

A Rebuttal to The 2010 Marine Corps Operating Concept
A Monograph

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ABSTRACT

A REBUTTAL TO THE 2010 MARINE CORPS OPERATING CONCEPT, by Major Robert G. McCarthy III, 57 pages.

The *2010 Marine Corps Operating Concept (MOC) Assuring Littoral Access... Winning Small Wars* makes the assertion that conventional forces designed, trained, and equipped for major combat operations against a peer competitor would not be equally adept at operations to counter insurgents, guerilla forces, and other irregular threats. The *MOC* states that the Marine Corps should shift more toward to what Rudyard Kipling called “the savage wars of peace.” The *MOC* calls for a break in the focus on combined arms maneuver of mechanized forces that had predominated since the Vietnam War and provides guidance for the preparation of what it believes will be the most likely form of combat – irregular warfare.

This shift in focus has the potential to jeopardize the Marine Corps’ ability to field a force capable of responding across the range of military operations. This topic is significant because it reverses an approach adopted over the last one hundred years that has aimed to field a balanced combined arms team. The *MOC’s* assertions caused this author to ask the following questions: Is the *MOC* right? Are Marine Corps forces designed, trained, and equipped for major combat operations against a peer competitor unable to conduct operations to counter insurgents, guerilla forces, and other irregular threats?

This monograph conducted a chronological review of Marine Corps operations from 1918-1945 and from 1946-1993 in order to test the *MOC’s* assertions that, (1) Conventional forces designed, trained, and equipped for major combat operations would not be equally adept at operations to counter insurgents, guerilla forces, and other irregular threats; (2) Since small wars are the more frequent form of warfare, the Marine Corps should focus on their conduct.

This monograph has concluded that since the battle at Belleau Wood in 1918, the Marine Corps has organized, trained, and equipped as a combined arms force in preparation for the conduct of high intensity combined arms battle. This approach, coupled with the creative, flexible, and versatile mindset of Marine leaders, has enabled the Marine Corps to succeed in both traditional and irregular warfare.

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ACRONYMS

AEF	American Expeditionary Force
CMC	Commandant of the Marine Corps
MOC	Marine Operating Concept
IW	Irregular Warfare
CAP	Combined Action Program
MAGTF	Marine Air Ground Task Force
NSS	National Security Strategy
FMF	Fleet Marine Force
FLEX	Fleet Landing Exercises
FSCC	Fire Support Coordination Center
MARFORPAC	Marine Forces Pacific
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
MEU	Marine Expeditionary Unit
MEB	Marine Expeditionary Brigade
MEF	Marine Expeditionary Force
MAG	Marine Air Group
MAF	Marine Amphibious Force
MACV	Military Assistance Command Vietnam
FMFPAC	Fleet Marine Force Pacific
DMZ	Demilitarized Zone
UN	United Nations
CENTCOM	Central Command
JTF	Joint Task Force
SEAL	Sea Air Land
UNITAF	Unified Task Force
MCDP	Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication

INTRODUCTION

The 2nd American Division, American Expeditionary Force (AEF) under the command of Major General John A. Lejeune steamed into New York harbor in August 1919 to the open arms and admiration of a proud Nation. The Great War was over. Lejeune had requested permission from the War Department for the 2nd Division to parade the streets of New York upon their return. On August 9th 1919, 25,000 fighting men marched through the streets of New York to the cheers of hundreds of thousands of proud Americans.¹ As Lejeune assumed his position in the reviewing stand, he glistened with pride as the division smartly passed by. He captured the spirit of the moment in a message to the men of the 2nd Division: “You have given yourselves completely to the patriotic duty of defending your country’s honor...I believe, too, that our appreciation of our country, and our admiration for its people and its institutions, have grown greatly during our sojourn in Germany.”² Lejeune’s request to parade the 2nd Division through the streets of New York indicated an intuitive understanding of the importance of a healthy relationship between a military and its people. As Commandant of the Marine Corps, Lejeune would make the relationship between the Corps and the American people one of his top priorities.³

The Great War had forced the United States to train and equip a large land army specifically designed for combat on the European continent. It was a formative experience for two generations of military officers. For Lejeune and the men of the Fourth and Fifth Marine Brigades, the Great War marked the birth of the modern day Marine Corps.⁴ The battles of

¹ John A. Lejeune, *The Reminiscences of a Marine* (Philadelphia: Dorrance and Company Publishers, 1930), 458. Hereafter referenced as Lejeune, *Reminiscences of a Marine*.

² Lejeune, *Reminiscences of a Marine*, 449.

³ Lejeune, *Reminiscences of a Marine*, 465.

⁴ Alan Axelrod’s *Miracle at Belleau Wood* and Edwin H. Simmons and Joseph H. Alexander’s

Belleau Wood, Soissons, and Mont Blanc “marked an important watershed in a century-long search for military respectability and public approval.”⁵ For the first time in its history, the “Marine Corps” became a household name and was associated with the highest standards of military efficiency.⁶ Ten months later, Lejeune would again be connecting the military with its people. However, this time would be under entirely different circumstances.

Lejeune assumed the duties of the Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC) on June 30th 1920.⁷ One of his first acts as Commandant was to address allegations made by a New York publication called *The Nation*. *The Nation* had reported on the brutality and harshness of the way Marine officers were running U.S. operations in Haiti⁸ and the Dominican Republic.⁹ The result was a Congressional investigation that sought to address the following findings: “The court finds that two unjustifiable homicides have been committed one each by two of the personnel of the United States naval service which has served in Haiti since 28 July 1915 and that 16 other serious

Through the Wheat: U.S. Marines in World War I give contemporary accounts of the significance of the Marine Corps’ actions in World War I, specifically the battle of Belleau Wood. Axelrod and Simmons both capture the fighting spirit of the Marines as they transition from their traditional role of “ships guards” to a modern force capable of waging industrial warfare.

⁵ Allan R. Millet, *Semper Fidelis, The History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, Inc., 1980), 317. Hereafter referred to as Millet, *Semper Fidelis*.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 317.

⁷ Lejeune, *Reminiscences of a Marine*, 460. John A. Lejeune would serve as the Marine Corps’ Thirteenth Commandant from 1920-1929. He is largely credited as a combat leader, scholar, thinker, educator, and innovator who formed the foundations of the modern day air-ground Marine Amphibious Force. Lejeune, *Reminiscences of a Marine*, Preface.

⁸ United States operations in Haiti and the Dominican Republic between 1915 and 1934 were the result of an interventionist foreign policy adopted by U.S. Presidential Administrations. The term “Banana Wars” was used by U.S. Marines, who had become the preferred executor of this policy, to cynically define the series of military interventions in the Caribbean and Latin America between 1901 and 1934 – primarily actions in Nicaragua (1912-1913 and 1926-1933); Haiti (1915-1934); and the Dominican Republic (1916-1924). J. Robert Moskin, *The U.S. Marine Corps Story, Third Edition* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992), 149.

⁹ Lester D. Langley, *The Banana Wars, United States Intervention in the Caribbean 1898-1934*, (Chicago: The Dorsey Press, 1983), 164. Hereafter referenced as Langley, *The Banana Wars*.

acts of violence have been perpetrated against citizens of Haiti during the same period by individuals of such personnel.¹⁰ In addition to the Senate investigation, Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels formed a Naval Court of Inquiry under the leadership of Rear Admiral Henry Mayo.¹¹ The Mayo-court “noted almost twenty instances of specific acts of unjustifiable violence against Haitians by American military personnel.”¹² Two separate official investigations had put the “marine style of rule” under scrutiny. However, “the court could not reasonably decide what, generally, constituted a campaign of atrocity in war and that in each case, the court declared, the perpetrator was punished.”¹³

The Marine Corps had escaped a public relations disaster, but the effects of the Haitian affair did not go unnoticed by Lejeune. He commented in his memoirs, “As an American I felt intense pride in our men. They had served their country with fidelity, with energy, and with courage, but no laurels bedecked their brows, and no crowds shouted peans of praise in their honor when they returned home.”¹⁴

The brief accounts of these two distinctive experiences during the first quarter of the 20th Century ended with very different results. One ended with the Marines parading through the streets of New York, while the other, ended in a senatorial investigation. Both of the experiences, large industrial wars and small interventionist wars, were forming dominate perspectives of warfare for a majority of Marines in the early 20th Century. The experiences of this era are

¹⁰ United States Congress. Senate. Hearings Before a Select Committee on Haiti and Santo Domingo, *Inquiry Into Occupation and Administration of Haiti and Santo Domingo*. 67th Congress., First and Second Session. 1922. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), 434. Accessed <http://book.google.com> 5 March 2010.

¹¹ Langlely, *The Banana Wars*, 164. Lejeune, *Reminiscences of a Marine*, 460.

¹² Langlely, *The Banana Wars*, 164.

¹³ Langlely, *The Banana Wars*, 164.

¹⁴ Lejeune, *Reminiscences of a Marine*, 468.

enjoying a revival in today's military literature, specifically the *2010 Marine Corps Operating Concept, Third Edition (MOC)*.

The *MOC* provides Marines with an overarching operating concept designed to guide the development and application of Marine Corps capabilities to the future operating environment.¹⁵ The *MOC* develops its approach from an intimate understanding of the Marine Corps' unique history and perspective to develop and maintain a broad range of critical capabilities necessary to fulfill its fundamental role in implementing national security policy.¹⁶ Central to the Marine Corps' approach to warfare is its ability to adjust its mindset to effectively deal with a blurred and rapidly shifting operational environment; a trait most recently displayed in Al Anbar Province.¹⁷ Lieutenant General George J. Flynn, former Deputy Commandant for Combat Development and Integration, challenged all Marines to read the *MOC* critically, in order to discuss, dissect, challenge, and analyze its content. This monograph is an attempt to answer the General's challenge.

In Chapter 7, *Countering Irregular Threats*, the *MOC* makes two problematic assertions that lead it to conclude the Marine Corps should "shift more toward to what Rudyard Kipling called "the savage wars of peace."¹⁸ Its first assertion points out the "fallacy in the view that forces designed, trained and equipped for major combat operations against a peer contributor would be equally adept at operations to counter insurgents, guerilla forces, and other irregular threats."¹⁹ This statement has two critical contradictions. First, the *MOC* contradicts its opening

¹⁵ G3/G5 Division Marine Corps Combat Development Command, *2010 Marine Corps Operating Concept, Third Edition* (Quantico, Virginia: 2010), 1-3. Hereafter referenced as *MOC*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

claim that successful operations in Al Anbar Province were the result of the Marine Corps' largely conventional force.²⁰ Second, the Marine Corps has fought with a conventional task organization, doctrine, and training over the last hundred years with relatively good success. Is the *MOC* suggesting that the Marine Corps' task organization and culturally unique understanding of warfare are incapable of adjusting to the complexities of today's irregular threats?

The *MOC*'s second assertion is that since small wars are the more frequent form of warfare, the Marine Corps should focus on their conduct.²¹ This assertion comes from the *MOC*'s historical analysis of the predominant form of warfare in the Twentieth Century. The *MOC* highlights assessments from Robert Asprey and Bernard Fall who cited 48 small wars from the first 65 years of the 20th Century.²² It states that the most frequent form of warfare conducted over the last one hundred years by the United States is classified as "irregular."²³ The *MOC* contends that the problem lies in the incompatibility of a "U.S. military predominantly organized, trained, and equipped to fight a traditional enemy"²⁴ with the opinion that "irregular" belligerents are the

²⁰ *MOC*, 1. *Joint Publication 1-02*, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms dated 8 November 2010 (As amended through 15 August 2012) defines conventional forces as those forces capable of conducting operations using non-nuclear weapons. 2. Those forces other than designated special operations forces.

²¹ *MOC*, 111-112.

²² *MOC*, 111.

