U.S. Marine Corps
Organization and Missions

Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen. James F. Amos, likens his service to a middleweight boxer, able to fight heavier or lighter by changing training and equipment to suit a particular set of operational requirements. Agility is the Marine Corps' most "saleable" attribute, by means of which the service quickly task organizes its 202,100 active-duty Marines, 39,600 Reservists and 35,000 civilians to deliver a variety of military capabilities anywhere in the world within 96 hours.
During 2011, the Marine Corps was on its feet in the ring and swinging. After an eventful year in which Marines completed their mission at al-Anbar Province, Iraq, the service redeployed its Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (MAGTFs) to the East. By the spring, this move had doubled the combat power (from 10,600 to 19,400 Marines) in Afghanistan.
As the federal government implements its exit strategy from Southwest Asia over the next three to five years, the Marine Corps must review its force structure, with an eye toward "right-sizing" the force for the "post-Afghanistan world," Amos told a lecture audience in San Francisco in February 2011. Resetting that force, in terms of rebuilding personnel and materiel readiness, will be among the biggest challenges for the Marine Corps in 2012.
Implementing lessons learned from a decade of war in Southwest Asia, the Marine Corps has made some significant changes to its force structure. For example, the service moved 7 percent of the troops in supporting billets back to the operational force, increased Marine special operations by 44 percent and cyber warfare personnel by 67 percent.
With regard to materiel readiness, the federal budget deficit crisis will continue to force tough choices across the Department of the Navy. The Marine Corps already has felt some of the punches strike home.
For example, in January 2011, the Defense Department (DoD) canceled funding for the Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle (EFV) program. The EFV had begun development in 1996 as a replacement for the Amphibious Assault Vehicle, which had entered service in the 1970s. Cost overruns and schedule delays made the program "unaffordable," according to Amos.
At its cancellation, the EFV already had cost $3 billion and was expected to cost $12 billion more to complete, which would have consumed the lion's share of the Marine Corps' vehicle budget for several years.
The Pentagon's F-35 Lightning II project also is under scrutiny as a possible target for future spending cuts. Intended for duty with the Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps and eight international partners' air forces, the F-35 will cost $385 billion to acquire 2,457 planes in three variants.
Amid rising cost and schedule delays, DoD has restructured the project, adding funds to the front-end development effort to ensure that technologies are more mature before entering production. Even so, the development phase of the F-35 variants will cost more than $56 billion to complete by 2018: 26 percent more and five years later than originally planned.
Some of the F-35's most difficult technical challenges have come to light in the Marine Corps' short-takeoff, vertical-landing (STOVL) variant, the F-35B, which

will replace the service's AV-8B Harrier II jump jets. Because of the techni-cal challenges, last year, then-Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates put the F-35B "on probation."

Unlike the Harrier, the F-35B uses a high-bypass turbine coupled to a large cold air lift fan to enable vertical flight. Working out an operationally suitable and effective design for this system and its transmission coupling may lead to "a redesign of the aircraft's structure and propulsion," Gates wrote in a Pentagon statement last spring.

The project office has two years to work the bugs out of the F-35B, or it may be canceled, according to Gates. Such a move would send the Marines back to the drawing board to replace the AV-8B.

Amos remains committed to developing the capabilities represented by the EFV and the F-35B. He has offered new solicitation to industry for the development of a more economical Amphibious Combat Vehicle to support Marine riflemen ashore. Amos has characterized the F-35 project's challenges as minor engineering setbacks, noting that acquiring the new, fifth-generation fighter would be crucial to reducing the overall cost of ownership and boosting the capabilities of Marine Corps tactical aviation.

