



## CHAPTER 3

### CURRENT OPERATIONS

**D**uring 2004, a significant part of the Marine Corps will remain deployed around the world, at sea, and ashore. Marine forces are engaged in combat, security and stability operations, the training of foreign troops, joint and multi-national exercises, and in the general maintenance of a sea-based US presence in key areas – all in support of US strategic goals and the Global War on Terrorism. The Marine Air-Ground Task Forces performing these vital missions are made up of both Active and Reserve forces, demonstrating the capabilities of the entire Marine Corps Total Force.

This chapter examines Marine Corps operations, training, and the lessons learned. In doing so, it highlights the service's global, expeditionary character and importance in today's joint operations.

## CURRENT OPERATIONS

In 2003, Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (MAGTFs) operated worldwide in support of America's national security strategy. The inherent capability, flexibility, and responsiveness of these MAGTFs was repeatedly demonstrated in operations ranging in size from Operation Iraqi Freedom in Southwest Asia to smaller-scale security cooperation and deterrence efforts in the Western Pacific. In addition, sea-based MEU(SOC) units provided US Combatant Commanders with critical forward-presence, security cooperation, and crisis-response capabilities in areas such as the Western Pacific and West Africa.

Operation Iraqi Freedom was the Marine Corps' largest and most prominent operation in 2003. More than 75,900 Marine forces deployed to the Central Command area for combat operations against Iraq. In January, 11,500 Marines and their associated aircraft and equipment embarked aboard 14 amphibious ships on the East and West coasts of the United States and sailed for Kuwait. In addition to these amphibious task forces, two MEU(SOC)s were already deployed in the Central Command onboard

six amphibious ships. A third MEU(SOC) deployed in March 2003 to the European Command area, and would later be employed in Northern Iraq.

As the amphibious task forces deployed, two Maritime Prepositioning Squadrons - 11 ships all told - arrived in Kuwait and offloaded equipment for 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) units arriving in the theater via strategic airlift. This offload was completed in 16 days, and by mid February, 42,000 Marines, along with their equipment and supplies, had taken up positions in Kuwait and were preparing for combat operations.

I MEF forces, including Task Force Tarawa and the United Kingdom's 1st Armored Division, were the first conventional ground elements to enter Iraq in late March. Their initial mission was to secure Iraq's Southern oil fields to prevent their destruction. During this stage of combat operations, Marines from the 15<sup>th</sup> MEU(SOC) fell under the tactical control of British forces as they attacked into Southern Iraq and secured the al-Faw peninsula.

As the coalition attack turned north toward Baghdad, fixed-wing and helicopter aircraft from the 3d Marine Air Wing provided continuous close air and assault support to Marine and coalition units as they drove deeper into Iraq. On the ground, Marines from I MEF moved nearly 400 miles from the Kuwaiti border to the city of Tikrit, Iraq and eliminated the last organized resistance by Iraqi military





forces. During the 26 days it took to accomplish this feat, Marine combat service support units sustained I MEF units and their equipment in a combat logistics effort that was unparalleled in the history of the Corps. This support allowed I MEF to consistently move further and faster than any other military formation on the battlefield.

Beginning with the declared end of combat operations in Iraq, Marines from I MEF seamlessly transitioned from combat to stabilization and security operations. From 1 May through mid-September, Marines provided security and humanitarian assistance to the Iraqi people. With the movement of additional coalition relief forces into Southern Iraq, I MEF completed its mission, and by late September the majority of Marines from the MEF redeployed to the United States to prepare for follow-on missions.

The redeployment effort commenced even before I MEF had accomplished its turnover in Southern Iraq. The Maritime Prepositioning Force Special Purpose MAGTF (MPF / SPMAGTF) Kuwait was established to facilitate the reconstitution

of our prepositioned shipping. MPF / SPMAGTF remained in Kuwait until early November, when the constitution of the 1st and 2d Maritime Prepositioning Squadrons was completed.