²³ This monograph will adopt the joint definition for irregular warfare (IW) found in *Joint Publication 1-02*, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms dated 8 November 2010 (As Amended Through 15 August 2012). Irregular warfare is defined as a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s). Irregular warfare favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capacities, in order to erode an adversary's power, influence, and will.

²⁴ Department of Defense, *Directive 3000.07, Irregular Warfare* (Washington D.C.: 2008), 11. Because *Joint Publication 1-02* does not define traditional warfare, this monograph will adopt Department of Defense *Directive 3000.07*'s definition of traditional warfare: A form of warfare between the regulated militaries of states, or alliances of states, in which the objective is to defeat an adversary's armed forces, destroy an adversary's war-making capacity, or seize or retain territory in order to force a change in an

ones most likely to be found in the operating environment.²⁵ The *MOC* contends that this logic should lead the Marine Corps to adjust its organization, training, and doctrine to be able to counter the more likely threat. However, does this allow the Marine Corps to continue to operate throughout the range of military operations, specifically the ability to conduct high-intensity combined arms combat operations?

The *MOC* concludes, “the changing security environment has resulted in a resurgence of interest in the lessons learned during those hard years (1920s) of small war campaigning.”²⁶ And “given the Commandant’s guidance, that irregular wars will characterize the foreseeable future...an extensive capability analysis must be considered.”²⁷ Does the *MOC* draw the right conclusions from its historical analysis of the Marine Corps’ conduct of warfare since the 1920s? Why did Lejeune essentially reject the idea of attaching the existence of the Marine Corps to the conduct of small wars²⁸ during the inter-war period?

adversary’s government or policies. *Directive 3000.07* marked an important step in the DOD’s attempt to draw attention to irregular warfare. Largely because of the actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, the directive recognized that IW is as strategically important as traditional warfare. Many of the capabilities and skills required for IW are applicable to traditional warfare, but their role in IW can be proportionally greater than in traditional warfare.

²⁵ *MOC*, 112.

²⁶ *MOC*, 129.

²⁷ *MOC*, 129.

²⁸ Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, *Small Wars Manual* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1940), 1-1. Hereafter referenced as *Small Wars Manual*, 1940. The *Small Wars Manual* defines small wars as “operations undertaken under executive authority, wherein military force is combined with diplomatic pressure in the internal or external affairs of another state whose government is unstable, inadequate, or unsatisfactory for the preservation of life and or such interests as are determined by the foreign policy of our Nation.” In Marine lexicon, Small Wars is synonymous with irregular warfare. The *MOC* refers to Small Wars as complex problems in which purely military solutions will not suffice – because the fundamental causes of the conflict are often a complicated combination of security, economic, political and social issues, *MOC.*, 1. To stay consistent with Marine Corps terminology, this monograph will apply the term Small Wars when referring to situations described above.

Interestingly, the *MOC's* position resurrects an old debate within the Marine Corps. In June 1916, Major John H. Russell published his landmark article "A Plea For A Mission And Doctrine" in the *Marine Corps Gazette*. Russell argued that any organization must be trained and equipped to fulfill its general or primary mission.²⁹ Russell believed the "general mission" of the Marine Corps was to co-operate with the Navy, in Peace and War, to the end that in the event of a war the Marine Corps could be of greatest value to the Navy.³⁰ It was during peace, that Russell urged the Marine Corps to rigorously debate its primary role and mission. He acknowledged the challenge of establishing a common understanding of the "General Mission" of the Marine Corps in the early 1900s when he asked, "How many officers of the Marine Corps, if interrogated separately, would give the same answer as to the primary mission of the Marine Corps?"³¹

Each officer's perspective on the purpose and mission of the Marine Corps was tied to individual experiences. Russell warned Marines of the corrosive effects of this unwanted characteristic – "In performing its "Task" the Marine Corps will, naturally, have many "Special Missions" presented to it, in fact in years of Peace, they are apt to become so numerous that the impression is likely to prevail that such subsidiary work is not at all subsidiary but is, in reality, the Masters Work of the Marine Corps."³² He continued, "Such an impression is worse than misleading, it is dangerously false, and if allowed to permeate the service would result in its failure to properly prepare itself for the real issue and cause it to fight at an enormous and perhaps decisive disadvantage."³³ Russell's message was clear. The Marine Corps was in need of a

²⁹John H. Russell, Major U.S.M.C., "A Plea For A Mission And Doctrine," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (June 1916): 112. Hereafter referenced as Russell, "A Plea For A Mission And Doctrine."

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 112.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

³² *Ibid.*, 112.

³³ *Ibid.*, 112.

“General Mission;” a purpose from which the organization was created.³⁴ Has the last ten years of war been a “special mission” for the Marine Corps? Has it clouded the Marine Corps’ understanding of its “general mission?”

The purpose of this monograph is to examine the *MOC’s* assertion that, (1) Conventional forces designed, trained, and equipped for major combat operations would not be equally adept at operations to counter insurgents, guerilla forces, and other irregular threats;³⁵ (2) Since small wars are the more frequent form of warfare, the Marine Corps should focus on their conduct.³⁶ To test these assertions, this study will conduct a chronological review of Marine Corps operations from 1918-1945 and from 1945-1993. This study contends that the Marine Corps has three dominate experiences that have shaped its position in the conduct of national defense. Its first experience is in service with the naval fleet. Its second, as adjunct to the army. And its third experience is as a small wars force. Each of these experiences has contributed to the development of the Marine Corps’ approach to warfare and has influenced how Marines understand the role of the Marine Corps in national defense. This study will attempt to dissect the historical narratives of each of those experiences in order to gain clarity regarding the two assertions made by the *MOC*.

This is an extremely relevant topic as the Marine Corps transitions from operations in Afghanistan, builds its capacity in the Pacific, and trains and equips a force during a period of fiscal austerity. If the Marine Corps creates an unbalanced force in an attempt to develop niche capabilities, it runs the risk of jeopardizing its most cherished role in national defense, “the Nation’s expeditionary force in readiness.”³⁷

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

³⁵ *MOC*, 109.

³⁶ *MOC*, 111-112.

³⁷ Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis, The History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, Inc., 1980), 500. Hereafter referred to as Millett, *Semper Fidelis*.

The first period under review is titled “Building the Modern Day Marine Corps” and will cover from 1918 to 1945. It will focus on the Corps’ approach to combat in World War I, the actions of the 2nd Marine Brigade in Nicaragua 1926-1933, and the development and validation of the amphibious assault doctrine that guided the Marine Corps across the Pacific in World War II. What is particularly interesting about this period is the simultaneous development of the amphibious assault doctrine while waging small wars in the Caribbean and Latin America. The era produced two key documents - the *Tentative Manual Landing Operations* and the *Small Wars Manual*. Both documents have been instrumental in forming the Marine Corps’ approach to warfare. Their influence can still be felt today.

The second period under review is titled “Evolving and Formalizing the Modern Day Marine Corps” and will cover from 1946-1993. It will focus on the Marine Corps’ struggle to formalize its institutions in the post-World War II era, while simultaneously fulfilling its newfound role as the Nation’s expeditionary force-in-readiness. It will cover the actions of the Marine Corps to deploy the 1st Marine Brigade to Korea, the diversified approach executed by the III Marine Amphibious Force in Vietnam, and the ability of the I Marine Expeditionary Force to form Joint Task Force Somalia and execute Operation Restore Hope. This period witnessed the evolution of the Marine Corps from a relatively minor force in the conduct of National defense to the cornerstone of expeditionary capabilities able to respond to a variety of contingencies.

The research for this monograph has focused on the analysis and synthesis of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources consist of government documents such as the *2010 Marine Corp Operating Concept, Third Edition* and Department of Defense *Directive 3000.07*, which have provided official guidance to the Marine Corps and the Joint Force respectively to develop the capability to counter emerging threats. This study has also relied heavily on the *Marine Corps Gazette* archives section to document first-hand accounts of the events discussed within the two case studies. Secondary sources such as Allan Millett’s, *Semper Fidelis, The History of the*

United States Marine Corps and numerous articles and books on regular, irregular, and hybrid warfare, have provided this study with a better understanding of the challenges facing Marines in the conduct of war. Official military doctrinal manuals such as the *Landing Operations Doctrine, F.T.P 167* (1938), *Tentative Landing Operations Manual* (1935), and the *Small Wars Manual* (1940) have also provided excellent sources that illustrate the evolution of institutional approaches to the execution of war.

BUILDING THE MODERN DAY MARINE CORPS 1918-1945

The actions of the 4th Marine Brigade in The Great War marked a turning point in Marine Corps history. On June 6 1918, “a brigade of seagoing light infantry left behind fourteen decades of small-scale skirmishes with insurgents, pirates, and light infantry regiments and entered the industrialized world of massive firepower and wholesale slaughter.”³⁸ The three-week struggle for Belleau Wood ranks as one of the greatest battles in Marine Corps history, “a touchstone that compares with Iwo Jima in 1945 and the Chosin Reservoir in 1950.”³⁹ Costly mistakes in the challenges of waging modern warfare combined with the well-prepared German positions ensured that the Marine Corps’ introduction to large-scale modern warfare would come at a cost. However, “the Marines’ stubborn pride and affinity for close combat...helped them prevail over a veteran foe, surprising the Germans and bolstering the flagging morale of the French at a crucial moment in the war.”⁴⁰

Ninety years later Marines still identify with the 4th Marine Brigade’s skill, heroism, and triumphs at Belleau Wood. The battle marked the Corps’ entry into a new domain of warfare –

³⁸ Edwin H. Simmons and Joseph H. Alexander, *Through The Wheat: The U.S. Marines in World War I* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008.), 100. Hereafter referenced as Simmons, *Through the Wheat*.

³⁹ Simmons, *Through The Wheat*, 100.

⁴⁰ Simmons, *Through The Wheat*, 100.

high intensity combined arms combat. The experience in World War I highlighted two characteristics of the modern day Marine Corps that would enable it to move from one form of combat to another. Its emphasis on the selection and training of the individual, coupled with an innovative application of technology provided the Marine Corps with a flexible and adaptive force. However, the Marine Corps' role in France also fueled the unresolved pre-war debate raging within the Marine Corps regarding its primary mission. There were three dominate perspectives regarding the role of the Marine Corps as it emerged from World War I.⁴¹

The first group, led by Major General Logan Feland, had seen the Corps' experience in France as a land force serving as an adjunct to the Army and believed this was the area where the Marine Corps should direct the bulk of its war readiness efforts.⁴² The second group, headed by Major General Smedley D. Butler and Lieutenant Colonel Harold H. Utley, saw the Marine Corps as the country's premier "small wars" force-in-readiness.⁴³ The final group, headed by Lejeune and John H. Russell, saw the primary mission of the Marine Corps in service with the Fleet.⁴⁴ Ironically, the Corps was all of these things. Each of these positions carried a unique perspective on the conduct of warfare that contributed to the Marine Corps' identity.

Service as an Adjunct to the Army

On April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson appeared before packed chambers of Congress to ask for a declaration of war against Germany.⁴⁵ For Major General George Barnett,

⁴¹ Leo J. Daugherty III, *Pioneers of Amphibious Warfare, 1898-1945* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2009), 225. Hereafter referenced as Daugherty, *Pioneers of Amphibious Warfare*.

⁴² Daugherty, *Pioneers of Amphibious Warfare*, 225.

⁴³ Daugherty, *Pioneers of Amphibious Warfare*, 225.

⁴⁴ Lejeune, *Reminiscences of a Marine*, 465. Russell, "A Plea For A Mission And Doctrine," 112.

⁴⁵ George C. Herring, *From Colony To Superpower, U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (New

the Commandant of the Marine Corps, the declaration of war presented an opportunity for the Marines. Barnett, like Lejeune and Russell, saw the existence of the Marine Corps linked to the Navy, but he also had an unerring instinct for the battle.⁴⁶ Barnett had the foresight to send a detachment of Marine officers to France in 1915 to study the nature of the European conflict while simultaneously developing an efficient training system capable of absorbing the expected increase in personnel.⁴⁷ Barnett sensed that in order for the Marine Corps to remain relevant and needed, it was going to have to field a force large enough to make a significant impact to the war effort.

