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The Marine Corps Operating Concept (MOC) conforms to operating concepts developed by the Marine Corps in the interwar periods of World War II and the Vietnam War. The 21st century combined arms concept proposed in the MOC, which incorporates cyber and information operations with the traditional aspects of combined arms, is comparable to the innovation of amphibious assaults in World War II and vertical envelopment in the Vietnam War. As the service conducts integration of the concepts presented in the MOC, lessons learned from exercises and experimentation must not be merely reports filed and not read, but reviewed to determine how they might impact changes to doctrine, training, and education.

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The Marine Corps Operating Concept and its Ties to Prominent Interwar Periods

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Executive Summary

Title: The Marine Corps Operating Concept and its Ties to Prominent Interwar Periods

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Thesis: The Marine Corps Operating Concept (MOC) conforms to operating concepts developed by the Marine Corps in the interwar periods of World War II and the Vietnam War. That the 21st century combined arms concept proposed in the MOC, which incorporates cyber and information operations with the traditional aspects of combined arms, is comparable to the innovation of amphibious assaults in World War II and vertical envelopment in the Vietnam War.

Discussion: The Marine Corps remains forward deployed and committed to combat operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication -1* identifies preparing for war as the most important task of any military during times of peace, and although we are not at peace, the Marine Corps is not nearly engaged as it was at the height of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Preparing for the next conflict is the objective of the *Marine Corps Operating Concept (MOC)* published in September, 2016.

Concepts provide a vision for a force to drive its collective efforts to achieve a clearly defined objective, and there are notable examples of influential concepts in Marine Corps history. Prior to World War II, General John A. Lejeune provided his vision for an amphibious assault capable Marine Corps as a solution to the challenges presented in the Pacific by the Japanese and War Plan ORANGE requirements. After World War II, the leadership of the Marine Corps wrestled with how to conduct operations in an atomic armed world and had to determine the role and utility of vertical envelopment in future combat operations. These two interwar periods provide lessons that are critical to navigating the current interwar period.

From these two interwar periods, lessons learned can be analyzed and applied to the recently published *MOC*. Changes in organization, doctrine, leadership, and education were key enablers to the successes observed in World War II and the Vietnam War. The MOC proposes similar changes to adapt to a rapidly evolving environment. By reaffirming the Marine Corp's primacy of maneuver warfare and its 21st century combined arms approach of seeking greater integration of Information Operations and Cyberwarfare into the traditional combined arms approach, the Marine Corps intends to ready to win in any environment in the future.

Conclusion: For the 21st century combined arms concept to become a reality, the Marine Corps must adhere to the successes that facilitated success in World War II and the Vietnam War. Innovation is more than just the incorporation of equipment and technical change in doctrine, tactics technics, and procedures. Innovation in operational concepts can prove to be more important than changes in equipment. The professional military education of the service must exploit both the officer and enlisted schools to encourage continued innovation, as PME was a major player contributor to innovation in previous interwar periods. As the service conducts integration of the concepts presented in the MOC, lessons learned from exercises and experimentation must not be merely reports filed and not read, but reviewed to determine how they might impact changes to doctrine, training, and education.

DISCLAIMER

THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.

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Introduction

The Marine Corps remains committed in supporting combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as being forward postured to support emerging crisis' and contingencies; however, the current period facing the institution represents one comparable to previous interwar periods. Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication -1 (MCDP-1) identifies preparing for war as the most important task of any military during times of peace,¹ and although we are not at peace, the Marine Corps is not nearly engaged as it was at the height of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Preparing for the next conflict is the objective of the Marine Corps Operating Concept (MOC) published in September, 2016. Marine Corps' force planning is concept based, were planning derives from a common set of concepts which describe how Marine Forces will operate and perform assigned tasks.² The intent of this paper is to analyze to what extent the MOC conform to operating concepts developed by the Marine Corps in the interwar periods of World War II and the Vietnam War. The paper contends that the 21st century combined arms concept, which incorporates cyber and information operations with the traditional aspects of combined arms, is comparable to the innovation of amphibious assaults in World War II and vertical envelopment of the Vietnam War.

The Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC) published the MOC to address the future challenges that the service will face and to guide the development and application of Marine Corps capabilities in that future operating environment. Future adversaries have utilized the last 15 years to observe and study how the Marine Corps operates, and will seek to leverage that knowledge as an advantage against the Marine Corps in the physical and cognitive dimensions of combat. The MOC asserts in its problem statement that "currently the Marine Corps is not optimally organized, trained, equipped, and postured to meet the demands of the evolving

operating environment characterized by its complex terrain, technology proliferation, information warfare, battle of signatures, and an increasingly non-permissive maritime domain,” preventing the Marine Corps the ability to adapt at the rate of change required to ensure success in future conflict.³ The MOC seeks to address this central problem by reaffirming the Marine Corp’s primacy of maneuver warfare and its 21st century combined arms approach.⁴

Innovation is natural, a result of a dynamic environment which requires organizations to accept change if they are going to survive. The technologies influencing civilian life in the 21st century may have a greater impact on military force than has been true in the 20th century innovation of armored warfare, amphibious warfare, strategic and tactical bombing, submarine warfare, carrier aviation, and the development of radar.⁵ Concepts provide a vision for a force to drive its collective efforts to achieve a clearly defined objective, and there are notable examples of influential concepts in Marine Corps history. Prior to World War II, General John A. Lejeune provided his vision for an amphibious assault capable Marine Corps as a solution to the challenges presented in the Pacific by the Japanese and War Plan ORANGE requirements. After World War II, the leadership of the Marine Corps wrestled with how to conduct operations in an atomic weapons era and had to determine the role and utility of vertical envelopment in future combat operations. These two interwar periods provide lessons that are critical to navigating the current interwar period.