Despite our success in toppling Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom, and our earlier successes in the global war on terrorism, the struggle continues. Even as Marine participation in Operation Iraqi Freedom drew to a close, Marines were deploying in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, which has been ongoing since 2001. In November 2003, the 2d Battalion, 8th Marines and Marine Light Attack Helicopter (HMLA) squadron 773(-) deployed to Afghanistan to support the stabilization of that country. Likewise, I MEF (Fwd), built around a division-sized Marine task force began returning to Iraq in early 2004 to support the continuing operations in that country. Today, these forward-deployed Marines, along with others, continue to uphold America's national security strategy abroad.



## INITIAL LESSONS FROM OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

Operation Iraqi Freedom was characterized by a quick buildup of Marine forces in the Central Command theater, followed by rapid maneuver through and around enemy strongpoints, supported by precision fires, with support and sustainment provided to widely dispersed units over extended lines of communication. The movement of Marine forces hundreds of miles inland from the ports of debarkation over hotly contested ground made long-range and non-line-of-sight on-the-move communications a necessity, and stretched logistics to extraordinary distances. While sustainment over the extended distances was challenging, logistics never halted our advance. The expeditionary mindset of Marines overcame obstacles and got the job done.

In general terms, the Marine Corps' preferred method of fighting – maneuver warfare – worked. In an extremely fluid environment, our deployed Marine Expeditionary Force focused on the enemy, by-passed obstacles, exploited gaps, and operated using stated commander's intent and mission-type orders – which provided an end goal – not detailed instructions. The application of combined arms at the tactical level was the key driver behind the success of the campaign. Armor; mechanized, dismounted, and motorized forces; artillery; organic attack helicopters; fixed-wing close air support; and expeditionary combat service support were integrated to produce a synergistic power and tempo that the Iraqis could not stop. Working within a joint structure, the Marine Corps

command-and-control system – and notably, the Marine Air Command and Control System that optimized air fires – worked exceptionally well.

Perhaps most significantly, Operation Iraqi Freedom demonstrated that Marine Corps entry-level training continues to produce the best junior enlisted and officers in the world. Operation Iraqi Freedom produced many specific lessons that can be grouped into the categories of what worked well, as well as some areas where our procedures, processes, or equipment need improvement. Lessons from the former area include the following:

***Expeditionary Posture: Strategic Agility and Tactical Flexibility.*** The rapid buildup of forces in the Central Command theater of operations demonstrated the expeditionary posture, strategic agility and tactical flexibility of Marine forces. The Marine Corps was able to deploy one-half of its operating forces to Operation Iraqi Freedom within an eight week period. When other ongoing worldwide contingencies and commitments as well as forward-based forces in the Western Pacific are included, the Marine Corps had over two-thirds of its total operating forces deployed, including more than 100,000 Marines from the continental United States, and nearly half of all Marine Corps Active and Reserve forces.

As noted, these forces deployed using a variety of means, ranging from assault shipping to strategic airlift. The offloading of 11 ships in 16 days was the largest single



Maritime Prepositioning Force operation in history, and provided the equipment and initial supplies for the equivalent of two Marine Expeditionary Brigades. Likewise, the two seven-ship amphibious task forces that sailed from the East and West coasts were loaded within 12 days of deployment orders, and sailed for the Middle East with 11,500 Marines and sailors. Three other three-ship Amphibious Ready Groups with embarked 2,200-man Marine Expeditionary Units (Special Operations Capable) participated in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

***The Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF).*** The Marine Corps' ability to rapidly deploy forces tailored for a particular mission resulted in a Marine Expeditionary Force "Reinforced" of 82,000 personnel, including over 21,000 British forces on 20 Mar 2003. This force at peak consisted of 127 battalion-sized units, including 12 from the US Army and Navy. Major Marine Corps weapons

systems included 142 main battle tanks, 454 aircraft, 606 amphibious assault vehicles, 105 155mm howitzers, 279 light armored vehicles, and over 7,000 other vehicles.

Our British coalition partners alone comprised a key part of our combined force, adding another 112 main battle tanks, 62 aircraft, 178 infantry fighting vehicles and reconnaissance vehicles, 30 105mm towed howitzers, and 32 155mm self-propelled howitzers. This was the largest coalition force ever assembled under Marine command. Another example of our joint and combined integration of forces was the 15<sup>th</sup> MEU(SOC)'s assignment to the operational control of the British 3 Commando Brigade, which made it the largest Marine unit to serve under foreign command since World War I.