Through Barnett's political maneuvering and over the objections of the War Department and the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) Commanding General, John Pershing, the Marine Corps was able to field a brigade of Marines and the 1st Marine Aviation Force for operations in Europe.⁴⁸ On June 14, 1917, the Fifth Regiment of Marines, consisting of 70 officers and 2,689 enlisted men, approximately one-sixth of the enlisted strength of the Marine Corps, competently organized and ready for active service, sailed on the *Henderson*, *De Kalb*, and *Hancock* from the United States, forming one-fifth of the first expedition of American troops for service in France.⁴⁹

The ability of the Marine Corps to field the 4th Marine Brigade in such a rapid manner comes largely from the implementation of a mandatory three-month recruit training program in

York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 410. Hereafter referenced as Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*.

⁴⁶Victor H. Krulak, *First to Fight, An Insider View of the U.S. Marine Corps* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1984), 4. Hereafter referenced as Krulak, *First to Fight*.

⁴⁷Edwin N. McClellan, *The United States Marine Corps in the World War* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1968 reprint of the 1920 edition), 25-28. Hereafter referenced as McClellan, *The United States Marine Corps in the World War*.

⁴⁸Krulak, *First to Fight*, 4.

⁴⁹McClellan, *The United States Marine Corps in the World War*, 9.

1910.⁵⁰ Parris Island, South Carolina, Mare Islands, California, and Quantico, Virginia became the major points of Marine Corps recruit training and proved critical in its ability to field an effective force.⁵¹ Despite a five-fold increase in personnel from 13,725 in 1917 to over 75,000 in 1918, the Marine Corps remained focused on the development of the individual Marine.⁵²

In 1917, the Marine Corps' approach to training appeared a bit crude in the age of modern weapons and large combat units. Recruit training at Parris Island was originally a fourteen-week course, but during the war, it was compressed into just eight hellish weeks.⁵³ The core of the training was built around discipline, physical conditioning, and marksmanship.⁵⁴ Major W.R. Coyle captured the focus of recruit training in his 1925 *Marine Corps Gazette* article, "In the first three weeks they acquired remarkable precision in close order drill, how to use their bayonet, to scale a nine-foot wall and climb a thirty-foot rope, they learned to swim and to keep themselves clean."⁵⁵ Over the next two weeks, "they perfected their drill, learned interior guard and extended orders, and learned something of boxing and wrestling."⁵⁶ The last three of the eight-week course were dedicated to mastering the M1903 Springfield Rifle. Long-range rifle

⁵⁰ Millett, *Semper Fi*, 276.

⁵¹ Lejeune, *Reminiscences of a Marine*, 235.

⁵² Kenneth J. Clifford, *Progress and Purpose: A Developmental History of the United States Marine Corps 1900-1970* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 1973), 22. Hereafter referenced as Clifford, *Progress and Purpose*.

⁵³ Alan Axelrod, *Miracle at Belleau Wood, The Birth of the Modern U.S. Marine Corps* (Guilford: The Lyons Press, 2010), 16. Hereafter referenced as Axelrod, *Miracle at Belleau Wood*.

⁵⁴ Elmore A. Champie, *A Brief History of Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, South Carolina 1891-1962* (Washington, D.C.: Historical Branch, G-3 Division Headquarters, Revised 1962), 2-5.

⁵⁵ W.R. Coyle, "Parris Island In The War," *Marine Corps Gazette* Vol. 10, No. 3 (December, 1925), 190. Hereafter referenced as Coyle, "Parris Island In The War."

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 190.

accuracy had improved dramatically when the hard-hitting, Mauser-type, caliber .30-06 Springfield M1903 bolt-action rifle began replacing the Krag-Jorgensen in 1906.⁵⁷ The Drill Instructors (DI) ensured every Marine could field strip and reassemble their rifle blindfolded – and the marksmanship instructors made sure that each Marine knew how to fire it such that every round counted.⁵⁸ A tough recruit training program was a critical requirement for the Marine Corps to sustain its reputation as an elite organization.

Marine recruiters worked hard to preserve the elite status of the Marine Corps in late 1916. Of the 239,274 who applied during the course of the war, just 60,189 were accepted as Marines.⁵⁹ Of those sixty thousand, large percentages were college-men and athletes. They were truly a “few good men” attracted to the challenges and opportunities offered by the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps’ emphasis on training, discipline, marksmanship, leadership, and esprit would not only distinguish the characteristics of the Marine Brigade, but more importantly also enable the Marines to adapt to the nature of the conflict.

Running concurrently to the Marine Corps’ efforts to produce the finest individual fighting man, was an effort to integrate the tools of warfare emerging from industry, specifically the “aeroplane.” When the United States declared war against the Central Powers on 6 April 1917, the Marine Corps’ aviation component consisted of 4 officers and 30 men.⁶⁰ These Marines aimed to build a first class aviation force to support Marine Corps operations.⁶¹ Every effort was

⁵⁷ Simmons, *Through the Wheat*, 24.

⁵⁸ Axelrod, *Miracle at Belleau Wood*, 16.

⁵⁹ Axelrod, *Miracle at Belleau Wood*, 12.

⁶⁰ Alfred A. Cunningham, “The Value of Aviation to the Marine Corps” *Marine Corps Gazette* Vol. V, No.3 (September, 1920): 223. Hereafter referenced as Cunningham, “The Value of Aviation to the Marine Corps.”

⁶¹ Cunningham, “The Value of Aviation to the Marine Corps,” 223.

made to convince the War Department and the American Expeditionary Force to employ Marine aviation in direct support of the 4th Marine Brigade, but Army aviation officials instructed the Marines they would be utilized as training support only.⁶²

By July 1918, the First Aviation Force under the command of Major A.A. Cunningham landed in France. The force was comprised of four tactical squadrons built around the British designed DeHavilland two-place light bombers, also known as the DH-4.⁶³ Unwilling to accept a “training support” role, the force organized to operate under the Navy as the Day Wing of the Northern Bombing Group in northern France.⁶⁴ Its primary mission was to disrupt the German U-boat menace to Allied shipping.⁶⁵

Despite the First Aviation Force’s lack of direct support to the ground element, Cunningham and other Marine aviators such as Roy S. Geiger left France with a clear understanding of the purpose of Marine Aviation. Cunningham commented, “The only excuse for aviation in any service is its usefulness in assisting the troops on the ground to successfully carry out their operations.”⁶⁶

⁶² Cunningham, “The Value of Aviation to the Marine Corps,” 224.

⁶³ Roger Willock, *Unaccustomed to Fear, A Biography of the Late General Roy S. Geiger* (Princeton: Published Privately, 1968), 92-93. Hereafter references as Willock, *Unaccustomed to Fear*. The DH-4, at full power could attain a speed of 120 miles per-hour. Sustained speed was set at 90 miles per-hour; landing speed at 60. Its forward-firing armament consisted of fixed, twin 30-caliber Vickers Machine Guns, synchronized with the camshaft of the plane’s engine to permit firing through the interstices or intervals of the rotating propeller blades; the rear cockpit was fitted with dual .30 caliber Lewis Machine Guns mounted on a scarf ring affording a 360-degree traverse. Racks for general purpose or fragmentation bombs of 25, 50, or even 100-pound size were attached to the underside of the lower wing, and could be released by either the pilot or the free gunner from their respective cockpit. The DH-4 eventually became the standard American combat plane not only for the First World War but for practically a decade after its termination.

⁶⁴ Clifford, *Progress and Purpose*, 24.

⁶⁵ Willock, *Unaccustomed to Fear*, 90.

⁶⁶ Clifford, *Progress and Purpose*, 24

The Marine Corps emerged from World War I with invaluable lessons in the conduct of modern warfare. Specifically, that infantry tactics should provide for fire superiority as well as maneuver, artillery support is essential against a determined enemy, and that careful operational planning paid dividends in lives saved and objectives taken.⁶⁷ However, arguably the most valuable lesson to emerge from the World War I experience was the education of the Marine Corps' senior leaders in the conduct of the inter-service discourse within Washington, specifically the education of Lejeune. As Lejeune assumed the responsibilities of Commandant on June 30, 1920,⁶⁸ he astutely assessed that the future of the Marine Corps relied on its ability to secure a relevant and needed role in the conduct of national defense. He chose the mission of the amphibious assault, a landing of seaborne troops on hostile shores against active enemy opposition, as the Marine Corps' contribution to the defense of the nation.⁶⁹ However, the Corps' expeditionary responsibilities would continue to dominate its resources through the 1920s.

The Small Wars Force-in-Readiness

By 1915, the Marine Corps had reluctantly assumed the role of the nation's small wars force-in-readiness. The Marine Corps had landed troops 180 times in 37 countries from 1800-1934.⁷⁰ The interventionist tendencies of U.S. Administrations in the early 1900s placed the Department of State, the U.S. Navy, and Marine Corps at the forward edge of U.S. policy. So much, that in 1929, the Marine Corps had two-thirds of its personnel employed on expeditionary or other foreign or sea duty.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Millet, *Semper Fi*, 317.

⁶⁸ Lejeune, *Reminiscences of a Marine*, 460.

⁶⁹ Spector, *Eagle Against The Sun*, 25.

⁷⁰ *Small Wars Manual*, 1-2.

⁷¹ *Small Wars Manual*, 1-2.

Expeditionary operations in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua dominated the Marine Corps' resources throughout the 1920s.⁷² The era would become known in Marine lexicon as the "Banana Wars."⁷³ With the possible exception of Haiti, the most significant small war experience within the context of the "banana wars," was the lengthy conflict in Nicaragua.⁷⁴

The Naval Personnel Act of 1899, which increased the Corps' authorized strength to 211 officers and 6,062 enlisted men, marked the beginning of further expansion and additional duties.⁷⁵ The Corps' end strength increased to 17,400 men by the end of 1916 as Congressional authorizations mirrored the growing concerns in Europe.⁷⁶ More men meant the Marine Corps was able to field more of its primary warfighting organizations, which evolved around ships detachments, companies, battalions, squadrons, and brigades. The Marine Corps' emphasis on exemplary individuals grounded in the art of military discipline and technical and tactical competence gave it tremendous flexibility in the fielding of organizations capable of responding across the range of military operations.

The Second Brigade was a perfect example. It was a conglomeration of the most available and ready units in the Marine Corps in 1926 and early 1927. Comprised of the 5th and 11th Regiments, numerous ships detachments, and two Marine aviation squadrons consisting of

⁷² Lejeune, *Reminiscences of a Marine*, 466-468.

⁷³ The term "Banana Wars" has come to define the series of military interventions in the Caribbean and Latin America between 1901 and 1934 – primarily actions in Nicaragua (1912-1913 and 1926-1933); Haiti (1915-1934); and the Dominican Republic (1916-1924). J. Robert Moskin, *The U.S. Marine Corps Story, Third Edition* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992), 149.

⁷⁴ Richard J. Macak, Jr. "Lessons From Yesterday's Operations Short of War: Nicaragua and the Small Wars Manual," *Marine Corps Gazette* Vol. 80, No. 11 (November 1996), 56.

⁷⁵ Millet, *Semper Fidelis*, 150.

⁷⁶ Axelrod, *Miracle at Belleau Wood*, 10.

six de Havilland DH-4B and six Boeing 02B-1 aircraft,⁷⁷ the Second Brigade marked a significant development in the Marine Corps' approach to warfare – the development of the air-ground team.