Pre-World War II Interwar Period

With a review of Plan ORANGE in 1919-1920, the Marine Corps recognized that it could expand its relationship with the Navy and fill a void in the operational plans for the seizure and defense of advanced naval bases. General Lejeune grasped the importance an amphibious assault

specialty could play in Plan ORANGE. He ordered a trusted staff officer, Major Earl H. Ellis, to analyze the requirements of amphibious operations across the central Pacific.⁶ The results of Ellis' study was a set of amphibious plans that called for the seizure of fleet bases, which required assaults across defended beaches in daylight. His plans drove the institution's efforts during the interwar period for training and wartime mobilization planning.

One of the questions that historians ask, is why was the Marine Corps successful in advancing the amphibious assault role and the Japanese and United Kingdom not, when those two nations had conceptual documents, amphibious ships, and landing forces as well. The advantage for the Marine Corps came with the execution of doctrine. While the Japanese had the largest amphibious forces for a time in the 1930's, it deemphasized its amphibious role from 1932 until 1937, once the landing force was ashore in China, and did not resurrect it until 1941. The British demonstrated a capacity to learn and teach amphibious operations, but it did not have serious backing within its military and did not see utility of it in future conflicts. However, by 1933 the U.S. Marine Corps had bet its institutional life on amphibious warfare and invested heavily in the pursuit of improving amphibious assaults through the development of doctrine, experimentation, and materiel acquisitions that represented one of the critical military innovations of the interwar period.⁷

Plan ORANGE also propelled planning at Navy and Army War Colleges for the conduct of amphibious operations in the Pacific; however, the amount of time spent on the subject paled in comparison to the Marine Corps who increased their attention on the subject to account for sixty percent of the total instruction at its schools for captains and majors. Advancement in amphibious operations went from the classroom to practical application with the start of annual Fleet Exercises (FLEX), which incorporated a Marine component as the landing force. The

exercises provided valuable feedback in shortfalls of effective landing craft, fire support, and logistical throughput challenges.⁸

The Marine Corps changed its organizational foundation when Secretary of the Navy Claude Swanson re-designated Marine Corps expeditionary force brigades as the “Fleet Marine Force” in 1933, elevating its importance to the likes of the Battle Force, Scouting Force, Submarine Force, and Base Force. In this capacity, the Marine Corps would fill the role of landing forces as a critical component of the U.S. Fleet and continue testing the Tentative Manual with the Navy.⁹ Although the results of the exercises were encouraging, both the Navy and Marine Corps faced the same funding challenges that the other services did during the interwar period which impacted the availability of amphibious ships, development of landing craft, and the lack of growth in personnel end strength.¹⁰

By 1931, the Marine Corps School in Quantico, VA, devoted itself to writing doctrine resulting in the publication of the *Tentative Manual for Landing Operations* in 1934. The manual represented the most comprehensive and detailed effort to solve the problems involved in amphibious operations and to answer the skeptics who deemed them impossible in the wake of the failures at Gallipoli in 1915.¹¹ The Tentative Manual provided the baseline for future operations in the Pacific.¹² However, the individual Marine was still the linchpin that determined whether the service would be successful in its missions, regardless of emerging technology or new equipment. General Oliver P. Smith is quoted as saying “There is one resource of the Marine Corps that has always been fully developed: the individual Marine. What made a good Marine during the Revolutionary War still makes a good Marine. A competent, loyal, highly motivated Marine is an asset far exceeding in value all the developments of a technology age.”¹³

The effectiveness of amphibious assaults in World War II reflects the Marine Corps making a bold decision in an interwar period to invest all aspects of its service into the application of advancing amphibious operations, from a tactic wrought with doubt, to one that was critical to defeating the Japanese in the Pacific and influencing operations in Europe. The focus on solving the problems of Gallipoli like assaults led to developing doctrine and the Tentative Landing Operations Manual. The Tentative Manual laid the foundation for the Marine Corps to expand its operations with the navy, create a dedicated landing force with the Fleet Marine Force, and test its proposed tactics and techniques prior to war with Japan.¹⁴

Pre-Vietnam War Interwar Period

Prior to the Korean War, the Marine Corps determined a need for the helicopter to support combat operations in the wake of the atomic employment at the end of World War II. The bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima and the subsequent testing after the war indicated that enough damage was done by atomic weapons that it would drastically alter the World War II techniques of amphibious warfare. After World War II, a series of tests occurred at the Bikini Lagoon in the western Marshall Islands to further evaluate the impacts of atomic weapons on operations. During Operation CROSSROADS two atomic bombs, one in the air and one