Legacy

The Second Continental Congress in 1775 authorized the raising of two battalions of Marines for service aboard the ships of the newly established Continental Navy. In 1798, the First U.S. Congress officially founded the Marine Corps for service aboard the ships of the new U.S. Navy. The first verse of the Marines' Hymn, "From the Halls of Montezuma/to the shores of Tripoli …" has enshrined the Corps' formative 18th- and 19th-century battles in the Mediterranean and Mexico. Since that time, Marines have made their mark in every American conflict, from Shanghai to Belleau Wood, from Iwo Jima to the Chosin Reservoir, and from Khe Sanh to Kandahar.

The Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF)

The iconic, deployable Marine combat formations are the MAGTFs, which are scalable to include varying numbers of infantry, mounted and aviation units, as well as the combat service support and logistics groups that ensure the frontline fighting forces have the fuel, ammunition and supplies they need to carry out a battle. MAGTFs include one or more ground combat elements, an air combat element, a command element and one or more combat service support elements. The largest MAGTFs are the three Marine Expeditionary Forces (MEFs), each of which includes 50,000-90,000 personnel, with 60 days' supply. The MEFs' fighting strengths are provided by the three active and one Reserve divisions. MEFs usually are commanded by a major general, who also is the commanding officer of one of the four Marine divisions.

When the strength of a full MEF is not required, a Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) may be sufficient for the task. MEBs include 14,500 personnel, with 30 days' supply. MEBs usually are commanded by a major general, sometimes a brigadier general, who also is the commanding officer of one of the Marine Corps' 15 regiments.

The smallest MAGTFs are the Marine Corps' seven Marine Expeditionary Units (MEUs). These are the basic, deploying formations of the Marine Corps. With some mission uncertainty as almost a guiding principle of each deployment, the Marine Corps trains and certifies its MEUs to accomplish a variety of crisis response operations, including combat, search and rescue, and military operations in urban terrain.

The MEUs rotate forward on 15-month cycles, with six months spent at sea aboard ships and nine months stateside conducting training and preparing for the next deployment. Each MEU includes 2,200 personnel, with 15 days' supply. These are embarked on the amphibious assault, landing and transport ships of a U.S. Navy Expeditionary Strike Group. When deployed, the typical MEU comprises a reinforced rifle battalion and a composite helicopter squadron, with fixed-wing strike fighters such as STOVL AV-8B Harrier IIs.

The MEUs are led by a colonel, with support from artillery, engineers, reconnaissance and logistics units. The MEU's major weapons include M777 155mm lightweight towed howitzers, M1A Abrams main battle tanks, Light Armored Vehicles (LAVs) and Amphibious Assault Vehicles. The naval aviators of a typical aviation combat element fly from Navy large-deck amphibious assault ships. These also play host to the mobility squadrons of MV-22 Osprey tiltrotors, CH-53E Super Stallion heavy-lift helicopters, UH-1-series utility helicopters and AH-1-series attack helicopters. Once deployed, MEUs are supported by land-based Marine KC-130 Hercules tanker/transports.

The Marine Corps also assembles special-purpose MAGTFs, which are functionally tailored to meet requirements such as weapon of mass destruction crisis response, firefighting, personnel evacuation, riot control, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

Commandant of the Marine Corps

Amos is the 35th commandant of the Marine Corps. A naval aviator, he previously led the 3rd Marine Air Wing in combat during Operational Iraqi Freedom II, and Marine Corps Combat Development Command.

The commandant is a four-star ranked flag officer and member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The commandant and chief of naval operations are the Navy Department's highest-ranking uniformed leaders, answering directly to the civilian secretariat. The commandant is responsible for the daily management and budgeting of the Marine Corps shore establishment and deployed forces.

Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr. is the assistant commandant of the Marine Corps. Dunford serves on the Defense Department's Joint Requirements Oversight Council, which has a crucial role in evaluating and championing the operational requirements of products delivered by the Marine Corps' and Navy's acquisition investment programs, including the new Amphibious Combat Vehicle and the F-35B.