The deployment of six de Havilland bombers under the command of Major Ross Rowell was the first deliberate deployment of Marine aviation in support of the ground commander. The Marine Corps had realized the value of the aircraft in operations in France and Haiti and was aggressively pursuing the structure, training, and procedures to incorporate aviation as a critical element within its expeditionary forces. Roger Willock noted the Marine Corps' unique perspective on aviation since its official adoption in 1916: "Unlike the Army and the Navy, the Marines consistently regarded its aeroplanes not as a separate arm or branch (with a special role), but rather as tactical weapons fully integrated for use with the conventional artillery of its landing forces and expeditionary troops."⁷⁸ Lejeune felt so strongly on the role of aviation that he felt it necessary to make the establishment of Marine Corps aviation as one of the critical tenants of his time as Commandant. Lejeune even took the time in his memoirs to note his personal thoughts on the matter, "Aviation, so far as the Marine Corps is concerned...has demonstrated that it is invaluable."⁷⁹ He continued, "I am convinced that it will be of vital importance, both by land and

⁷⁷ Merritt A. Edson, Captain USMC, "The Coco Patrol, Operations of a Marine Patrol Along the Coco River in Nicaragua," *Marine Corps Gazette* Vol. 19, No. 3 (August 1936): 20. Wrey R. Johnson, "Airpower and Restraint in Small Wars: Marine Corps Aviation in the Second Nicaraguan Campaign 1927-33," *U.S. Marines and Irregular Warfare, 1898-2007: Anthology and Selected Bibliography*, ed. Stephen S. Evans, Colonel (Quantico: Marine Corps University, 2008), 58.

⁷⁸ Willock, *Unaccustomed to Fear*, 117.

⁷⁹ Lejeune, *Reminiscences of a Marine*, 483.

at sea, when war is again precipitated.”⁸⁰ Lejeune’s vision of aviation was grounded in the exploits of Rowell and his flyers in Nicaragua,⁸¹ particularly the actions at Ocotal.

Augusto C. Sandino, the Liberal General, opposed the Peace of Tipitapa, an agreement engineered by U.S. Presidential Envoy Henry L. Stimson.⁸² Sandino sought a dramatic attack and defeat of the U.S. Marine and Guardia Nacional outpost at Ocotal. Ocotal was a small town located in the center of the Sandinista controlled central highlands. It offered Sandino the perfect target to achieve a strategic victory. On 15 July 1927, 300-400 Sandinistas attacked the thirty-nine Marines and forty-eight Nicaraguan National Guard constabulary troops under the command of Marine Captain Gilbert Hatfield.⁸³ Hatfield’s security precautions paid off. The Marine and National Guard positions defeated the initial Sandinista attacks, but Hatfield knew he did not have the offensive power to break Sandino’s will and defeat the attack.

It took what is considered the world’s first execution of a close air support mission to break the Sandinista attack at Ocotal. Rowell and five DeHavilland bombers appeared in the skies over Ocotal at 1435 on 16 July 1927. By using air-panels, Rowell and the aviation element coordinated with Hatfield and the ground element to conduct a devastating air-ground attack that quickly dispersed the Sandinistas. Rowell noted the effect of the new tactic; “...since the enemy had not been subjected to any form of bombing attack...we were able to inflict damage which

⁸⁰ Ibid., 483.

⁸¹ Ibid., 483.

⁸² The Peace of Tipitapa was signed on May 12 1927 by Liberal and Conservative leaders that agreed the insurgents would demobilize in exchange for the guarantee that U.S. troops would supervise forthcoming municipal and national elections. General Augusto Sandino was the only revolutionary chieftain to oppose the agreement. Michel Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream, Nicaragua Under U.S. Imperial Rule* (Durham: Duke University Press: 2005), 143.

⁸³ Charles Neimeyer, Lieutenant Colonel USMC(Ret) “Combat in Nicaragua, Effective and Unique,” *Marine Corps Gazette* Vol. 92, No. 4 (April 2008): 73.

was all out of proportion to what they might have suffered had they taken cover.”⁸⁴ Rowell and Hatfield had established one of the tenets of the Marine Corps approach to warfare - air-ground coordination.

The Marine Corps would spend the next twenty years developing, refining, and implementing techniques and procedures to maximize the integration of the air-ground team in the march across the Pacific. However, the seed had been planted. The innovative and flexible use of aviation units was proving to enhance the effectiveness of the Marine Expeditionary Force, regardless of the nature of the conflict.

The development of aviation as a tactical arm of the Marine Corps was not the only valuable lesson to emerge from the Nicaraguan experience. The *Small Wars Manual*, first published in 1935 and revised in 1940, is one of the seminal works on the conduct of small wars warfare ever produced. Intended as a comprehensive guide to the conduct of small wars, the manual was a compilation of the lessons learned from operations in the Philippines, China, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua. Written during a period when the Marine Corps was fully committed to the development of its amphibious warfare doctrine, the *Small Wars Manual* stands as a testament to an organization who understood and valued a holistic approach to the conduct of warfare.

The creation of the *Small Wars Manual* can be traced to the ideas and actions of Brigadier General Randolph C. Berkley, head of Marine Corps Schools in Quantico in 1931.⁸⁵ Berkley sought to compile the lessons of the last forty years of Marine Corps operations in a holistic text that aimed to reconcile the “broad diplomatic goals of intervention with the tactical

⁸⁴ Ibid., 73.

⁸⁵Nicholas J. Schlosser, “The Marine Corps’ Small Wars Manual,” *Fortitudine, Bulletin of the Marine Corps Historical Program*, Historical Bulletin Volume 35, No. 1 (2010): 7.

imperatives of effective counterinsurgency.”⁸⁶ Veterans of the Nicaraguan campaign such as Major Harold H. Utley and Captain Merritt “Red Mike” Edson assumed ownership of the manual in the late 1930s. They were quick to establish the political nature of small wars.

The manual states on page 1-1, “Small wars are operations undertaken under executive authority, wherein military force is combined with diplomatic pressure in the internal or external affairs of another state.”⁸⁷ So political in nature were small wars that by the end of the 1920s the Marine Corps had earned the moniker of being the military arm of the Department of State.⁸⁸ Despite the reluctance to be referred to as “State Department Troops,” the manual’s emphasis on the integration of political and military strategies in small wars is a timeless lesson. The difference between the political nature of small wars and those of a more regular nature lies where in the political process the decision to apply force is made. As the manual states, “traditional war is undertaken only as a last resort after all diplomatic means of adjusting differences have failed and the military commander’s objective ordinarily becomes the enemy’s armed forces.”⁸⁹ In small wars, “either diplomacy has not been exhausted or the party that opposes the settlement of the political question cannot be reached diplomatically.”⁹⁰ War and warfare’s political nature was never in doubt to the authors of the *Small Wars Manual*. The manual’s unique perspective lies in its emphasis on the seamless integration of the political and military process. Every action within the context of small wars should be conducted with the

⁸⁶ Ibid., 7.

⁸⁷ *Small Wars Manual*, 1940, 1-1.

⁸⁸ *Small Wars Manual*, 1940, 1-7.

⁸⁹ *Small Wars Manual*, 1940, 1-7.

⁹⁰ *Small Wars Manual*, 1940, 1-7.

intent of achieving the desired political outcome. This theme is evident throughout the manual, from discussions on psychology to the tactics of infantry patrols and the employment of aviation.

The Marine Corps emerged from Nicaragua in 1933 with a tremendous amount of combat experience. Its air-ground coordination techniques and procedures continued to evolve, it learned the value of detailed logistical planning, and Marine leaders left with a clear understanding of the challenges of command and control of multiple units over a diverse area of operations.

The experiments of integrating the new technologies such as the truck, aeroplane, machine gun, and radio into the conduct of operations had been an ongoing event since the landing at Vera Cruz in 1914. This innovative approach continued to provide Marine leaders with invaluable lessons that were transferable to the next conflict. As a Marine officer noted, “the hard campaigning, the perpetual stretching of insufficient means, and tenacity of the enemy did much to maintain the professional temper of the Corps between the two world wars.”⁹¹ However, the legacy of Nicaragua and the Banana Wars is mixed. It is true the efforts of the Marines stabilized the region, prevented the expansion of European powers, and created internal security and political institutions to administer the needs of the population, but that came at a cost. The duration of interventions put Marines in direct contact with indigenous populations, which at times resulted in allegations of drunkenness and direct conflict with the local police. Reports of Marine misbehavior back in the United States fueled an already tiring tolerance for overseas expansion and threatened to jeopardize the Marine Corps’ intimate relationships with the American public and members of Congress. The difficult nature of small wars had not gone unnoticed within the Marine Corps. Major Earl H. Ellis wrote in 1921, “military pacification was

⁹¹ Neill Macaulay, *The Sandino Affair* (Chicago: Duke University Press, 1985), 240.

a difficult proposition, even if American motives were altruistic.”⁹² Some Marine planners simply viewed the Banana Wars as a better transition mission than ship duty. The Caribbean operations allowed the Marine Corps to learn valuable lessons for the development and implementation of its developing primary mission – seizing advanced naval bases.

Service With The Fleet

In 1920, the idea of attacking a strongly defended position from the sea was considered tactical suicide. The debacle at Gallipoli in 1915 had confirmed the future of amphibious warfare in the minds of many military planners. It was largely accepted that storming a defended beachhead in daylight had a small chance of success. However, the strategic conditions in the Pacific in the 1920s and 1930s were revealing an operational environment that would force the Marine Corps to reevaluate the lessons of the past.

War Plan Orange⁹³ was the plan to counter Japanese aggression in the Pacific. The plan acknowledged, due to the U.S. military’s limited force projection capabilities, insufficient numbers of land forces, and conditions agreed to at the Washington Conference of 1922,⁹⁴ that

⁹² Millet, *Semper Fidelis*, 262.

⁹³ Louis Morton, “War Plan Orange, Evolution of a Strategy,” *World Politics* Vol. 11, No. 2 (January 1959), 221-250. In 1903, the mechanism devised for Army-Navy co-operation was the Joint Army-Navy Board, consisting of eight members, four from the Army’s General Staff and four from the General Board of the Navy. The Board’s purpose was to prepare a series of plans for joint action in an emergency requiring the co-operation of the services. Each war plan, known as the “color plans,” addressed specific concerns for the nation it was designed for. War Plan Orange was developed for Japan. War Plan Orange was the only plan that was under constant review and revised frequently to accord with changes in the international scene.

⁹⁴ Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun*, 20. The Washington Conference of 1921-1922 and the London naval treaty of 1930 – put an upper limit on naval building in the category of battleships, cruisers, destroyers, and carriers and established ratios between the great naval powers. Arguably the most dangerous aspect of the treaties from the naval point of view was the provision of the Five Power Washington Treaty which forbade further military bases in the Pacific island possessions of Britain, France, the United States, and Japan. This was critical to the execution of War Plan Orange because the navy had always believed it was imperative to have major bases on the island of Guam, in the Mariannas, and in the Philippines in order to carry on a successful war against Japan.

the re-conquest of western Pacific territory would be a slow deliberate process. The authors of Plan Orange identified the requirement to project U.S. sea power across six thousand miles of ocean to seize, occupy, and defend advanced bases.⁹⁵ The concept of advanced naval bases emerged from the realities in the limitations of naval technology in the early 1900s. Any plan that required the U.S. to project power from ports on the U.S. West Coast to the Philippines would require a system of Pacific naval bases.⁹⁶ The execution of War Plan Orange became more complicated as Japan revealed her intentions to deny U.S. access to advanced naval bases. Japan now caused U.S. military planners to grapple with the challenge of seizing well-defended naval bases. A challenge Lejeune saw as the primary mission of the Marine Corps.