Picture of atomic tests at Bikini Lagoon during Operation CROSSROADS, 1946.¹⁵

underwater, were detonated amongst a fleet of obsolete warships.¹⁶

The senior Marine official present was Lieutenant General Roy Geiger. His impressions of the test included a recommendation to the Commandant of the Marine Corps that the concept of amphibious operations be reviewed and studied against potential enemies possessing atomic weapons and the assumption that landings like Normandy or Okinawa could not be conducted in the atomic age.¹⁷ The Navy and Marine Corps still believed that amphibious operations could be conducted in the atomic era, but that it would require increased dispersion of the fleet. Since amphibious landings typically required the massing of forces at the lodgment point, this complicated the future of amphibious operations. Studies offered protentional solutions of greater utilization of submarine delivered troops, airborne operations launched from friendly territory and helicopters. The helicopter assault concept would become the focal point of Marine Corps innovation post-World War II.¹⁸

In 1947, the Marine Corps School Academic Board convened a committee, known as the Helicopter Board, to write new doctrine for the use of helicopters. After three months, the board submitted its report, titled “Military Requirements of Helicopter for Ship-to-Shore Movement of Troops and Cargo.” The report detailed the recommendation of aircraft that could carry up to 20 infantrymen to accelerate ship-to-shore movement with the potential of one day replacing traditional surface connectors. In response to the board’s recommendation, the Commandant of



Sikorsky HO3S-1 observation-utility helicopter at Quantico’s air station in May 1948. (USMC Photo #25605)¹⁹

the Marine Corps, General Clifton Cates, activated the HMX-1 experimental helicopter squadron. The CMC tasked HMX-1 in developing tactics and techniques in connection with the movement of assault troops. The squadron also assisted the Marine Corps Schools in developing doctrine covering the employment of helicopters in amphibious operations. Subsequently, once the squadron had sufficient personnel and started to receive its helicopters, it began to support exercises, notably PACKARD II in May, 1948. During the exercise, HMX-1 simulated a ship-to-shore assault of a Regimental Combat Team against a defended beach. The assault was considered entirely successful, with recommendations on continued experimentation and development.²⁰

After PACKARD II, the tentative doctrine for helicopters was revised, and in 1948 a 52-page pamphlet was published titled “Amphibious Operations-Employment of Helicopters

(Tentative),” written by then Colonel Victor Krulak. It was commonly referred to as *Phib-31*, due to it being the 31st in a series of manuals on amphibious operations. The purpose of *Phib-31* was to “explore the various aspects of helicopter employment, discerning the manner in which the characteristics of the vehicles can be best exploited to enhance the effectiveness of the amphibious attack, and providing the basis for a body of doctrine.”²¹ The Marine Corps fully embraced the helicopter and the possibilities of new techniques that it brought to amphibious warfare. Additional advances at HMX-1 and further experimentation were interrupted by the Korean War, where the helicopter was tested under combat conditions. It distinguished itself during the war as it provided aerial observation, movement of supplies and personnel, and casualty evacuations.²²

After the Korean War, additional key concepts and doctrine were developed, as well as the convening of influential boards. Landing Force Bulletin #17, titled *Concept of Future Amphibious Operations*, was published at Headquarters Marine Corps on December 12, 1955, and described the concept of integrating helicopters into amphibious assault operations. The ability of conducting vertical envelopment was characterized by the bulletin “as important an advance in tactical mobility as the nuclear weapon was in firepower.”²³ Recognizing the potential of the helicopter, the Marine Corps began development of a new concept to give the amphibious assaults increased depth, flexibility, speed, and power through the use of helicopters. The “all-helo assault” concept envisioned the ability of an integrated landing force of ground and supporting air components, to project power deep ashore at any point on the world littoral without having to conduct a direct assault on a defended beachhead.²⁴

The all-helo assault concept was estimated to lift an entire Marine Division, it would require the Navy to maintain sixteen helo-carriers or Landing Platform Helicopter ships and that

the Sikorsky aircraft being built would be capable of transporting supporting arms equipment such as 155-mm. howitzers and 6x6 trucks. If vertical envelopment was to remain a viable concept, the ground divisions would have to reduce their lift and sustainment requirements. Major General Robert Hogaboom was appointed to lead the board tasked with examining FMF doctrine and organization and make recommendations on how to make the all-helo assault work. The Board's recommendations led to significant changes to the organization of the Marine Division, which went unchanged for nearly twenty years and were employed during the Vietnam War.²⁵

The concept had skeptics and suspected drawbacks as well. During the time the board met, there was considerable opinion across the Marine Corps that the "all helicopter assault" was mistaken as the "all helicopter concept," relegating traditional surface assaults to seize beachhead's as no longer needed or valid. The Hogaboom Board additionally doubted that the Navy and Marine Corps could ever source the necessary ships and helicopters to launch a division all-helo assault and stressed the need to maintain an amphibious operations capability that could simultaneously execute vertical and surface assaults. It envisioned the role of the helicopter as a means to secure critical objectives and displace assault elements of the landing force from ship to positions ashore to maintain momentum of the assault.²⁶ The board also independently analyzed the probable enemy the Marine Corps would face in the future, and although nuclear war with Russia at that time during the Cold War was the prevailing thought, the board predicted the more likely employment for the Marine Corps was wars and conflicts against communist proxies outside of Europe.²⁷

Naval operations during this period focused on gaining and maintaining sea control, and the seizure of advance bases and beachheads for land operations. Landing Force operations were

required for the seizure of installations and facilities, destruction of enemy bases, and gaining strategic information. Integrating carrier task forces and the Fleet Marine Force provided a “highly flexible and mobile force capable of intervention in any coastal area.”²⁸ The board found these balanced naval task forces ideally suited for expeditions and effective employment in operations short of general war. Although the Navy and Marine Corps desired to increase the ships available to support advancements in amphibious operations and the new concept of vertical envelopment, the amphibious fleet ship building program was severely restricted by austere budgets and increasing costs of technological advances.²⁹