Marine Corps Forces Command (MARFORCOM); II Marine Expeditionary Force (II MEF)

Lt. Gen. Dennis J. Hejlik leads MARFORCOM from his headquarters at Naval Base Norfolk, Va. MARFORCOM is one of the Marine Corps' three major administrative

commands, along with Marine Corps Forces, Pacific, and Marine Corps Forces, Reserve. Together, these organizations are responsible for manning, training and equipping the Marine units that deploy to operations overseas. Under commander, Fleet Marine Forces Atlantic, are the 45,000 personnel of II MEF, which are led by Lt. Gen. John M. Paxton from his headquarters at Camp Lejeune, N.C.

Marine Corps Forces Pacific (MARFORPAC); I MEF; III MEF

Lt. Gen. Duane D. Thiessen leads MARFORPAC from his headquarters at Camp Smith, Hawaii. The Marine Corps' largest field command, MARFORPAC includes more than 74,000 personnel.

Under commander, Fleet Marine Forces Pacific, are I MEF, led by Lt. Gen. Thomas D. Waldhauser from his headquarters at Camp Pendleton, Calif., and III MEF, led by Lt. Gen. Kenneth J. Glueck Jr., from his headquarters at Okinawa, Japan.

MARFORPAC's 19 major installations are the starting points from which the majority of the Marine Corps' expeditionary combat forces are deployed. In 2010, the Defense Department proposed moving more than 8,000 Marines from Japan to Guam amid discussions over the future of the U.S.-Japanese treaty relationship. The plan has stalled due to lack of funding in the fiscal 2012 budget and delays to the development of a facility to replace Japan's Futenma Marine Corps Air Station.

Marine Corps Forces Reserve (MARFORRES); Marine Forces North

Lt. Gen. Steven A. Hummer leads MARFORRES from his headquarters in New Orleans. There are approximately 100,000 Marine Reservists in 183 Re-serve units based across the United States and overseas. MARFORRES is responsible for manning, training and equipping the 22,000 Marines who serve in the 4th Marine Division under Brig. Gen. James M. Lariviere. Marine Forces North provides anti-terrorism and force protection planning, coordination and support to the U.S. Northern Command in its homeland defense mission. They are based throughout the United States and at posts overseas.

Marine Corps Combat Development Command (MCCDC)

Lt. Gen. Richard P. Mills leads MCCDC, located at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va. MCCDC develops the Marine Corps' doctrine, tactics, techniques and procedures, and provides professional development courses for current and future service leadership. One of MCCDC's most important roles is shaping future warfighting requirements, which inform the modernization and recapitalization investments of the service's equipment acquisition portfolio.

Brig. Gen. Mark R. Wise, who also is the vice chief of Naval Research, leads the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory (MCWL), also located at Quantico. The lab develops practical applications for new technologies relevant to Marine warfighting requirements. For example, in 2010, MCWL developed a concept for armored capsules to better protect the crews of Marine High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWVs, or Hum-vees) against improvised explosive devices and mines.

Marine Corps Systems Command (MARCORSYSCOM)

Brig. Gen. Francis L. Kelly Jr. leads MARCORSYSCOM, located at Marine Corps Base Quantico. MARCORSYSCOM manages the Marine Corps' $1.2 billion procurement and $18 billion development budgets for fiscal 2012. These investments deliver the vehicles, armament, ammunition, uniforms and mission equipment used by Marines in the field. MCCDC's projects are organized into seven product groups, including armor and fire support systems, infantry weapon systems and communications, intelligence and networking systems.

U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC)
Maj. Gen. Paul E. Lefebvre leads MARSOC from his headquarters at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, N.C. MARSOC provides U.S. Special Operations Com-mand with 2,500 highly trained and proficient personnel from the three Marine Special Operations Battalions of the Marine Special Operations Regiment. These units are trained to carry out foreign internal defense, foreign military training, special reconnaissance and direct action missions. The Marine Corps carries out its own screening, selection and training program for its special operations forces, through the Marine Special Operations Support Group, also based at Camp Lejeune.