



MWX 1-20 Summary from CG, 2d MARDIV

When I took command of 2d Marine Division in August of 2018, one of my priorities was to conduct a Division(+) force-on-force exercise against a peer adversary in order to create an environment that would allow me, my subordinate commanders, and the entire Division to test its capabilities in a cauldron that replicated the extreme stress and friction of combat. Working closely with the Commanding General of the Marine Air-Ground Task Force-Training Center at Twentynine Palms, we embarked on preparation and execution of what became MAGTF Warfighting Exercise (MWX) 1-20. The Corps' preeminent venue for a large force-on-force exercise is in the high desert environment of California and was the only base in the Marine Corps large enough to host such an ambitious exercise. My intent was to test the Division in a force-on-force exercise with its current capabilities against a peer threat in a domain disadvantaged environment: a "fight tonight" exercise. From the beginning, my focus was to train and educate the commanders, staffs, and individual Marines and Sailors on how we would fight TODAY against current adversaries. Our focus began developing capabilities and procedures for surviving and winning in a domain disadvantaged environment where we no longer enjoyed air superiority and were challenged across the visible, thermal, IR, and electromagnetic spectrum. This was particularly challenging as we struggled to understand our electromagnetic signature as well as that of our adversary and to develop the tactics, techniques, and procedures required to maneuver, survive, and thrive within these challenged spectrums. Another focus area was to develop smaller, distributed, mobile, and survivable C2 nodes that were rapidly deployable and mobile so that we could move inside the enemy's D3A cycle and continue to command and control despite the adversary's advantage in front line intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance and long-range precision fires capability. In addition, I wanted to stress the Division's organic and direct support logistical capability by deploying a 12,000 personnel force with its associated equipment from eastern North Carolina directly into the fight, sustaining that force, and redeploying it while maintaining a 85 percent materiel readiness rate to ensure we were capable of reacting to any potential real world tasking throughout the entirety of the exercise. Supporting this distributed force in the field while trying to avoid an adversary's sensors and fires as well as simultaneously keeping units combat ready, dealing with significant numbers of casualties with slimmed down forward medical capabilities, and fixing and removing damaged equipment from the battle space all proved challenging. In the end, I wanted to place myself, my subordinate commanders, and staff in a fight where the results of our decisions, in the face of a thinking enemy, were real and not based off of any computer simulation.

When we returned to Camp Lejeune, we began a very deliberate and thorough after-action review (AAR) process. The AAR resulted in refinements to the Division Tactical Standing Operating Procedures and were incorporated into the Division's long-range training plan. Finally, all participants were asked to write articles for the *Marine Corps Gazette* and *Leatherneck* magazine in order to share their experiences with a wider audience in a professional forum. The articles in this month's *Gazette* are the result of this effort. These articles are not perfect; however, it is clear to me that one of the major factors contributing to the success of the Navy and Marine Corps in World War II was the rigor, honesty, and frankness with which they conducted the inter-war Fleet Exercises. The Navy and Marine Corps of 1930 established aggressive free-play exercises and a meticulous AAR process in order to develop, refine, and perfect the operational concepts that led to victory in the war in the Pacific. These articles endeavor to stimulate intellectual discourse as a means to improving the tactical and operational performance of the Service's Ground Combat Element. The Division's execution during MWX 1-20 was far from perfect, but I cannot imagine a better way to truly test a unit. The results far exceeded my expectations and I and the Division are indebted to MAGTF-TC, TTECG, MCLOG, and MCTOG and everyone who supported us and made this invaluable training possible.

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2d Marine Division