The board’s report examined the advancing complexity of conducting combined arms, describing how original landing force Marines only went ashore with shoulder and hand-held weapons but now they have acquired a considerable array of supporting arms, to include close air support and guided missiles.³⁰ However, the basic function of the Fleet Marine Force as the ground arm of the naval fleet went unchanged, that “Marine forces composed of air and ground elements should be employed as an integrated air-ground task force and not separated into ground units assigned to an Army command and aviation units assigned to an Air Force command.”³¹

The efforts of the numerous boards and Marine Corps leaders to advance the integration of the helicopter into amphibious operations saw the fruits of the labor in action during the Vietnam War. With a growing communist insurgency, the United States Military Assistance Command – Vietnam (MAC-V) was established in 1962 and by the end of the year more than 12,000 U.S. military personnel, advisors, pilots, and support personnel were deployed to South Vietnam. Included in this contingent were 18 Marine Advisors and a Marine Helicopter Task

Group, code named SHUFLY. The SHUFLY detachment flew missions in support of South Vietnamese forces, to include assault support operations and re-supply sorties.³²

These operations advanced many of the tactics, techniques, and procedures developed during the interwar period and were relayed back to squadrons supporting training in anticipation of greater involvement in Vietnam. Exercises also continued to play a major role in the Marine Corps developing concepts and providing opportunities to experiment. Large scale exercises such as SILVER LANCE³³ provided the MEF and the MEBs the ability to rehearse against the backdrop of a Vietnam scenario that featured guerillas, robust aggressor forces, and political-military problems that required a civilian-military integrated response.

With the deployment of 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade in March, 1965 and its expansion to III MAF, Marine Corps helicopter-borne forces provided the commanders in the Vietnam War with greater flexibility and depth on the battlefield. Lieutenant General Keith McCutcheon, one the first Marine Air Wing Commanders of the war and later III Marine Amphibious Force Commanders, stated that “Vietnam was certainly a helicopter war for U.S. Forces. It is difficult to envision how we would have fought there without them.”³⁴ By the end of the first year in Vietnam, III MAF was conducting Battalion sized heliborne operations in STARLITE and HARVEST MOON, and moving 40,000 passengers and 2,000 tons of cargo per month via transport helicopters. The interwar period following World War II again showed the importance of concepts providing a vision for the service to focus its institutional efforts, specifically in organization, education, and through practical application in major exercises.

The Marine Corps Operating Concept

The MOC intends to guide the collective efforts of the Marine Corps to ensure future readiness and relevancy are maintained. The Marine Corps is an integral part of both the Naval force and the Combined/Joint force, and must remain tailorable, flexible, and versatile, and capable of responding to any crisis across the full range of military operations (ROMO). Furthermore, the Marine Corps is an expeditionary, agile, and lethal force that must be proficient with operating in austere and hostile environments as well as the physical and cognitive dimensions of complex situations. Ultimately, the Marine Corps must continue to be a winning force, and the MOC has identified five critical tasks to achieve which will produce the future force that can operate, fight and win in the 21st century.³⁵

The first critical task identified in the MOC addresses the integration of the Naval Force to fight at and from the sea. The Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) provides the Naval Force with the “ability to rapidly deploy, employ and sustain versatile combat power to accomplish a wide range of missions...and we must understand the implications of the Naval functions for organizing, training, and equipping MAGTFs to operate and fight.”³⁶ The Navy and Marine Corps team provide a forward deployed presence, capable of responding across the range of military operations, to afford geographic combatant commanders (GCC) and national command authorities immediate response options. Doing so enables leaders to immediately respond to a crisis, while additional joint and coalition forces are mobilized and capable of deploying. Operating forward with coalition partners additionally aids in building and developing access to regions that facilitate timely and sustainable support to operations.³⁷

The MAGTF will play an increasingly larger role in sea control and power projection by providing forces and capabilities to enhance visit, board, search, and seizure missions and project power ashore to neutralize threats or control terrain in the landward portion of the littorals. The

Navy and Marine Corps will task organize to provide scalable and distributed options to defeat land-based threats, deny enemy use of key maritime or terrain, or establish Expeditionary Advanced Bases (EAB). “The growth of crowded, poorly governed, or lawless areas, particularly in and around the world’s littorals, will confront future commanders with the need to consider complex terrain.”³⁸ For the Naval Force to increase its effectiveness in operations within the littorals, further naval integration is sought to facilitate the ability to “rapidly and flexibly engage threats whether they are based on land, air, surface, subsurface, or originate in the cyberspace and space domains.”³⁹ The Navy and Marine Corps will focus on strengthening naval habitual relationships at the tactical and operational level with the Coast Guard and Special Operations Forces, addressing both the seaward and landward portions of the littorals.⁴⁰

The second critical task from the MOC addresses the need to evolve the MAGTF. The MAGTF construct will remain the “first principle” for force organization; however, future MAGTFs will most likely be composed through a combination of forward-deployed units, rapidly deployable units such as GRF or ACM, and land and maritime preposition forces from either MCPP-N or one of the MPSRON squadrons. Although the MAGTF remains the optimal method for task organization, the Marine Corps “cannot afford its thinking about the MAGTF construct to be static.”⁴¹ The Marine Expeditionary Force remains the most capable MAGTF, conducting operations across the ROMO, as well as being the major force provider for deploying a MEF-forward or a MEB. The MEF must remain prepared to perform large scale forcible entry operations, conduct large scale exercises at the MEF and MEB level against realistic future fights, and facilitate the its’ Command Elements (CE) ability to serve as Combined or Joint Task Force Headquarters.⁴²

