

# Task Organizing the GCE

The challenges of “training like you fight”

by Capt Patrick S. Hassett

**M**AGTF Warfighting Exercise (MWX) was executed in MCAGCC Twenty-nine Palms, CA, in November 2019. In the second phase of this exercise, as the 2dMarDiv transitioned to the offense, 1st Bn, 6th Marines (1/6) staged a mechanized task force for a night movement to contact out of the Blacktop Strongpoint. The mission tasked to 1/6 was,

As the main effort for RCT-3, NLT X time, conduct a mechanized counter-attack through Engineer's Pass from the line of departure (Blacktop strongpoint) to Phase Line Green (roughly around the 10 Northing) in order to defeat organized enemy forces in the area.

2d Tank Battalion, reinforced by elements of 2d Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion (LAR), pushed through the strongpoint and conducted a parallel maneuver through the Lead Mountain area. As core of the mechanized task force, Bravo Company, 1/6, was significantly reinforced and task organized with five mechanized rifle platoons (each reinforced with medium machineguns and assault men), two AAV platoons (reduced), a HMMWV-mounted heavy machinegun section, a JLTV-mounted SABRE missile section, a UTV-mounted Javelin missile section, a M1A1 tank platoon, an 81mm mortar section mounted in AAVs, an assault breaching vehicle (ABV) detachment, an electronic warfare support team (EWST), and a direct support (DS) artillery battery. At approximately 2300, the mechanized task force began the 22km night movement to contact to locate and destroy the adversary force. It was about this time that the author re-

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flected on how inopportune the lack of any pre-deployment training integration with LAR, tanks, AAVs, and an EWST detachment truly was. Nevertheless, the mechanized task force stepped off.

## The Problem

It is an unfortunate and preventable circumstance that a typical infantry company in the latter stages of its pre-deployment training would conduct its first execution of mechanized integration, tank integration, assault breaching, and a forward passage of lines with adjacent and higher units during the largest

force-on-force exercise our Service has conducted in over 40 years. 2dMarDiv retains the ability to support integration between infantry battalions and independent battalions to accomplish critical mission essential task (MET) training within the division during home-station training prior to a Service-level training exercise (SLTE).<sup>1</sup> We cannot rely solely on integrated training exercise iterations and future MWX-style events as the primary means of accomplishing essential GCE integration training, as the frequency of these opportunities is insufficient. 2dMarDiv infantry battalions must be trained in this dimension prior to deployment from home station of Camp Lejeune.

To compete in the future operating environment, our *National Security Strategy*,<sup>2</sup> *National Defense Strategy*<sup>3</sup>



**We can not rely on an ITX or MWX as the means to ensure GCE essential training.** (Photo by LCpl Jacqueline Parsons.)

and the 38th Commandants Planning Guidance<sup>4</sup> are clear and unambiguous: our Service must prepare for major combat operations against a peer adversary, such as Russia or China. 2dMarDiv is on the leading edge of this effort. To this end, our Service must continue to fulfill our Title X obligations to train, man, and equip forces, specifically in support of MET requirements.<sup>5</sup> Conventional mechanized ground combat operations against large-scale forces are an essential capability for our Service to provide geographical and joint force commanders. For an infantry battalion in Camp Lejeune, the cornerstone MET is Marine Corps Task 1.6.1, Conduct offensive operations. It is unsatisfactory for one of the most trained and proficient infantry battalions in 2dMarDiv to lack demonstrated proficiency in critical collective training standards which aid to the accomplishment of our METs until execution of a SLTE.

The infantry community is required to utilize the NAVMC 3500.44C, *Infantry Training and Readiness Manual* (T&R Manual) as the doctrinal guide for developing, conducting, and sustaining individual and collective unit proficiency in essential infantry skills and tasks.<sup>6</sup> It is the “fundamental tool for



**Mechanized ground operations are essential for the future warfare environment.** (Photo by LCpl Gadiel Zaragoza.)

proficient execution of these events may be made informally or formally, internal to the unit or externally by an evaluation cadre. The sustainment interval for each of these critical events is twelve months; execution must be assessed and documented within a twelve-month cycle to sustain qualified proficiency. All of these collective training events sup-

port the proficient execution of MET 1- Conduct offensive operations and its defined output standard of defeating a conventional enemy force up to battalion strength in defensive positions [and] across dispersed battlefield.<sup>8</sup>

**Seeking Integration**

Our ground combat element peers want to integrate. Particularly resonant in the AAV community is the acknowledgement of their fundamental purpose of integrating and enabling successful infantry ground and amphibious operations. Unfortunately, independent unit training, exercise, and employment plans (TEEPs) rapidly depict the conflicting nature of this goal. Integration and coordinated employment within the GCE is key as MWX taught all who participated. However, independent GCE battalions within the 2dMarDiv frequently have competing priorities of support to MEU training and deployments, named exercises, and Service-level training exercise participation, higher-level tasking for support to other exercises, as well as internal training to support individual and unit proficiency.<sup>9</sup> The added maintenance burden within these communities cannot be understated. In practice, in order for an infantry battalion to receive support from independent battalions, these units must be tasked to support. This typically originates from an Automated Message Handling System message request for forces or feasibility of support request. Absent tasking from Division to support these requests, the Automated Message Handling System message is typically unfulfilled. Again, our GCE peers do not avoid integration; in practice, competing priorities deny the freedom and flexibility of these units to support home-station integration training.