It was now time to build the organization and doctrine to fulfill an obvious policy objective – the neutralization of Japanese aggression in the Pacific. Lejeune assigned the task to one of his most trusted subordinates, Major Earl H. “Pete” Ellis. In 1921, Ellis produced *Operation Plan 712, Advanced Base Operations in Micronesia*, and a detailed study that analyzed the requirements of amphibious operations across the central Pacific.⁹⁷ Ellis concluded that an assault from the sea against a defended position was feasible, but only under the right conditions and with the right training. Ellis’ detailed study revealed that the flaws in the Gallipoli operations were correctable by proper planning and appropriate doctrine on the use of naval gunfire and the deployment of the landing force.⁹⁸ His study also isolated one of the most important and enduring

⁹⁵ Gunther E. Rothenberg, *Assault From The Sea, Essays on the History of Amphibious Warfare*, ed. Merrill L. Bartlett, Lieutenant Colonel USMC (Ret.) (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1983), 177. Hereafter referenced as Rothenberg, *Assault From The Sea*.

⁹⁶ Millett, *Semper Fi*, 269.

⁹⁷ Alan R. Millett, *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*, ed. Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 72. Hereafter referenced as Millett, *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*.

⁹⁸ Millett, *Semper Fi*, 321.

relationships in the history of warfare – the relationship between a defender and an attacker. How could an amphibious assault force overwhelm the inherent advantages of the defense?

Throughout the 1920's the Marine Corps balanced its operational requirements of overseas duty with its desire to reinvent the idea of the amphibious assault. The Operations and Training Division along with the newly formed Marine Corps Schools at Quantico started to seriously develop Ellis' study. Full-scale assault training exercises in 1924 and 1925 in the Caribbean and Hawaii provided the Navy and Marine Corps with invaluable lessons. The training exercises dramatized the need for better boats, improved communications, and more training on debarking troops and equipment.⁹⁹ The training exercises also validated two critical requirements – an organization dedicated to the development, implementation, and execution of amphibious operations, and an accepted doctrine that would unify the services in the conduct of such a complicated military maneuver.

Lejeune also saw 1924 -1925 as a growing opportunity for the Marine Corps. He proposed to the Navy Department, “The duties of the Marine Corps in war and peace, should be entrusted with sole responsibility for “the initial seizure and defense” of advanced bases until relieved by the Army.”¹⁰⁰ The lessons of 1924-25, materialized when the creation of the Fleet Marine Force (FMF) became a conceptual reality with Navy Department Order 241 on December 7, 1933.¹⁰¹ The following day the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Major General John H. Russell, issued Marine Corps Order 66 which set forth implementing instructions regarding the organization and doctrine of the Fleet Marine Force.¹⁰² Russell's “A Plea For A Mission And

⁹⁹ Millett, *Semper Fi*, 327.

¹⁰⁰ Millett, *Semper Fi*, 328

¹⁰¹ Millett, *Semper Fi*, 330.

¹⁰² Robert D. Heinl, Jr., Colonel USMC (Ret) *Assault From The Sea Essays on the History of Amphibious Warfare*, ed. Merrill L. Bartlett, USMC (Ret) (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1983), 187.

Doctrine” had come to fruition in the form of the FMF, now comprised of two brigades, one in San Diego for service in the Pacific and one in Quantico for service in the Atlantic. The formation of the FMF marked a unique break in the development of traditional American military units. For the first time, a military unit was constructed for the execution of a specific type of warfare – the amphibious assault.

Two predominant aspects of the FMF of 1933 marked the unit as original within the construct of American military tradition. First, it was primarily and openly organized, equipped, and trained for landing operations incident to naval campaigns.¹⁰³ And secondly, the force retained at all times a high degree of readiness and strategic mobility well suited to the policy of a maritime nation whose fleet constituted a first line of defense.”¹⁰⁴

The FMF’s balanced task organization provides some insight into how Marine leaders viewed the conduct of amphibious warfare. Each brigade was “organized into one infantry regiment, two batteries of 75mm pack howitzers, one battery of 155mm guns, and two aircraft squadrons (one observation and one pursuit).”¹⁰⁵ Writing in the *Naval Institute Proceedings* in October 1936, Russell added a philosophical approach to the employment of the FMF, “The efficiency of every military force depends upon the co-ordination of its parts; each element must be trained in conjunction with the other elements.”¹⁰⁶ The key to the FMF was its ability to leverage the strengths of its parts into a balanced fighting force. Russell and the Marine Corps had designed an organization for the sole purpose of seizing the initiative. What it needed in 1935

¹⁰³ Ibid.,188.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 188.

¹⁰⁵ Leo J. Daugherty III, *Pioneers of Amphibious Warfare, 1898-1945* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009), 261. Hereafter referenced as Daugherty, *Pioneers of Amphibious Warfare*.

¹⁰⁶ Daugherty, *Pioneers of Amphibious Warfare*, 263.

was an accompanying doctrine and a series of rigorous tests to validate and improve its combat effectiveness.

Despite Lejeune's public acknowledgment that the mission of the Marine Corps was in service with the Fleet, the other two prominent experiences were challenging the implementation of the *Tentative Manual Landing Operations*. This dilemma played out in the halls of Marine Corps Schools throughout the 1930s. Overreliance on Army doctrine, coupled with the combat experience of the officer corps, presented a serious cognitive obstacle to the inculcation of Marine leaders in amphibious warfare. The *Tentative Manual Landing Operations* had to capture the Marine Corps' unique approach to warfare while simultaneously providing the cohesive language to coordinate and deconflict the tools of modern warfare. It outlined six major ideas as being essential to the conduct of amphibious operations: (1) command relationship; (2) naval gunfire support; (3) aerial support; (4) ship-to-shore movement; (5) securing the beachhead; and (6) logistics.¹⁰⁷ It was becoming apparent that the key to overwhelming the defender lay within the Navy and Marine Corps' ability to coordinate and synchronize the actions of the two services; no small task in the parochial environment of the 1920s and 1930s. However, the *Tentative Manual Landing Operations* represented what Navy and Marine planners thought to be a workable solution to the amphibious assault problem. What they needed was a series of rigorous field tests to validate the new doctrine.

The Fleet Landing Exercises (FLEX) from 1935 through 1939 provided the forum to discover the flaws in theory, organizational structure, equipment, and doctrine of the new approach to amphibious warfare. The first two FLEXs in 1935 and 1936 fell victim to service specific interests and proved to be of little value. However, FLEX three and four in 1937 and 1938 followed by FLEX five and six in 1939 and 1940, provided excellent validation and

¹⁰⁷ Rothenberg, *Assault From The Sea*, 179.

refinement of the amphibious techniques and procedures that would accompany the Navy and Marine Corps into World War II. The FLEXs had identified that if an amphibious assault was to be successful the amphibious force would have to isolate the objective area, then pound the defenders into a stupor with naval gunfire and close air support.¹⁰⁸ The landing would require a violent assault by a combined arms team capable of rapid movement inland and most importantly an amphibious expeditionary force could not rely on guile for success, but would require local superiority in every element of air, naval, and ground combat power.¹⁰⁹

The FLEX's also marked the opportunity for the Navy to recognize the value of the *Tentative Manual Landing Operations* and officially approved *Landing Operations Doctrine, U.S. Navy, (FTP-167)* on August 5, 1938, for the use and guidance of the naval service.¹¹⁰

By the end of 1940, the Marine Corps had established an essential role in American naval strategic plans and had responded to the challenges of War Plan Orange by writing the *Tentative Manual Landing Operations* and creating the Fleet Marine Force.¹¹¹ The doctrine and the organization would attack across the Pacific in places like Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. Between 1942 and 1945, the Fleet Marine Force and the *Landing Operations Doctrine, F.T.P 167* proved adaptable to the changing environment of the Pacific.

The Marine Corps' ability to incorporate the tools of modern warfare into its approach to warfare continued to give it a tactical advantage. The addition of heavy artillery, tanks, amtracs, and reconnaissance units were in direct response to the competitive nature of warfare in the Pacific. This flexible and adaptive approach was in response to the fact that the Marine Corps

¹⁰⁸ Millett, *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*, 77.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹¹⁰ Department of the Navy, Chief of Naval Operations, *Landing Operations Doctrine, F.T.P 167*. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1938). Sect. 1.

¹¹¹ Millett, *Semper Fi*, 343.

essentially fought four different ground wars against the Japanese: the jungle warfare of the South Pacific, the atoll warfare of the Gilberts and Marshalls, the mobile warfare of the Marianas, and the cave warfare of Peleliu, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa.¹¹² Each one of these operating environments required adjustments to techniques and procedures. For example, the evolution of close air support continued from Nicaragua to the Pacific. A 3d Marine Division study of the experience at Guadalcanal highlighted three critical objectives. They were “improved means of target designation, exploration of the precise effect of bombs and fusing of various types, and the determination of safety margins that were necessary for the protection of our own troops.”¹¹³ Increased application of air power combined with the integration of naval surface fires and artillery led Marine leaders to develop the Fire Support Coordination Center (FSCC).

First applied at Iwo Jima, the FSCC proved critical in the coordination and deconfliction of artillery, naval gunfire, and aviation delivered fires.¹¹⁴ It allocated fire missions to the support elements whose capabilities promised the most effective results; a necessity against the hardened and well-prepared Japanese fortifications.¹¹⁵ The integration of the tools of industry was a key characteristic of the Marine Corps’ approach to warfare in the Pacific. This innovative approach, combined with the gallantry, tenacity, and agility of the Marines who executed the assaults across the southern and central Pacific, will forever be a part of the Marine Corps’ approach to warfare.

Lejeune defied conventional wisdom when he attached the future of the Marine Corps to the success of the amphibious assault mission. He intuitively understood the future of the Marine Corps was linked to its ability to remain relevant, needed, and wanted in the execution of national

¹¹² Millett, *Semper Fi*, 440.

¹¹³ Clifford, *Progress and Purpose*, 67.

¹¹⁴ Clifford, *Progress and Purpose*, 69-70.

¹¹⁵ Clifford, *Progress and Purpose*, 69.

defense. He saw the opportunity to fulfill those requirements in the Marine Corps' ability to support War Plan Orange. The plan worked. The Marine Corps entered the post-war era with a new found sense of self-importance and the belief that it had a viable and relevant role in the conduct of national defense.

EVOLVING AND FORMALIZING THE MODERN DAY MARINE CORPS 1946-1993

The atomic bomb ended World War II and directly affected the conduct of warfare. The Navy and Marine Corps took notice of this paradigm changing technology that many believed neutralized the amphibious assault model of World War II. To get the facts straight, the government set a series of tests under the cognizance of the Navy called Operation CROSSROADS in the summer of 1946.¹¹⁶ Two atomic bombs would be dropped in the Marshall Islands to provide data for the study of atomic blast damage and radiation contamination.¹¹⁷ Lieutenant General Roy S. Geiger, the Commanding General of Marine Forces Pacific (MARFORPAC) was the senior Marine present. In his report to the Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC), General A.A. Vandegrift, Geiger advised, "a complete reappraisal of the basic concept of amphibious operations, for it is believed that atomic weapons could raise havoc with expeditionary forces as then constituted."¹¹⁸ Vandegrift assessed Geiger's recommendations and determined the atomic age presented the Marine Corps with three major considerations: how to reorganize the Fleet Marine Force to render its units less vulnerable to atomic warfare; how to decrease our reaction time or, conversely, attain and maintain a preparedness by which a large unit could mount out in hours; and how to put atomic weapons of the future to our own best

¹¹⁶ Clifford, *Progress and Purpose*, 71.

¹¹⁷ Willock, *Unaccustomed to Fear*, 314.