The Marine Corps will continue to train and experiment with the other services, nations, governmental agencies, and non-governmental organizations to develop and sustain Combined/Joint capabilities. The Marine Corps will develop common processes essential to effective Combined/Joint operations through wargaming and experimentation at the Service, MARFOR, and MAGTF levels. To support GCC shaping operations, emphasis will be placed on task-organized, general-purpose forces for security cooperation activities to facilitate access, improve regional understanding, liaison with the regional Marine Forces Components (MARFORs), and enhance integration with theater special operations commands. Additionally, all MAGTF operations and exercises will have access to Information Operations capabilities.⁴³

Due to the likelihood of future MAGTFs responding to an unexpected crisis or contingency being composed of a mix of forward deployed forces, rapidly deployable units, and prepositioning forces, the process of compositing the force is challenged by the requirement to establish new MAGTF command arrangements and functional processes (e.g., fires, intelligence, etc.) while integrating into a Naval and/or Combined/Joint force. This challenge is not a new development, examples from Vietnam and more recently with Task Force-58 supporting Operation Enduring Freedom. To ensure a responsive and effective force, the Marine Corps needs to develop common, consistent practices to enable rapid compositing of forces into a single MAGTF or multiple MAGTFs under a single CE. These practices “require formal training, planning and rehearsal mechanisms as an adaptable baseline approach to minimize challenges associated with the compositing of MAGTFs.”⁴⁴ CONUS based and overseas exercises in support of GCCs require prioritization to “drive appropriate Service component and force provider participation in testing potential compositing approaches and solutions.”⁴⁵

Although the MEF remains the Marine Corps' most capable MAGTF, the requirement to train and fight as a distributable force exists due to the proliferation of technologies that facilitate surveillance, information operations, and targeting of forces that mass. *MCDP-1 Warfighting* states, "Military forces will mass to concentrate combat power against the enemy. However, this massing will also make them vulnerable to the effects of enemy fires, and they will find it necessary to disperse."⁴⁶ To conduct maneuver warfare in the 21st century operating environment requires a MAGTF to have agility and mobility to distribute and concentrate as opportunities arise or circumstances dictate. To do so, the Marine Corps must develop the capabilities across all warfighting functions that enable the MAGTF to operate in a distributed posture in a complex non-permissive environment. Additionally, it must "explore the extent to which distributed MAGTF elements will require situational awareness, fires, logistics, communications, and maneuver assets to secure landing sites or maneuver to objectives deep inland."⁴⁷

The third critical task is operating with resilience in a contested network. The world is becoming more connected, with nearly half of the world currently capable of accessing the internet. The reliance on the internet has created a double-edged sword, speed of access to obtain and share information, and the vulnerability of a connected network to share information. There are two challenges to realizing the potential of networking. First, the high bandwidth requirements to share vast amounts of information is strained, requiring commands to prioritize what information is shared at different echelons. Second, no matter how much connectivity is achieved in peacetime, "information ubiquity" is likely going to cease in a war against a peer or near-peer competitor. The MOC contends that resilience will be built from practice throughout the MAGTF of adhering to the tenets of *MCDP-1 Warfighting*, by "decentralized decision

making by leaders who work from commander's intent to rapidly envision and execute maneuver warfare."⁴⁸

The Marine Corps will seek to exploit the advantages of a richly connected network, while simultaneously working to deny the same advantages to its enemy. Advances in technology and networking have created an increase in unit signature as well, which requires commands at all levels to employ strict control measures such as decoys, cover, concealment, and deception to avoid detection by an enemy. The ability to distribute intelligence is critical in supporting maneuver warfare, requiring commands to employ defensive measures to protect the ability to gain and distribute intelligence in the face of sophisticated jamming, hacking, and other threats. Units need to be capable of operating when networks are attacked, degraded, or denied by executing their missions working from an understanding of commander's intent and gaining situational awareness through basic reconnaissance and scouting techniques.⁴⁹

Networking has additionally reduced the kill chain timing required to prosecute indirect fire missions. In future conflicts against peers and near-peers, the enemy will have the capability to leverage its own Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance (ISR) to place long range strikes on Marine Corps positions. It is critical that Marine force retain the ability to act first in conducting counter-fire, defensive or offensive fire missions. To do so, the Marine Corps seeks to link distributed forces to sensors and firing units as well as employ rapidly deployable fire systems that engage immediately while networked. Advances in Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) provide the capability to push sensor capabilities down to the lowest echelons to provide increased awareness and the ability to harness kinetic and non-kinetic fires in support of their operations.⁵⁰

To create a refined Common Operational Picture (COP), and be capable of pushing networked intelligence down to tactical units, the MAGTF must “draw on the full portfolio of U.S. intelligence systems, including space-based assets, to build and maintain an accurate, current, and actionable operational knowledge base.”⁵¹ The goal is to push networked intelligence down to tactical units throughout the MAGTF. The service will seek greater empowerment of the Marine Corps ISR Enterprise (MCISRE) to evolve at the pace of information technology development, leveraging Open Source Intelligence to stunt the reliance on over-classifying intelligence preventing widespread dissemination, and explore expanding information sharing architectures that can exploit advances in machine-aided “tipping” to help construct the COP.⁵²

