and 4th MAB, Camp Lejeune, NC; 5th MAB, Camp Pendleton, CA; 7th MAB, MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, CA; and 9th MAB, Okinawa, Japan. In 1988 the MABs were re-designated as MEBs. This structure remained intact until 1992-1994 when the MEB CEs were "embedded" into the MEF CEs and became "MEF Forward Staffs."