¹¹⁸ Willock, *Unaccustomed to Fear*, 314.

use.¹¹⁹ Vandegrift formed a special board to analyze the challenges of the atomic era. He provided the following guidance: “details are neither expected nor desirable at this time, but general principles must be determined in order to orient the effort of the Marine Corps away from the last war and toward the next.”¹²⁰

The special board returned with recommendations to incorporate a revolutionary piece of equipment – the helicopter. The board believed that the helicopter amphibious assault technique capitalized on the inherent characteristics of the vehicle with a view of providing the landing force with those precious ingredients, “speed,” “flexibility,” and “dispersion.”¹²¹ Vandegrift assigned the problem to Oliver P. Smith and William Twining at Marine Corps Schools to develop an innovative and revolutionary approach.¹²² They were charged with the development of, “a tentative doctrine for helicopter employment, and to identify the military requirements of a helicopter specifically designed for ship-to-shore movement of troops and cargo.”¹²³ Ship-to-shore movement had taken its first step in incorporating the new tools of warfare. Vandegrift compared the development of helicopter doctrine to the efforts made in 1934.¹²⁴ The Marine Corps’ institutional culture of incorporating the tools of warfare into innovative approaches capable of being applied to a variety of problems remained strong in the post war era.

¹¹⁹ A.A. Vandegrift, *Once A Marine, The Memoirs of General A.A. Vandegrift, U.S.M.C* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1964). 320. Hereafter referenced as Vandegrift, *Once A Marine*.

¹²⁰ Clifford, *Progress and Purpose*, 72.

¹²¹ Clifford, *Progress and Purpose*, 72.

¹²² Vandegrift, *Once A Marine*, 320.

¹²³ Clifford, *Progress and Purpose*, 72.

¹²⁴ Vandegrift, *Once A Marine*, 320.

Through 1946-47, significant progress had been made on legalizing Lejeune's vision of the Marine Corps in service with the Fleet. The *National Security Act of 1947*¹²⁵ was considered a major victory for the Marine Corps in that it provided statutory protection of the Marine Corps' air, ground, and reserve units.¹²⁶ Despite significant advances in the establishment of official Marine roles and functions, it found itself in a familiar position in 1950 – service as an adjunct to the Army.

Service as an Adjunct to the Army

On June 25th, 1950, elements of seven North Korean divisions crossed the Thirty-eighth Parallel and changed the Korean War into an international struggle with global consequences.¹²⁷ On 30 June, Fleet Marine Force Pacific Headquarters in Hawaii received a message from the chief of naval operations, it asked: *How soon can you sail for combat employment in the Far East: (a) A reinforced battalion: (b) A reinforced regiment?*¹²⁸ Fleet Marine Force chief of staff, Colonel Gregon Williams, replied: *(a) 48 hours. (b) Five days, including a Marine aircraft group.*¹²⁹ The concept of the Nation's expeditionary force-in-readiness was being tested for the first time on a large scale.

¹²⁵ Herring, *Colony to Superpower*, 614. The National Security Act of July 1947 – what has been called the “Magna Carta of the national security state”- was an awkward compromise. It created a cabinet-level, civilian secretary of defense to preside over separate departments of the army, navy, and air force. It institutionalizes the wartime Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), established a National Security Council (NSC) in the White House to better coordinate policy making, and provided for an independent Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to replace the defunct OSS. Krulak, *First to Fight*, 51. For the Marine Corps, the Act meant that it shall be organized, trained, and equipped to provide fleet marine forces of combined arms, together with supporting air components, for service with the fleet in the seizure or defense of advanced naval bases and for the conduct of such land operations as may be essential to the prosecution of a naval campaign.

¹²⁶ Krulak, *First to Fight*, 51.

¹²⁷ Allan R. Millet, *The War for Korea, 1950-1951 They Came from the North* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 85. Hereafter referenced as Millet, *The War for Korea*.

¹²⁸ Krulak, *First to Fight*, 124.

¹²⁹ Krulak, *First to Fight*, 124.

The Marine Corps would form the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade around the 5th Marine Regiment and Marine Aircraft Group 33.¹³⁰ The 6,500-man air/ground brigade sailed for the Far East on 14 July 1950, destined for the port of Pusan.¹³¹ Pusan's capacity to handle 10,000 tons a day made it a critical factor in General Walton Walker's plan to regain the initiative.¹³² From July 31 to 2 August, the Eighth Army gained the Second Infantry Division from Fort Lewis, the 5th Regimental Combat Team from Hawaii, and the First Marine Brigade.¹³³ These forces provided Walker with the much-needed firepower and counterattack capabilities to stop the North Korean assault.

In anticipation of a request for forces from the Far East Commander, General Douglas MacArthur, the Marine Corps exhausted all available resources to staff and equip the remainder of the First Marine Division under Major General O.P. Smith. The reserves were called up, a directive was issued for a major cross-country transfer of 7,182 men from the Second Marine Division in Camp Lejeune to the 1st Division, and all to report within two weeks, and individuals were ordered to Camp Pendleton from any location in the Corps.¹³⁴

On 10 July, MacArthur formally asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) to send him an entire Marine division with supporting aircraft.¹³⁵ MacArthur desperately needed to turn the momentum, and he saw Inchon and the subsequent liberation of Seoul as the best way to do it. His staff began detailed planning for the amphibious assault and set D-day for 15 September. For

¹³⁰ Krulak, *First to Fight*, 124.

¹³¹ Krulak, *First to Fight*, 124.

¹³² Millet, *The War for Korea*. 215.

¹³³ Millet, *The War for Korea*. 215.

¹³⁴ Krulak, *First to Fight*, 127.

¹³⁵ Millet, *Semper Fi*, 478.

Navy and Marine planners Inchon presented some serious concerns, but MacArthur's decision was final. The Inchon landing and the subsequent liberation of Seoul would go down as one of the greatest maneuvers in military history.

For the Marines, the Korean War brought the intensity and valor of combat equal to the assaults of World War II. In five months, the Marines helped the Eighth Army stop the North Korean assault along the Pusan perimeter; landed at Inchon and, in a dramatic two-week campaign, liberated Seoul; landed on the east coast of North Korea and drove as far north as the Chosin Reservoir; and then destroyed seven divisions of the Chinese Communist army as the 1st Marine Division "attacked in a different direction."¹³⁶ The Korean War also highlighted a serious concern in Marine Corps readiness, combat end-strength, and the role of the Commandant on the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The Marine Corps petitioned its political allies to make further adjustments to U.S. law. The Douglas-Mansfield Bill of 1952 took two critical steps toward addressing the perceived deficiencies. Through Public Law 416, the 82nd Congress provided for three active Marine divisions and three air-wings, and co-equal status for the commandant with the Joint Chiefs of Staff when matters of direct concern to the Marine Corps were under consideration.¹³⁷ The law recognized the "Marine Corps is and has always been since its inception a separate service, distinct and apart from the United States Army, United States Navy, and United States Air Force" and it gave the Corps' its well needed footing in the inter-service arena.¹³⁸

The Douglas-Mansfield Bill also formulized a well-understood but never clearly articulated role of the Marine Corps – the Nation's "force-in-readiness." The Marine Corps was

¹³⁶ Millet, *Semper Fi*, 481.

¹³⁷ Edwin Howard Simmons, *The United States Marines, A History, Third Edition* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 212. Hereafter referenced as Simmons, *The United States Marines*.

¹³⁸ Simmons, *The United States Marines*, 212.

expected “to suppress or contain international disturbances short of war.”¹³⁹ To fulfill this role, the Marine Corps would be expected to rapidly deploy combined-arms organizations, from battalion to division size, capable of responding to any crisis along the range of military operations.

In August 1955, General Lemuel C. Shepard described the nature of FMF units in his commandant’s annual report, the “Fleet Marine Forces are a flexible, mobile, integrated force of ground and air elements comprising a single weapon system.”¹⁴⁰ Shepard’s vision of the FMF units evolved into Marine Corps Order 3120.3, published in December 1962. The order formalized the creation of the Marine air-ground task organization: A Marine air-ground task force with separate air-ground headquarters is normally formed for combat operations and training exercises in which substantial combat forces of both Marine aviation and Marine ground units are included in the task organization of participating Marine forces.¹⁴¹ The Marine air-ground task force was a battle-tested organization that had proven itself in the Pacific and Korea. It was built on the foundations of mobility, flexibility, versatility, and readiness – for combined vertical and surface amphibious assaults.¹⁴² By 1965, Marine Corps policies placed increasing emphasis on the use of amphibious forces for alliance support and crisis control in nonnuclear confrontations.¹⁴³ The Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB), and the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) were the primary warfighting organization that

¹³⁹ Millett, *Semper Fi*, 500.

¹⁴⁰ Simmons, *The United States Marines*, 212.

¹⁴¹ Simmons, *The United States Marines*, 212.

¹⁴² Millett, *Semper Fi*, 548.

¹⁴³ Millett, *Semper Fi*, 547.

enabled the Marine Corps to fulfill its role in national defense. Each MAGTF was task organized to respond to a variety of contingencies across the range of military operations.

By 1960, Communist inspired “wars of national liberation” dominated the international operating environment. The growing insurgency in South Vietnam had demanded more attention from U.S. policy makers. These insurgencies demanded flexible, responsive forces capable of operating in complex population centric environments.

The Small Wars Force-in-Readiness

Counterinsurgency capabilities grew in value to the Kennedy Administration as the “special warfare” movement swept through the U.S. military. However, Marine leaders were reluctant to embrace the new “fad” in military operations. The Commandant, General David M. Shoup, captured the Marine position: “Counterinsurgency is an attention-getting word these days...The Marine Corps has long recognized that fighting guerillas is an inherent part of landing force operations...Counterguerilla warfare is essentially one of small units and we have traditionally emphasized individual leadership and small unit operations.¹⁴⁴ Shoup, along with the majority of the Corps’ senior leadership did not share the Administrations infatuation with counterinsurgency operations.

The Marine Corps viewed counterinsurgency operations as an extension of the “force in readiness” role. The Corps’ heritage had always stressed the ability of the landing force to operate in chaotic and complex environments; either as an amphibious assault or as part of an extended campaign ashore. To enable it to operate in ambiguous environments, the Marine Corps had always stressed small unit tactics, individual discipline, and initiative and leadership at the most junior levels.

¹⁴⁴ Millet, *Semper Fi*, 548.

By the 1960s, the Marine Corps in theory “had to be prepared to land either as an amphibious force or helicopter borne assault force, and once ashore, face a Soviet mechanized force in conventional warfare or quell an insurgency, prop up a friendly government, or provide disaster relief.¹⁴⁵ Vietnam would present the Marine Corps with the opportunity to test its theory.

On 8 March 1965, the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade landed across the sandy beach in the Bay of Da Nang, the first American ground-combat forces to come into Vietnam.¹⁴⁶ Met by speeches and flowers from the local community, the Marines reinforced the defensive perimeter of the air base and prepared Da Nang for follow on ground, air, and logistics units. The III Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF), later to become the III Marine Amphibious Force (MAF),¹⁴⁷ commanded by Major General Lewis Walt assumed control of I Corps Tactical Zone, the northern most sector of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) tactical area of operation. The I Corps area of operations consisted of five provinces – from north to south: Quang Tri, Thua Thien, Quang Nam, Quang Tin, and Quang Ngai – a traditional hotbed of Vietminh political and military action.¹⁴⁸ The strong Vietcong presence, supported by the close proximity of NVA regulars, had tightened its control of the local population in the I Corps Tactical Zone by 1965.

¹⁴⁵ Ed Gilbert, *The U.S. Marine Corps in the Vietnam War, III Marine Amphibious Force 1965-75*, ed. Dr. Duncan Anderson (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2006), 11.

¹⁴⁶ Simmons, *The United States Marines*, 221.

¹⁴⁷ Simmons, *The United States Marines*, 224. News reports of the landing of the Marine Expeditionary Brigade pointed out that the term “Expeditionary” was not apt to be regarded fondly by South Vietnamese who remembered the French Expeditionary Corps of the First Indochina War (1946-54). Alarm bells went off in the Saigon headquarters of the U.S. Military Assistance Command, VietNam. ComUSMACV, General William C. Westmoreland, got a message to the Joint Chiefs of Staff urging a unit designation less likely to upset Vietnamese sensibilities. The Joint Chiefs asked Marine Corps Commandant Wallace M. Greene to come up with a more neutral term. Greene and his staff selected “III Marine Amphibious Force.” In 1970, “Amphibious” would be substituted for “Expeditionary” in all MAGTF designations.