**Task-Organized Forces.** Operation Iraqi Freedom proved how quickly and flexibly Marine forces can be task-organized. Task Force Tarawa was established in the United States on 3 January 2003. By 15 January, Marines and Sailors were embarked on seven amphibious ships. By 18 February, the task force had completed offload in theater, and on 22 March, Task Force Tarawa crossed the line of departure for ground operations in Iraq. Task Force Tripoli was a mechanized force formed on 10 April from elements of the 1st Marine Division. They led the attack on Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit, securing it on 14 April, and on 22 April, stood down and were reabsorbed into 1st Marine Division.

**Operational Reach.** Marine forces conducted operations over 500 miles inland (covering over 1,200 road miles), and I MEF's area of responsibility encompassed some 103,000 square kilometers. Support and sustainment enabled the rapid advance of Marine forces. With the distances and rapid movement involved in Operation Iraqi Freedom,

fueling the force was a critical factor. The establishment of multiple forward arming and refueling points and forward operating bases also extended the operational reach of forces. The integrated use of joint fires was also an essential element in the operational reach achieved by Marine forces. Marine and Navy air power provided key operational support, operating from sea bases and thus freeing up land bases for other aviation capabilities.

There are profound geopolitical implications for the operational reach demonstrated during Operation Iraqi Freedom. The ability to prosecute the attack against an unconventional enemy far inland without encountering any operational or logistics "show-stoppers" significantly enhances the credibility of US expeditionary capabilities.

**Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT).** Experience gained by Marines in numerous urban and built up area engagements prior to reaching Baghdad built on the foundation of the Marines' prior Basic Urban Skills Training and MOUT training.





Freedom validated Marine Corps investments during the last several years to achieve increased readiness in the Reserves and the assignment of 5,000 active-duty Marines to support Reserve training and readiness.

Marine forces adapted tactics, techniques and procedures, and incorporated the use of rotary- and fixed-wing close air support, as well as armor and mechanized forces.

Marines did note the difference between the urban terrain they encountered and their relatively simple and limited urban training facilities. They expressed a need to develop larger urban training areas where they can practice mechanized and aviation integration, as well as convoy training, and other important skills. This will require a more complex, realistic training environment, with vehicles, unidentified personnel, furnishings in the buildings, barred windows, and other, similar characteristics.

**Reserve Integration.** The Reserve Component forces were essential to the success of the total force, and one of the most common comments made was, “We couldn’t have done it without the Reserves.” Over 21,000 Selective Marine Corps Reserves (SMCRs), Individual Mobilization Augementees (IMAs) and Individual Ready Reserves (IRRs) were mobilized for OIF. SMCR units and IMA detachments made timely deployments and were ready upon arrival. Operation Iraqi

**Tactical Flexibility and Training.** The Marine Corps displayed its operational agility in many ways. Our operating forces’ ability to plan and prepare for many missions in less than six hours demonstrated the value of the Marine Corps Rapid Response Planning Process and the importance of tactically integrated training and exercises. Tactical flexibility is also directly linked to the MAGTF’s organic capabilities, such as its artillery and other fires, aviation, and logistics. In addition, Operation Iraqi Freedom demonstrated the importance of retaining capabilities that can be difficult to maintain in peacetime – such as mine-clearing and bridging.

Most importantly, unit flexibility is directly linked to the expeditionary mindset that is instilled in every Marine. It also reinforces the vital importance of continuing to develop and sustain the Marine Corps’ core competency of combined-arms proficiency and individual skill training, epitomized by the statement “Every Marine a Rifleman.”

Operation Iraqi Freedom also revealed several areas for improvement. These include:



**The “Digital Divide” and Information Management.** Despite an unprecedented increase in the amount of bandwidth available to US combatant commanders, we discovered that raw communication potential does not necessarily equate to improved command and control. At times, the sheer volume of information threatened to overwhelm commanders and staffs, proving that additional information is not always value-added information.

Conversely, while communications bandwidth to move information was more than sufficient at the operational level, Marine commanders at the tactical level complained of inadequate communications occasionally affecting their ability to develop the desired level of situational awareness. This experience highlighted the need for an information management review in the Marine Corps.