Unmanned ISR systems can provide actionable intelligence, capitalizing on portable systems is critical to informing the small-unit leader of everything that is occurring in their battlespace. In addition to unmanned ISR platforms serving as sensors, every platform that the Marine Corps operates, to include manned and unmanned aircraft and vehicles, will be examined to determine their viability to serve as a battlefield sensor.⁵³

The fourth critical task is enhancing the Marine Corp’s ability to maneuver. Maneuver warfare remains the principal doctrine of the Marine Corps. It requires action in the physical and cognitive dimensions of conflict and the 21st century MAGTF must be able to maneuver equally well in both dimensions to achieve desired advantages. Naval maneuver involves fighting on and from the sea and projecting and sustaining ready-to-fight combat forces, with littoral maneuver as a critical subset of naval maneuver. At the outset of a campaign, the MAGTF uses the sea and Expeditionary Advance Bases (EABs) as maneuver space to apply power at a time and place of its choosing. Traditional amphibious warships provide the optimal means to conduct littoral

maneuver; however, amphibious class shortfalls will likely prevent the naval service from meeting the GCC operational demands. The shortfall in amphibious platforms will require the Marine Corps to examine alternative methods for achieving littoral maneuver by modifying other vessels for sea-based operations.⁵⁴

Additionally, as the service adjusts to current short term solutions, future acquisitions need to expand beyond the capabilities of current amphibious connectors, vehicles, and aircraft to examine future manned and unmanned systems that “reduce our signatures, allow us to overcome obstacles, extend our reach with boats and surface connectors that operate throughout the depth (rivers, estuaries, bays, extended coastlines) and breadth of the littorals.”⁵⁵ Maritime Prepositioning Force (MPF) capabilities provide support to afloat forces and a range of crisis operations.⁵⁶

As the world continues to become more connected to the internet and access to information via websites and social media, the Marine Corps will have to fight for and with information. This application of information operations is a driving factor in the emergence of the 21st century concept of combined arms, leveraging the space and cyber domains. The portfolio to do so will include information operations (IO) that encompass the integration of: military information support operations (MISO); military deception (MILDEC); operations security (OPSEC); electronic warfare (EW); physical attack; special technical operations (STO); information assurance (IA); computer network operations (CNO); public affairs (PA); and civil-military operations (CMO).⁵⁷

This concept requires that the Marine Corps provide all MAGTFs with an information warfare capability and generate the capacity in subordinate echelons. For units, planners, and individuals to gain proficiency and develop the 21st century combined arms approach, the

service must invest in education, training, exercises, and organizations. The Marine Corps must be able to seize the initiative in the information fight by enhancing its ability to identify and oppose adversary narratives through methods for counter-narrative, competing narratives, and reducing voices contributing to those narratives.⁵⁸

Future conflicts will require Marines to operate on complex terrain, to include mountainous, jungle, arctic, desert, and an urban environment which emphasizes the need to maneuver in the human dimension of conflict. This requires a thorough understanding of the relationships, culture, politics, and objectives of the people and organizations that populate the battlespace. Conducting urban operations is a manpower intensive action, which require the use of manned and unmanned teaming to overcome the challenges of urban terrain. Training and exercises must account for complex terrain and be incorporated into the training design to ensure realistic scenarios are presented to test and evaluate units and Marines. Fires in urban terrain is extremely challenging, precision fire solutions are critical in avoiding civilian casualties and collateral damage while still providing critical support to ground units.⁵⁹

Marine infantry units are comfortable operating from the air, land, or sea but often conduct dismounted actions to destroy the enemy on the objective. Marine Corps infantry is intentionally “platform agnostic” to provide a standard, modular organization with the ability to deploy rapidly. This places a premium on the GCE’s ability to conduct sustained, foot-mobile operations while bearing mission-essential equipment and personal protective gear.⁶⁰

To enable infantry units to maneuver more rapidly and deeply throughout the battlespace the Marine Corps will explore as quickly as possible unmanned sub-surface, ground, and air vehicles across the MAGTF to enhance survivability, increase lethality and reduce manpower

requirements. Also, it will continue to organize and train its maneuver forces as infantry-centric elements that are supported by air and ground mobility and fires systems.⁶¹

A 21st century combined arms team requires a 21st century approach to logistics support. The logistics enterprise should provide expeditionary support and sustainment from greater distances and be capable of supporting distributed units on a widely-dispersed battlefield and reduce the burden that must be carried by the individual Marine. Expeditionary Logistics (EXLOG) will require a maneuver warfare mindset. It must be responsive, agile, and resilient to support and sustain operations on the move in austere environments and frequently on short notice.⁶²

To accomplish this, the Marine Corps will encourage logisticians to increase their consideration for utilization of “outside the MAGTF” support such as Naval, Joint, multi-national, and industry partners. Greater naval integration will also facilitate the ability to rely on a transportation/distribution system that delivers sea-based supplies, particularly Class III and V, to smaller, dispersed units-- reducing the traditional logistics stockpile ashore. EXLOG must develop the capability to rapidly establish and disestablish EABs and support distribution of logistics across a large geographic area and maximize the use of CCMD and Joint sustainment and support capabilities by MARFORs.⁶³