¹⁴⁸ Millet, *Semper Fi*, 561.

By late summer 1965, Walt had four Marine infantry regiments – the 3d, 4th, 7th, and 9th Marines along with four Marine aircraft groups: MAG-12 with its A-4s at Chu Lai; MAG-11, fixed wing group at Da Nang; MAG-16, a fixed wing and rotary wing group at China Beach; and MAG-36 a rotary wing group on the Chu Lai strip. The air-ground task force numbered 25,000 by August.¹⁴⁹

The Marine Corps' two primary doctrinal publications, *Landing Operations Doctrine*, *F.T.P 167* and the *Small Wars Manual*, guided its approach to Vietnam. Within six months of crossing the beaches at Da Nang, the Marine Corps launched OPERATION STARLITE; the first regimental-size battle fought by U.S. forces since Korea.¹⁵⁰ Third Marine Amphibious Force (MAF) intelligence assets had located the 1st Viet Cong Regiment about 15 miles south of the Marine Corps air base at Chu Lai. Commanded by the 7th Marine Regiment, three battalions assaulted the objective. One company in LVTs crossed the river from the north; a battalion landed by helicopter on the west; and a battalion in amphibian tractors attacked the southeastern beach.¹⁵¹ The Viet Cong fought from prepared defensive positions with a ferocity reminiscence of the Pacific. However, the combined-arms team of aviation, artillery, naval gunfire, and aggressive infantry tactics more than overmatched the Viet Cong tenacity.¹⁵² Large-scale operations, focused on the destruction of enemy formations and capabilities, were going to be a part of solving the Vietnam problem. However, as Giap so astutely realized with the French, revolutionary wars are fought among the people.

¹⁴⁹ Simmons, *The United States Marines*, 225.

¹⁵⁰ Simmons, *The United States Marines*, 225.

¹⁵¹ J. Robert Moskin, *The U.S. Marine Corps Story, Third Revised Edition* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992), 630.

¹⁵² Millett, *Semper Fi*, 572.

The other aspect of the Marine Corps' approach to Vietnam was built around an "ink blot" system of rural pacification. Walt, along with Fleet Marine Force Pacific Commander, Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak, pursued a hold-and-pacify approach that would begin in the populated coastal cities in the I Corps area of operation. Guided by the *Small Wars Manual*, the Combined Action Program (CAP)¹⁵³ came to represent the Marine Corps' answer to pacification. The CAP was built around Marine small unit tactical proficiency, leadership, and discipline. The program united "a Marine rifle squad with a Vietnamese Popular Force platoon to provide village security and pacification in Vietnam."¹⁵⁴ The CAP construct was relatively simple on the surface; its complexity lied within the nature of the mission. The CAP mission had six parts: destroy the Viet Cong hamlet-village infrastructure; provide public security and help maintain law and order; protect the local governing structure; guard facilities and important lines of communications within the village and hamlet; organize local intelligence nets; and participate in civic action and psychological operations against the Viet Cong.¹⁵⁵ The mission was ambitious, but the Marines were convinced that the "future of Vietnam had to be decided among the people in the villages of South Vietnam."¹⁵⁶

Giap certainly understood the "people" of South Vietnam would ultimately determine the outcome. His hybrid approach to warfare did an excellent job distracting the Marines and MACV from focusing on the population. Conventional attacks along the demilitarized zone (DMZ), Khe

¹⁵³ F. J. "Bing" West, *The Village* (New York: Pocket Books, 1972) *The Village* is arguably one of the best accounts to emerge from the Vietnam War regarding the actions of Marine Combined Action Platoons (CAPS). The book is considered a classic in Marine Corps literature and currently resides on the Commandant's Reading List.

¹⁵⁴ Lawrence A. Yates, "A Feather in Their Cap? The Marines' Combined Action Program in Vietnam" *U.S. Marines and Irregular Warfare, 1898-2007: Anthology and Selected Bibliography*, ed. Colonel Stephen S. Evans (Quantico: Marine Corps University, 2008), 147.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 146.

Sanh, and the Tet Offensive of 1968 restricted the Marines' ability to resource the CAP. The success of the CAP is highly debated in post-Vietnam literary circles. Even during the war, it received mixed reviews. British counterinsurgency expert Sir Robert Thompson praised it as "the best idea I have seen in Vietnam" while U.S. Army Major General William Depuy dismissed it as "counterinsurgency of the deliberate, mild sort."¹⁵⁷ Regardless of the CAPs impact on the outcome of Vietnam, the larger issue is that the Marine Corps had the institutional flexibility to develop, implement, and execute such a program. The CAP demanded a large number of small unit leaders who had the intelligence, agility, and professional competence to carry out such a complex mission.

As the last helicopter flew out of Saigon on 29-30 April 1975, the Marine Corps was ready to reconstruct itself as the nation's elite force-in-readiness.¹⁵⁸ Improvements in recruiting, training facilities, and rapidly deployable logistics capabilities enhanced the Marine Corps' ability to respond to the changing dynamics of the operating environment. The *MOC's* position that the post-Vietnam era focused primarily on combined arms maneuver of mechanized forces designed, trained, and equipped for major combat operations against a peer competitor is a bit shortsighted. What the era actually produced was a Marine Corps capable of responding across the range of military operations – as evident by the I Marine Expeditionary Force's actions in Operation Desert Storm in Iraq and Operation Restore Hope in Somalia. Two completely different environments approached by the same Marine Corps.

Service with the Fleet

On 1 December 1992, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell sent a warning order to U.S. Central Command, Commanding General, Joseph P. Hoar stating:

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 147.

¹⁵⁸ Millett, *Semper Fi*, 560.

“When directed...the U.S. will conduct military operations in Somalia to secure major food distribution points and air/sea ports, guard relief convoys and relief organization operations, and assist relief organizations in providing humanitarian relief in Somalia under UN auspices.”¹⁵⁹ On 2 December, General Powell added to the warning order: “disarm, as necessary, forces which interfere with humanitarian relief operations.”¹⁶⁰ Somalia’s conditions had commanded the attention of the international community by the summer of 1992. Images of sick, weak, and starving people had been forced into the consciousness of even the most casual observer of the news of the day.¹⁶¹ Feeling compelled to stop the anarchy and suffering, President H.W. Bush offered to lead a coalition under United Nations authority to restore a stable security environment from which humanitarian relief supplies could be distributed.

The clan based structure of Somalia society, coupled with the availability of numerous weapons, made Somalia a difficult country for any one faction to govern. Internal power struggles had dominated the way of life in Somalia and had made the progression of political and economic stability almost impossible. It was clear by the end of August 1992, if any relief effort was to be successful, it would have to have the security capability to deal with the warring factions within Somalia.

President Bush concurred with his Chairman and CENTCOM Commander, that any U.S. led humanitarian effort should be capable of dealing with the full spectrum of problems presented

¹⁵⁹ Walter S. Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia, August 1992-March 1994* (Washington, D.C., Joint History Office, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2005), 22. Hereafter referenced as Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia*. 22.

¹⁶⁰ Poole, *The Effort to save Somalia*., 23.

¹⁶¹ Mroczkowski, Dennis P. *Restoring Hope: In Somalia with Unified Task Force, 1992-1993 U.S. Marines in Humanitarian Operations* (Washington, D.C., History Division, Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 2005), 1. Hereafter referenced as Mroczkowski, *Restoring Hope*.

within Somalia.¹⁶² On 27 November, Lieutenant General Robert B. Johnston, Commanding General I Marine Expeditionary Force,¹⁶³ received an oral order from General Hoar to be prepared to lead Joint Task Force Somalia.¹⁶⁴ Johnston was immediately challenged with the task of expanding the I MEF staff into a Joint Headquarters. He opted to use the I MEF command element as a core around which to construct a *joint* staff by bringing in augmentees from subordinate and other Marine commands and from the sister services.¹⁶⁵ Johnston's JTF had operational control over all forces participating in Operation Restore Hope.¹⁶⁶ The United States provided most of these, including elements from the two principal ground combat units, the 1st Marine Division—a logical choice in that it belonged to I MEF—and the Army's 10th Mountain Division at Fort Drum, New York.¹⁶⁷ The Navy and Air Force also provided essential units and personnel for the undertaking along with 23 countries who contributed troops.¹⁶⁸ At its peak, JTF Somalia would total 39,000 personnel.¹⁶⁹

Operation Restore Hope was initiated on December 9th by the 15th Marine Expeditionary

¹⁶² Poole, *The Effort to Save Somalia*, 19.

¹⁶³ Simmons, *The United States Marines*, 277-78. In 1988, Commandant General Al Gray returned Marine-air-ground task force designations to what they had been before 1965. "Amphibious" became "Expeditionary" once again: Marine Expeditionary Unit, Marine Expeditionary Brigade, Marine Expeditionary Force. Said Gray: "The Marine air-ground task forces which we employ around the world are not limited to amphibious operations alone...Our Corps is an expeditionary intervention force with the ability to move rapidly, on short notice, to wherever needed to accomplish what is required."

¹⁶⁴ Mroczkowski, *Restoring Hope*, 12.

¹⁶⁵ Robert F. Baumann, and Lawrence A. Yates with Versalle F. Washington. "*My Clan Against the World*," *US and Coalition Forces in Somalia 1992-1994* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2003), 29. Hereafter referenced as Bauman, *My Clan Against the World*.

¹⁶⁶ Baumann, *My Clan Against the World*, 30.

¹⁶⁷ Baumann, *My Clan Against the World*, 30.

¹⁶⁸ Baumann, *My Clan Against the World*, 30.

¹⁶⁹ Baumann, *My Clan Against the World*, 30.

Unit (MEU) and U.S. Navy SEALs.¹⁷⁰ The landing force moved ashore via every means possible – SEALs swam, Marines via zodiac boats, amphibious assault vehicles, air-cushioned landing craft, and CH-46 helicopters.¹⁷¹ The MEU Commanding Officer, Colonel Gregory Newbold stated, he wanted to “accomplish our mission by overwhelming any opportunity for forces to oppose us...This is a low intensity conflict environment requiring a dramatic show of force (to create the respect that will minimize opposition), mind-numbing speed (so that we maintain the initiative), and a willingness to neutralize those who attack us (to deter further violence).¹⁷² Newbold’s approach could have been lifted directly from the *Small Wars Manual*, which states, “when forced to resort to arms to carry out the object of the intervention, the operation must be pursued energetically and expeditiously in order to overcome the resistance as quickly as possible.”¹⁷³ Newbold’s overwhelming application of force quickly established the desired conditions. The following day, Lieutenant General Johnston flew into Mogadishu and established his headquarters at the formerly abandoned American Embassy.

The approach of overwhelming force was integrated with an understanding of the nature of the conflict. Brigadier General Anthony Zinni described the JTF mindset: “Everybody with some degree of authority, even it’s out of the barrel of a gun; you’d better give them a forum in which to bring their case. When they’re isolated, there’s no recourse other than to violence.”¹⁷⁴ This approach of communication and compromise proved effective in dealing with Somalia’s

¹⁷⁰ Mroczkowski, *Restoring Hope*, 32.

¹⁷¹ Mroczkowski, *Restoring Hope*, 32.

¹⁷² Mroczkowski, *Restoring Hope*, 33.

¹⁷³ *Small Wars Manual*, 1-8.