Intelligence-wise, the Pioneer and Dragon Eye unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) provided an unprecedented level of collection capability to Marine Corps operating forces. In a departure from previous employment doctrine, tactical units were given operational control of UAV assets, affording them a much greater capability to manage the intelligence-collection process at the tactical level, without having to coordinate requirements through various layers of intelligence hierarchy. To build on this success, the

Marine Corps seeks a capability with extended range, less disruption during unit displacement, and improved ability to downlink imagery at the tactical unit level, such as maybe gained from the vertical UAV effort.

**Logistics.** Repair parts re-supply in particular was a notable shortfall. The lack of in-transit visibility of what was moving in the supply and distribution chains severely hampered the ability to get spare parts and other sustainment to forward units in the rapidly moving environment of the OIF campaign. The Department of Defense must reduce the number of incompatible automated information systems and improve visibility of the content and location of supplies. Much of the technology required to do so already exists, and our GCSS-MC development will capitalize on this.

Other logistics issues require attention as well. Maneuver distances and the degree to which the force was mechanized in Operation Iraqi Freedom also highlighted the need for more efficient ways of transporting bulk liquids. Likewise, batteries for command-and-control equipment and other electronic equipment were also a persistent logistics concern. This situation highlighted



the need for long-shelf-life, high-capacity, longer-lasting, lightweight, renewable, environmentally-friendly, multi-application power sources.

**Manning at Bases and Stations.** Marine Corps bases and stations in the United States depend on augmentation from tenant operating forces for much of their manpower. When those units deploy, they lose a significant percentage of the personnel who perform important functions, such as air traffic control, security, and other base functions. Operation Iraqi Freedom demonstrated that bases and stations need more efficient ways to augment sentry, security, and patrol functions during wartime.

**Casualty Reporting.** At the beginning of the war, it became clear that the speed in notifying family members needed improvement. Aggressive leadership and command attention eventually brought this challenge down to acceptable levels, but the proliferation of information systems on the battlefield, as well as the presence of embedded media, highlight the need for more responsive yet accurate notification.

**Fratricide Prevention.** Although friendly-fire incidents were lower in Operation Iraqi Freedom than in previous comparable conflicts, the Marine Corps is exploring technologies and procedures to minimize both “blue-on-blue” (friendly fire) and “blue-on-white” (non-combatant) incidents. The Army and the Marine Corps employed seven different types of blue-force trackers (BFTs) during Iraqi Freedom, with varying degrees of success.

While the mix of systems was not ideal, such systems are clearly an impor-

tant capability, and suggest the need for compatible systems across all the services. Although improved BFT may help to reduce the likelihood of fratricide, BFT does not address all of the complex combat identification challenges posed by friendly fire on US and coalition forces and civilian populations, including facilities and sensitive sites. The development of joint tactics, techniques, and procedures, along with integrated joint training, will be a key element in reducing the toll of these tragedies during future operations.

**Joint Processes.** Many standard joint processes, such as battle damage assessment (BDA) and the development of the air tasking order (ATO), simply could not keep pace with the speed and tempo of the campaign, and had to be adjusted. In addition to the BDA and ATO processes, we found that the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance procedures also needed work to make them more responsive to the needs of Marine forces engaged in combat.

The Marine Corps is applying its experiences in Operation Iraqi Freedom to guide its future efforts to “fine tune” and transform its forces. There were many lessons concerning organization, processes, systems, and equipment that have already affected current and future programs. However, probably the most salient lesson is the absolutely essential need to continue inculcating our Marines with the ethos, character, and skills that enable them to take imperfect systems and processes - sometimes using very old equipment, under conditions of uncertainty and peril, against a determined and deadly enemy - and convert them into the ingredients of victory.

## EXERCISES

In terms of operational deployments, 2003 was the busiest year since 1991. Consequently, most service exercises were cancelled and participation in exercises throughout the world was reduced, with the exception of the Pacific region. In that area, Marines embarked onboard the USS *Fort McHenry* (LSD 43) participated in the Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (LF CARAT) exercise sponsored by the Commander, US Pacific Command, engaging in a series of bilateral training exercises in the Southeast Asian littoral region.