The fifth critical task is exploiting the competence of the individual Marine. An essential ingredient of mission success is the competence of the individual Marine to think and act effectively under chaotic, uncertain, and adverse conditions. This ensures that the Marine Corps can seize the initiative, keep the enemy off balance, and dictate the terms of an engagement. The service will continue to screen for individuals that can demonstrate the physical strength, intestinal fortitude, temperament, and maturity required to lead Marines in combat. However,

given the advances in technology and complexity of the future environment, the qualities of critical thinking and mental dexterity are just as important and require significant repetition in realistic training environments to develop intuitive tacticians.⁶⁴

As the service seeks greater naval integration, it is imperative that all Marines learn what it means to operate as an integrated Naval force capable of fighting on, at, and from the sea and ensure a baseline Naval experience and education for Marines. The service will develop integrated Naval education that includes littoral operations, intelligence preparation, and environmental/pattern of life studies. To aid in education and training, it will look to leverage increased computing power and more powerful simulation tools to increase the number of turns, repetitions, and scenarios in training.⁶⁵

In complex terrain, crowded with multiple adversaries and disparate threats intermixed with populations of various loyalties and motivations, Marines must be able to understand the battlespace with sufficient clarity to identify the points of advantage and disadvantage, and read the human terrain and navigate the social domain. Critical thinking-based approaches, such as negotiating skills and problem-solving methods, are highly valuable in situations where the use of lethal force might be counterproductive to the larger mission. The Marine Corps will review education and training curriculum to ensure its developing Marines with the agility and perspectives to manage uncertainty, think critically, and solve complex problems. Marines must additionally understand the human dynamics of the battlespace and be adept at interacting with and influencing allied and coalition militaries and foreign populations. By ensuring Marines gain and maintain their language, regional expertise, and culture (LREC) capabilities, they will understand that the cultural landscape is as important as understanding enemy capabilities.⁶⁶

All leaders – from junior NCOs to senior officers – will need critical thinking skills to continually assess and navigate complex engagements characterized by blurred boundaries between military and civilian concerns, differing objectives between allies and partners, and the frustrating effects of adaptive adversaries. The 21st century combined arms approach requires the continued emphasis of mission-type orders and commander’s intent to develop unit structures that rely on skilled enlisted operators to assume some of the decisional burden that they are more than capable of handling. The Marine Corps must ensure technology does not undermine a Marine’s “brilliance in the basics.”⁶⁷

Conclusion

The interwar periods of World War I and II, and between World War II and the Vietnam War provide meaningful timeframes that leaders can study to gain insights on how previous generations dealt with the similar complexities that currently challenge the institution. The Marine Corps faces an uncertain fiscal situation that impacts all aspects of preparing for the current and future threat, while the operating environment remains complex and evolving. Operational concepts provide a vision for the service to concentrate its efforts and will be the driving force in preparing for the next conflict, the vision provided within them cannot be undervalued. Boldness and innovation served the Marine Corps well during previous interwar periods, focusing the service towards future challenges while not falling back on preparing for the last war fought. The MOC embraces those same traits, and separates itself from the characteristics that have defined the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The MOC reaffirms the Marine Corps primacy of maneuver warfare and combined arms as the critical components to ensure future successes, and that the development of future

capability and capacities must reinforce that warfighting philosophy to defeat our potential enemies. It rightfully addresses that merely adding new technology, equipment, and personnel are not a silver bullet that will guarantee success on a future battlefield, and that it will be the Marine Corps ability to innovate, adapt, and win that will carry the day.

For the 21st century combined arms concept to become a reality, the Marine Corps must adhere to the successes that facilitated success in World War II and the Vietnam War. Innovation is more than just the incorporation of equipment and technical change in doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures. Innovation in operational concepts can prove to be more important than changes in equipment. The professional military education of the service must exploit both the officer and enlisted schools to encourage continued innovation, as PME was a major player contributor to innovation in previous interwar periods. As the service conducts integration of the concepts presented in the MOC, lessons learned from exercises and experimentation must not be merely reports filed and not read, but reviewed to determine how they might impact changes to doctrine, training, and education.⁶⁸

Recommendations

The MOC has laid out a clear and comprehensive plan in preparing the force for the future conflict that the Marine Corps will face. Within that plan, there is an exhaustive list of tasks that need to be accomplished to ensure success. Prioritization of resources and efforts will be critical in effectively meeting the Commandant's end state. Below are two recommendations on changes that can occur in the near future that do not require the procurement of technology or equipment and will enhance the readiness and capability of the Marine Corps.

As seen in the lead up to landing in March of 1965, large scale exercises such as SILVER LANCE⁶⁹ provided the MEF and the MEBs the ability to rehearse against the backdrop of a Vietnam scenario that featured guerillas, robust aggressor forces, and political-military problems that required a civilian-military integrated response. The MOC addresses the importance of exercises to integrate the 21st century combined arms approach and the need to continue large scale MEF exercises and amphibious ones such as BOLD ALLIGATOR, DAWN BLITZ, and SSANG YONG to refine the appropriate light-heavy equipment mix. As the two interwar periods reviewed have also indicated, exercises are essential in experimenting new concepts.