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commanders to build and maintain unit combat readiness.<sup>7</sup> Our T&R Manual directs infantry companies to conduct a variety of task at the 6000-level, to include INF-MAN-6001 Conduct a ground attack, INF-MAN-6002 Conduct a movement to contact, INF-MAN-6005 Integrate Armor, INF-MAN-6206 Conduct a passage of lines, INF-MAN-6208 Conduct obstacle breaching, and INF-MAN-6301 Participate in an amphibious [mechanized by AAVs] assault, among many other essential tasks. Evaluation of the

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defeating a conventional enemy force up to battalion strength in defensive positions [and] across dispersed battlefield.<sup>8</sup>

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## Solution

The solution to the lack of available integration and training between independent battalions and infantry battalions is simple: optimize existing training methodology to efficiently task and employ independent battalions in support of infantry battalion training execution and assessment. This existing model is the Division's Marine Corps Combat Readiness Evaluation (MCCRE) By *Marine Corps Order 3501.1E Volume 2, Marine Corps Combat Readiness Evaluation*, force commanders are required to formally evaluate subordinate unit core METs through the conduct of a MCCRE to ensure adherence to Service standards and combat readiness.<sup>10</sup> Prior to departure from home station, in accordance with the MCCRE order, all infantry battalions are required to demonstrate successful execution of a unit MCCRE to assist the unit commander in identifying unit strengths and weaknesses relative to the unit METL.<sup>11</sup>

As the Division continues to poise itself for major combat operations against a peer adversary, this evaluative exercise should emulate the Marine Corps training principle of "train like we fight." This exercise is the ideal juncture in a unit life cycle to enable evaluation of major combat operation-centric, conventional force-on-force training with

integration from all aspects of the GCE. Division must prioritize independent battalion integration within this existing MCCRE construct in order to enable deploying battalions to have access to these independent unit capabilities. If infantry battalions were assured available independent battalion support could be prioritized to this exercise, less feasibility of support/request for forces would go unfulfilled at other intervals in the standard pre-deployment training plan. Each deploying battalion could be provided honest capability and proficiency assessments of the aforementioned required T&R Manual standards. Ideally, this evaluation would come prior to a unit's evaluation during a major Service-level training exercise. Further, providing the medium for unit proficiency development at home station prior to participation in a Service-level training exercise will logically contribute to a more proficient unit in general. Further efficiency would be gained by independent battalion's ability to plan for and align forces to support scheduled 2dMarDiv priority exercises on a more regular interval.

## Closing

MWX 1-20 demonstrated the essential nature of our Division's ability to conduct conventional ground combat operations against a peer adversary,

emphasizing mechanized and armored combat operations. In times of fiscal austerity and uncertain future force design, our Division must set conditions for manning, training, and equipping of subordinate units by the most efficient manner.<sup>12</sup> In this case, one of our most scarce resources is the time and ability to proficiently integrate GCE forces. We must prioritize this effort by enabling infantry battalions to access the invaluable resources of tank, amphibious assault, engineer, artillery, and reconnaissance battalions.

## Notes

1. 2d Marine Division, *2d Marine Division Campaign Plan FY19-21*, (Camp Lejeune, NC: 2d Marine Division, January 2019).
2. The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, (Washington, DC: 2017).
3. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2018).
4. Gen David H. Berger, *38th Commandant's Planning Guidance*, (Washington, DC: HQMC, July 2019).
5. U.S. Congress, Title 10 U.S. Code, (Washington, DC: 1926).
6. Headquarters Marine Corps, *NAVMC 3500.44C, Infantry Training and Readiness Manual*, (Washington, DC: November 2016).
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. 2d Marine Division, *2d Marine Division Training, Exercise, and Employment Plan* (Unclass), (Camp Lejeune, NC: 2020).
10. Headquarters Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Order 3501E, Marine Corps Combat Readiness Evaluation*, (Washington, DC: February 2019).
11. Ibid.
12. *2d Marine Division Campaign Plan FY19-21*.



**Our Marines and units can't display lack of proficiency.** (Photo by LCpl Jacqueline Parsons.)