At home, the Marine Corps resumed service exercises as forces began to re-

deploy to the continental United States. Combined Arms Exercises (CAX) at Twenty-nine Palms, California; Mountain Warfare Training Center (MWTC) courses in Bridgeport, California; Weapons and Tactics Instructor (WTI) courses in Yuma, Arizona; and MEU(SOC) work-ups began in earnest to prepare recently redeployed forces for scheduled or emergent deployments. These exercises also served to evaluate individual and unit proficiency, and ultimately to maintain the operational primacy of Marine Air-Ground Task Forces across the spectrum of operations.



## COUNTER-DRUG OPERATIONS

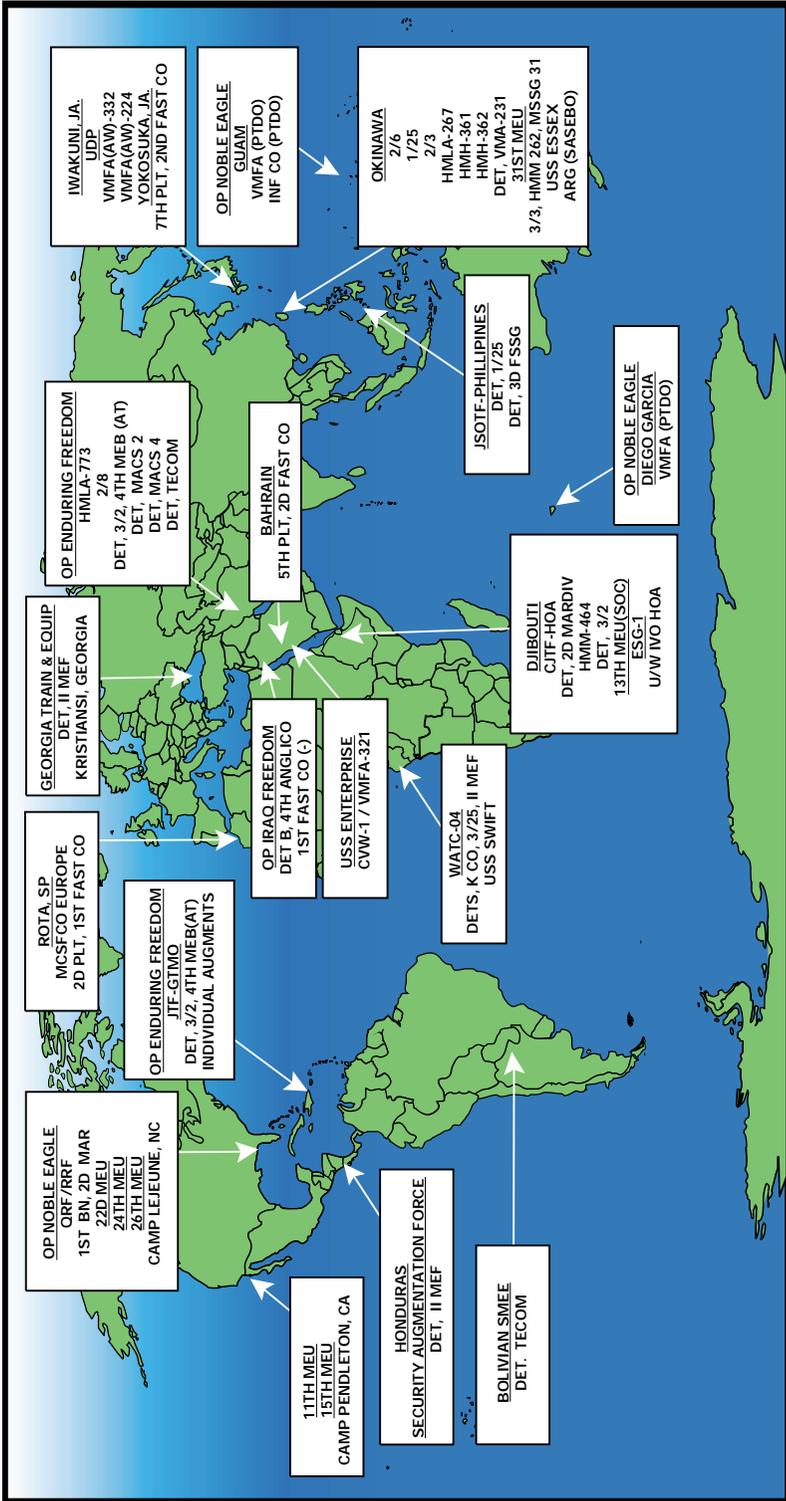
The Marine Corps continued to contribute to the Nation's counter-drug effort during 2003, conducting numerous missions in support of Joint Task Force Six (JTF-6), the Joint Interagency Task Force East (JIATF-E), and the Joint Interagency Task Force-West (JIATF-W). These missions supported law-enforcement efforts in federal lands along the US Southwest border, and in several other domestic "hot spots" that have been designated as High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas. Individual Marines and units from Marine Forces Reserve executed the vast majority of these missions.