It is critical that all Marine Force Components redesign their exercise scenarios immediately, striving to incorporate as much of the emerging concepts and capabilities that are identified in the MOC, specifically information operations and cyber warfare due to their importance in advancing the 21st century combined arms concept. Most OCONUS exercises focus on building partner capacity with host nation forces, and consist largely of practicing our abilities within conventional maneuver warfare concepts. Exploiting these exercises to further test the concepts presented in the MOC will provide greater opportunity to experiment with the equipment, technology and the tactics, techniques, and procedures while still maintaining strong relationship with partner nations.

Additionally, Information Operations education and planning needs to be more heavily incorporated into the curriculum of Expeditionary Warfare School, Command and Staff College, and the Marine Corps War College. As pointed out in an article from the *Marine Corps Gazette* from a student in the academic year 2010/2011 class, Command and Staff College students received “three very general overview lessons on Information Operations providing very little planning guidance or information on capabilities for future commanders and staff planners. This

resulted in very substandard Information Operations plans being produced during the OPT exercises.”⁷⁰

Information related capabilities (IRCs) are commonly added to the planning process as a “bolt on” capability instead of a primary planning effort, relegating it to an afterthought. If Information Operations and Cyberspace Operations are going to advance combined arms operations, more investment is required for instruction that educates officers on how to master these concepts and capabilities.⁷¹ During at least one of the major planning exercises at each resident school, the feasibility of including school trained IO planners or instructors into the student OPTs needs to be explored and emphasized. This subject matter expert can significantly enhance the understanding and incorporation of IRCs into the planning process.

¹ Headquarters US Marine Corps, *Warfighting*, MCDP 1 (Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, June 30, 1991), 53.

² *Ibid.*, 53.

³ Commandant of the Marine Corps. *2017 CMC Institutional-Level Task List for Deputy Commandants (DCs) and Commanders*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Marine Corps, 7 February, 2017.

⁴ Headquarters United States Marine Corps. *Marine Corps Operating Concept: How an Expeditionary Force Operates in the 21st Century*. (Washington, DC: 2016), 8. Hereafter referenced as MOC.

⁵ Williamson Murray and Allan Millet, *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1-5.

⁶ Allan R. Millet, “Assault from the Sea,” in *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*, eds. Murray, Williamson and Allan R. Millet, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 72.

⁷ Matthew Bronson, “The Marine Corps Bets on its Institutional Life.” (unpublished manuscript, December 15, 2016), Microsoft Word file.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Robert Heinl, *The U.S. Marine Corps: Author of Modern Amphibious Warfare*. (Baltimore, MD: The Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company, 1991), 187.

¹⁰ Millet, *Assault from the Sea*, 78.

¹¹ Matthew Bronson, “The Marine Corps Bets on its Institutional Life.” (unpublished manuscript, December 15, 2016), Microsoft Word file.

¹² Millet, *Assault from the Sea*, 78.

¹³ Kenneth Clifford. *Progress and Purpose: A Developmental History of the US Marine Corps, 1900-1970*. (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, 1973), 85.

¹⁴ Millet, *Assault from the Sea*. 79.

¹⁵ Atomic Heritage Foundation, “Operation Crossroads-Baker Test”, <http://www.atomicheritage.org/history/operation-crossroads>.

¹⁶ Clifford, *Progress and Purpose*, 71.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 71-72.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

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- ²¹ Ibid., 77.
- ²² Ibid., 83.
- ²³ Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *Landing Force Bulletin: Concept of Future Amphibious Operations, Number 17*. Washington, D.C., 20 Nov 1956, 1.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 2.
- ²⁵ Allan Reed Millet, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 524-525.
- ²⁶ Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *Report of the Fleet Marine Force Organization and Composition Board*, Washington, D.C., 7 Jan 1955, II-14
- ²⁷ Millet, *Semper Fidelis*, 526.
- ²⁸ HQMC, *Report of the Fleet Marine Force Organization and Composition Board*, II-11.
- ²⁹ Ibid., II-10-11.
- ³⁰ Ibid., II-13.
- ³¹ Ibid., II-21.
- ³² Matthew Bronson, "Operation STARLITE." (unpublished manuscript, March 6, 2017), Microsoft Word file.
- ³³ Otto J. Lehrack. *The First Battle: Operation Starlite and the Beginning of the Blood Debt in Vietnam*. (Havertown, PA: Casemate, 2004), 56.
- ³⁴ Clifford, *Progress and Purpose*, 104.
- ³⁵ MOC, 4.
- ³⁶ Ibid., 10.
- ³⁷ Ibid., 10.
- ³⁸ Ibid., 5.
- ³⁹ Ibid., 12.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 12.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 13.
- ⁴² Ibid., 13.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 14.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 14.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 15.
- ⁴⁶ *Warfighting*, 73.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 16.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 17.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 17.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 18.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., 18.
- ⁵² Ibid., 18.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 18.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., 20.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., 20.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 20.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., 20.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., 20-21.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 21.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 22.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., 22-23.
- ⁶² Ibid., 23.
- ⁶³ Ibid., 23.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., 24.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., 24.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid., 26.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid., 26.
- ⁶⁸ Williamson Murray and Allan Millet, *Military Innovation in the Interwar*, 325.
- ⁶⁹ Lehrack. *The First Battle*, 56.
- ⁷⁰ Michael Scott, "Information Operations" Marine Corps Gazette, 96, 12 (Dec 2012); 20.
- ⁷¹ Terron Warton, "Viral Conflict: Proposing the Information Warfighting Function," *Small Wars Journal*, March 17, 2017. <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/viral-conflict-proposing-the-information-warfighting-function>

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