¹⁷⁴ Norman Cooling, “Operation RESTORE HOPE in Somalia: A Tactical Action Turned Strategic Defeat.” *Marine Corps Gazette* Vol. 85, No. 9 (September 2001): 94. Hereafter referenced as Cooling, *Marine Corps Gazette*, Operation RESTORE HOPE in Somalia.

most problematic warlord, Mohamed Farrah Aideed. The JTF Headquarters was located in Aideed's neighborhood, making the relationship with him a delicate balancing act. The JTF's recognition of Aideed's position and power in Somalia society was critical to the success of the operation. As Zinni stated, "we actively engaged Aideed and because we did he often assisted UN operations by offering advice."¹⁷⁵ By the end of December, the security mission had established the conditions to allow for the flow of humanitarian aid.

Joint Task Force Somalia would eventually evolve into Unified Task Force Somalia (UNITAF) and Ambassador Robert B. Oakley would add the diplomatic component to assist in navigating the myriad of political issues so common in these operations. Oakley and Johnston quickly realized the need to integrate the military and political aspects of this unique mission. They established a daily coordinating committee "to tie the diplomatic-political considerations with the military power, which allows us to pressure the factions to...decrease violence."¹⁷⁶ Again, the *Small Wars Manual* seems to provide Johnston and Oakley with excellent historical guidance - "Small war situations are usually a phase of, or an operation taking place concurrently with, diplomatic effort."¹⁷⁷ This seemingly intuitive action by both Johnston and Oakley is a critical lesson to be taken from this operation.

Another lesson highlighted in the *Small Wars Manual* comes from Brigadier General Zinni. He made the following observation: "Operations such as this become less clear as far as military objectives... they become more politically driven... the humanitarian need forces the military to work differently."¹⁷⁸ The *Small Wars Manual* states, "The campaign plan and strategy

¹⁷⁵ Cooling, *Marine Corps Gazette*, Operation RESTORE HOPE, 94.

¹⁷⁶ Mroczkowski, *Restoring Hope*, 51.

¹⁷⁷ *Small Wars Manual*. 1-7.

¹⁷⁸ Mroczkowski, *Restoring Hope*, 51.

must be adapted to the character of the people encountered.”¹⁷⁹

The actions of JTF Somalia from December 1992 to May 1993 were only a part of the larger US-Somalia story. However, JTF Somalia “had accomplished much in terms of creating security, ending famine, and helping to encourage reconciliation and the reconstruction of social structures.”¹⁸⁰ JTF Somalia had created a window for the international community to stabilize one of the most chaotic environments in the post-Cold War era.

For the Marine Corps, I Marine Expeditionary Force’s ability to adapt to the complex nature of Somalia, the international command structure, and the challenges of operating a diverse coalition was a testament to their flexible and creative approach. In 1992, Tom Ricks was on his first deployment as a Pentagon reporter in Somalia. He linked-up with Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines and set out on patrol with twenty-two-year old Corporal Armando Cordova.¹⁸¹ Ricks was so impressed with the young Marines sense of self, purpose, and esprit that he set off on a journey to Parris Island to investigate the nature of the cause. The same Parris Island that produced the heroes of Belleau Wood over ninety years ago.

The evolution of the Marine Corps from 1946 to 1993 can best be described as one of flexibility, adaptation, and perseverance. The establishment of no less than three Marine divisions and three Marine aircraft wings as federal law was a tremendous step in the Corps’ battle of organizational survival. The ability of the 1st Marine Provisional Brigade to respond to the crisis in Korea in such a rapid and professional manner established the foundation of the Corps’ expeditionary force-in-readiness status. The responses of the III Marine Amphibious Force in Vietnam and the I Marine Expeditionary Forces in Somalia indicate the Marine Corps’ ability to

¹⁷⁹ *Small Wars Manual*, 1-8.

¹⁸⁰ Mroczkowski, *Restoring Hope*, 148.

¹⁸¹ Thomas E. Ricks, *Making the Corps* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 18. Hereafter referenced as Ricks, *Making the Corps*.

respond across the range of military operations has not been lost. Underwriting both of those responses has been a relentless commitment to perseverance of institutional and individual standards' the foundation of the Marine Corps' approach to warfare.

CONCLUSION

This monograph was organized into two research sections. Each designed to test the *MOC*'s two major assertions that, (1) Forces designed, trained and equipped for major combat operations against a peer contributor would not be equally adept at operations to counter insurgents, guerilla forces, and other irregular threats;¹⁸² (2) That since small wars are the more frequent form of warfare, the Marine Corps should focus on their conduct.¹⁸³ Section I provided the context to evaluate the *MOC*'s two major assertions in the period from 1918-1945. Section II covered the period 1946-1993. Both of these sections utilized the three prominent experiences within the Marine Corps, service together with the Army, service as a small wars force, and service with the naval fleet, to test the validity of the *MOCs* assertions.

This study concludes that the *MOC*'s first assertion is inaccurate. Since 1918, the Marine Corps has been organized, trained, and equipped to conduct traditional warfare. No deployment since the 4th Marine Brigade to France has disproven that Marines trained and equipped for the conduct of high-intensity combined arms warfare would not also be successful in small wars. Classic small wars operations conducted in Haiti, Nicaragua, Vietnam, and Somalia were all conducted by Marine forces trained and equipped in the image of traditional warfare. This suggests that success in warfare is dependent on the ability of Marine leaders to recognize the realities of the operating environment and adjust the conduct of operations to meet those realities.

The key to adjusting the conduct of operations to the realities of the operating

¹⁸² *MOC*, 109.

¹⁸³ *MOC*, 111-112.

environment resides in the capacity of the unit to respond to any threat that might exist within the range of military operations. The lessons of Belleau Wood, Iwo Jima, and the Chosin Reservoir are that Marines must develop and retain the ability to operate in the most lethal and chaotic environments. However, it would be a mistake to classify the lethality of the engagement to a specific type of warfare. The *Small Wars Manual* addresses this point, “With all the practical advantages we enjoyed in those wars, that experience must not lead to an underestimate of the modern irregular, supplied with modern arms and equipment.”¹⁸⁴ The *Small Wars Manual* continues, “The future opponent...as well armed as they are; will be able to concentrate a numerical superiority against isolated detachments at the time and place he chooses.”¹⁸⁵ This is an important point regarding the conduct of future operations. Opposing belligerents have the capability and the will to oppose Marine forces with lethal force in any environment. The ability of Marine units to dominate the tactical engagement, regardless of the type of warfare, should be the focus of the conversation regarding the development of future operating concepts. Research for this monograph indicates the ability to dominate the lethal engagement resides in the preparation, training, and equipping for major combat operations.

When the *MOC* separates the conduct of irregular warfare from the conduct of traditional warfare, it runs the risk of creating a misunderstanding of the evolving nature of operations within a single environment. Traditional characteristics can be present in a small war, just as irregular techniques are used in a traditional war. The lethality of the engagement is not confined to the western label of traditional or irregular warfare environments.

The integrated understanding of traditional and irregular warfare can be seen in the Marine Corps’ approach to Nicaragua, Vietnam, and Somalia. The integration of Major Rowell’s

¹⁸⁴ *Small Wars Manual 1940*, 1-5.

¹⁸⁵ *Small Wars Manual 1940*, 1-5.

DeHavilland bombers in the defense of Ocotlan in 1927, the execution of Operation Starlite in 1965, and the amphibious assault into the ports of Somalia in 1992 highlight how Marine forces trained and equipped for traditional warfare adapted their approach to the realities of the small war environments. There was no evidence in the research for this monograph that would support the *MOC*'s claim that Marine forces trained in the conduct of traditional warfare would be unable to adapt to the realities of an irregular warfare environment. The research actually suggests the Marine-air-ground-task-force (MAGTF) is a highly flexible organization capable of evolving with the conduct of operations.

The ability to evolve with the changing nature of operations is one of the strengths of the MAGTF. This unique formation, created out of the need to apply a focused amount of force at a specific time and place, is applicable in both traditional and irregular warfare environments. The MAGTF's only limitation comes from a lack of imagination and creativity on behalf of the Marines within its ranks. Nothing in the research on the development of the modern day MAGTF would indicate it was designed for a specific type of warfare. In fact, the genius of the organization is its inherent flexibility, mobility, versatility, and readiness – favorable traits for any operating environment.

The *MOC*'s second assumption contends that since small wars are the more frequent form of warfare, the Marine Corps should focus on their conduct. The *MOC* also contends that the incompatibility of a "U.S. military predominantly organized, trained, and equipped to fight a traditional enemy"¹⁸⁶ compounds the problem. The *MOC* is right in that "small wars" have been the more frequent type of conflict for the Marine Corps, but they have not been the most beneficial. Operations in Haiti and Nicaragua directly stressed the Marine Corps' relationship with Congress and the American people. A point Lejeune keenly noticed as Commandant.

¹⁸⁶ *MOC*, 112.

Lejeune intuitively sensed that the “Marine Corps is dependent on the confidence and the affection of the American people for its maintenance and support.”¹⁸⁷ He also noticed the difference in the reception of Marines returning home from France and those returning from Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua. It would be in the best interest of the Marine Corps to ensure it understands the tolerance and acceptance among the American people for the conduct of small wars. The often-unmentioned aspect of the small wars era in the 1920s and again in the 1960s is the amount of unwanted publicity that directly eroded the status of the Marine Corps as an elite organization.

The *MOC’s* contention that the Marine Corps’ approach to warfare is incompatible with the current operating environment has already been addressed. However, the other challenge with the shift in focus to the conduct of small wars comes in the reality that increases in the Marine Corps’ end strength and budget have historically been linked to its ability to contribute to the “big war.” The Naval Appropriation Bill of 1916, The National Security Act of 1947, and the Douglas-Mansfield Bill of 1952 directly enhanced the Marine Corps’ status and role in the conduct of national defense. One of Lejeune’s major concerns was the ability to secure a wartime role for the Marine Corps. Generals Vandegrift, Cates, and Shepherd worked tirelessly to legalize the task organization and role of the Marine Corps to ensure its survival. All of these former Commandants linked the role and purpose of the Marine Corps to its ability to respond to any crisis, in any environment, against any foe. We would be wise to remember the challenges of the past as we prepare for the future.

RECOMMENDATION

The Marine Corps should reevaluate how it understands and applies the label of “conventional” to the conduct of its operations. What does this mean to Marines? How does this

¹⁸⁷ Lejeune, *Reminiscences of a Marine*, 465.

“label” affect its approach to warfare? *Joint Publication 1-02* uses the word conventional to describe, “Those forces capable of conducting operations using non-nuclear weapons and are forces other than designated as special operations forces.” The *MOC* states, the term “conventional” in the context of military operations has come to be synonymous with “regular” or “traditional” combat.¹⁸⁸ When did training and equipping for the conduct of high intensity combined arms battle become limited to a particular type of warfare? There is no indication this was the case as Marines transitioned from operations in France to operations in Haiti and Nicaragua. In fact, many of the techniques that originated in France were refined in Nicaragua.

The blending of these labels and terms creates confusion regarding the understanding of the Marine Corps’ approach to warfare. If the Marine Corps applied the *Joint Publication’s* definition of conventional forces and the *MOC’s* interpretation of it, it could infer that because it is not designated as special operations forces, it does not have the ability to counter emerging irregular threats. However, nothing in the Marine Corps’ historical narrative or combat performance supports this view. The mindset of Marines distinguishes its approach to warfare. The Marine Corps’ decision to organize, train, and equip for combined arms battle allows it to fulfill its role as the nation’s expeditionary-force-in-readiness. Its creativity, flexibility, and versatility allow it to maintain its excellence in the conduct of small wars.

The label “conventional” is simply an inaccurate description of Marine Corps culture, capabilities, and approach to the conduct of operations. The uniqueness of the Marine Corps’ approach to warfare has always resided in its ability to respond to any threat in any environment. It would be in the best interest of the Marine Corps to shed the term “conventional” from its lexicon and refer to itself more accurately as Marine Forces.

¹⁸⁸ *MOC*, 112.

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