# USMC OPERATIONS MATRIX

DATE	LOCATION	MISSION
Oct 92 - Present	SE Asia	POW/MIA Accounting
Nov 00 - Present	Kosovo	Staff augments
Sep 01 - Present	CONUS/ Guam/ Diego Garcia	Air defense, contingency response
Dec 01 - Present	Kabul, Afghanistan	Embassy security
Dec 01 - Present	Guantanamo Bay, Cuba	Security, staff augments
Jan 02 - Present	CENTCOM AOR Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgistan	Combat operations
Jan 02 - Present	PACOM AOR Phillipines	Security and medical augmentation
Nov 02 - Present	CENTCOM AOR Horn of Africa	Anti-terrorist operations and theater security cooperation
Nov 02 - Present	EUCOM AOR Republic of Georgia	Georgian Train and Equip Program (GTEP)
Jan 03 - Present	CENTCOM AOR Iraq	Combat operations
Jul - Oct 03	EUCOM AOR Liberia Sierra Leone Senegal Italy	Peace-keeping support and humanitarian operations
Oct 03 - Present	EUCOM AOR (PTDO)	NATO operational reserve force

FORCE	DESCRIPTION OF ACTION
Detachments from III MEF	Recovery operations in support of Operation Full Accounting
Individual Augments	Operation Joint Guardian
Elements of 2d and 3d MarDivs, 1st MAW, CBIRF	Provide air defense quick/ready reaction, and incident response forces in support of NORTHCOM, PACOM, and Operation Noble Eagle
Detachment, 3d Bn, 2d Mar; and 4th MEB (AT)	Providing security at the US Embassy compound
Detachment, 4th MEB (AT); and individual augments	Provide security and staff augmentation in support of JTF-GTMO and Operation Enduring Freedom
Elements of 1st, and 2d MAW; TECOM, HMLA-773, and 2d Bn, 8th Mar	Conduct Combat Operations in support of Operation Enduring Freedom
Elements of 3d MarDiv and 3d FSSG	Provide security and medical support of US forces deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom - Phillipines
Detachment, 2d MarDiv; Detachments, 4th MEB (AT); and Detachment, HMH 464	Conduct anti-terrorist operations and theater security cooperation in the Horn of Africa in support of Operation Enduring Freedom
Detachments, II MEF; and TECOM	Provide training in company-level tactics and the Marine Corps Planning Process to elements of the Georgian Armed Forces
1st FAST Co (-); Detachment B, 4th ANGLICO	Provide security in support of the Office of the Coalition Provisional Authority and combined-arms coordination for the Multi National Division - South East, Operation Iraqi Freedom
Detachment, MARFORREUR; 26th MEU(SOC); Detachment, MCSF Co Europe	Provide security, air, and engineering support in order to facilitate the deployment of West African Peacekeeping Forces and the distribution of humanitarian aid
One Infantry battalion from 2d MarDiv	Provide ready reaction forces in support of USEUCOM and US forces deployed to the Balkans

# SELECTED MARINE CORPS DEPLOYMENTS 2003



# EARLY 2004 MARINE CORPS DEPLOYMENTS

